

A Review of

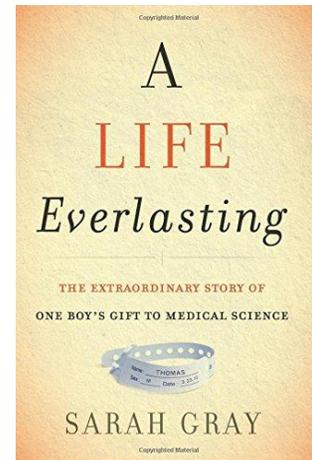
A Life Everlasting

The Extraordinary Story of One Boy's Gift to Medical Science

Author: Sarah Gray (2016)

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

In my world of reviewing hundreds of transplant related books, ***A Life Everlasting*** stands out not only for its very engaging writing style but especially its unique subject matter. In spite of the tragic loss of one of their newly born twins, Sarah Gray succeeds in sharing her celebration of the contribution that comes out of a realization of the impact that his life of only a six days is making in the world of science and medical research.



What begins as a hopeful story of typical family growth in expecting twins turns tragic when one of the in vitro babies, given the name Thomas, is found to have anencephaly, a terminal condition involving birth with an exposed brain. The foundation story may move the reader to tears in its telling (I cried while reading the birthing story), but their courage in finding some positive outcome in a decision to donate his organs, eyes and blood to research carries us into the uniqueness of this book as Sarah searches for how those donations come to be used.

The search takes her into uncharted territory as such donations typically move through as anonymous sources, various 'gifts' (as such donations are known) going to different research organizations with government mandated tracking codes that protect the anonymity of the donors, yet still provide ways to communicate back up the chain if health issues arise, but not to the donor family. Against such odds, Sarah is driven to first, identify the organizations that received Thomas' gifts, then to contact each and convince researchers to open up to contact and sharing of how those gifts are used in improving treatments in the future when research is successful. It is in the individual stories of Sarah's search that we find how unique it is for those organizations to ever encounter and eventually meet their donor families. Sarah succeeds in inviting us along as she faces and overcomes each obstacle blocking her from making that connection. Researchers who daily work with anonymous source specimens as an object of study are moved in encountering the human family and person behind that donation in a very rewarding and touching description of the encounters. Very special relationships develop from those encounters and that becomes the heart touching core that makes this beautifully written book so unique and enjoyable.

The author explains much of the organ and tissue donation process and even complex medical topics in clear and user friendly terms, many included in a helpful appendix listing of abbreviations and acronyms. Her family's story is complimented by several other donor families' stories (I cried with Jodi's story too) that are included to broaden the conceptual understanding of how impactful research donations are to living patients and the future of medicine in general. We also get to hear firsthand from recovery staff what it is like for them to participate in organ and tissue recoveries, supporting the donor

families at their time of tragedy, another powerful insight seldom visible to the general public. In a closing **Resources** section the author lists helpful contact information and advice for donor families and organ/tissue transplant recipients, including contact information for the 58 organ procurement organizations that serve across the United States.

Anyone involved in organ and tissue donation – including transplant patients and families, organ procurement staff and medical professionals that benefit from research – will be moved and educated from this very open sharing. But donor families, especially those who are asked to donate to research when their gifts are not able to be used directly for transplant, will take a new positive outlook in responding to that question, or if that is in their past, an appreciation of how helpful their decision was (or could have been) when originally asked.

Be prepared in that Sarah’s powerful and touching storytelling that brought me to tears more than once, so have tissues handy. As she reminds us, “People say, ‘No parent should have to bury a child.’ But there is no *should* in life.” Coming to accept that fact ‘was good enough for me. Until it wasn’t.’ And that led her to find the missing pieces of the puzzle that results in the amazing journey we join with her in reliving this very inspiring story of a life’s impact and meaning no matter how long one lives. Sarah, thank you for allowing us to come along side you in this amazing life experience, and especially for sharing your own “Dreamworld” vision in the book’s Epilogue, a must read to the very end.

Note: *A Life Everlasting* is available in various formats at Amazon.com

Brief reviewer bio:

Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. ’94, retired after 37 years in the computer industry with Unisys Corporation in 2005. He is a volunteer with The Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia, a national board member with UNOS as well as president of TRIO (Transplant Recipients International Organization) where he maintains a list of reviewed transplant related books on TRIO’s web site <http://TRIOweb.org> under menu item RESOURCES. Jim is a nationally recognized speaker with over 500 events in his speaking resume and an author himself. His own book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered free in thanks to his donor family and can be obtained online at <http://gleasonjim.com> or on CD by contacting him at GleasonJim@aol.com.