

## “No time for goodbye”

By Majella Gillett

I am a former nurse, but I was still nursing when our family was touched by the transplant experience. My 18 year old daughter, Alison, suffered a grade five subarachnoid haemorrhage and subsequently became an organ donor.



Alison (left) with elder sister Rebecca (Beccs)

As is usual in such cases it was a sudden and unexpected catastrophe. She went to bed one night a normal schoolgirl and awoke the next morning in excruciating pain and lost consciousness within 15 minutes. She suffered a respiratory arrest while I called the ambulance. I administered mouth-to-mouth until the ambulance arrived. It was the first time I had ever had to apply resuscitation, but those many years of CPR training obviously came to the fore despite the panic I felt.

She was quickly transported to hospital and placed on a ventilator and the many tests began. Following a CT scan the massive haemorrhage was diagnosed and she was transferred to the intensive care unit. It was totally and utterly shocking to be told quite bluntly by the first doctor I saw in ICU that she 'could die in the next hour' or perhaps linger for weeks. I just did not know what to feel, think or do.

I had great difficulty in processing the fact that she was 'brain dead' and I wondered how a normal person without any medical background in the same situation would cope when I had difficulty, even though I had some knowledge. It is especially difficult when there are no outward signs of trauma - she just looked like she was asleep.

The nursing staff who looked after us made our experience bearable. I was the one who first mentioned organ donation and the nursing staff were comfortable in discussing it so I was able to talk about the process and have my questions answered. We were able to spend as much time with Alison as we wanted and we were encouraged to touch her and talk to her. The time we had left with her was so precious.

Thirty hours after she lost consciousness and the brain death tests were completed, the donor coordinator was informed and we started the organ donation process. It was so difficult going through the forms and questions required, but it was something I felt very strongly about. In the midst of our horrific pain I just knew this was the only thing to do.

We had briefly discussed organ donation when Alison went for her learner driver's permit and she had affirmed that it was what she would want in the unlikely event that it happened to her. Knowing her wishes made the decision so much easier. Something 'good' had to come from the loss of our beautiful girl.

We heard a few weeks later that her organs had helped a toddler, a teenager, two adults with families and two young women.

Knowing her organs have given others the chance to live a full life has been a great comfort to me as I have struggled to come to terms with her sudden loss.

There is no 'getting over it' - you just have to learn to live with the loss and the pain and accept that life is forever changed.

Nothing prepares you for the loss of a child. I found I needed the support groups and counselling I had previously thought unnecessary. I didn't know anyone else that had lost a child or had been a donor family. It takes time to learn to laugh again without feeling guilty; time to adjust to a future without one whole branch of the family. The losses continue as I watch the daughters of friends go to university, get married and have children; something Alison had dreamed of doing with her boyfriend but never got the chance to achieve.

Organ donation did give us the chance to make some sort of sense out of her loss and make her death seem a little less 'pointless'. Nothing makes it okay that Alison is not here experiencing a full life with her two sisters and brother but I am so proud of the legacy she has left behind in the lives of the recipients she helped.

To find out more about Al visit her webpage <http://www.geocities.com/lazermaj>