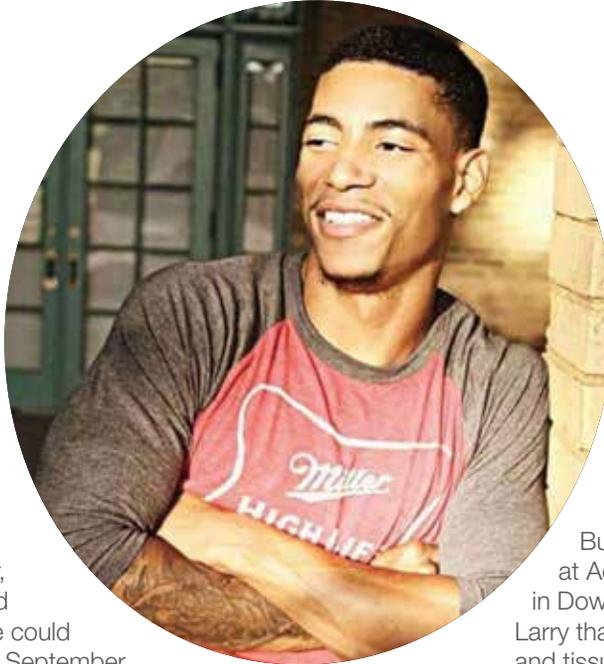


THE LEGACY OF DONOR IN SPIRIT DERRICK PAGE LIVES ON THROUGH THE LIVES HE TOUCHED

Derrick, a lover of sports and music, had a generous nature and a compassionate desire to help others through the gift of organ and tissue donation.



If Derrick Page could've given his heart to his grandfather, Larry, he would have. That's just the kind of person he was. In fact, the 23-year-old Aurora University student was planning on registering as an organ and tissue donor, but fate stepped in, and he lost his life before he could sign up. Derrick died in September 2015, and, unfortunately, he was unable to become a donor for his grandfather. However, Derrick is a donor in spirit, someone whose gift of life lives on through his desire to donate despite being unable to and through the lives he touched throughout his lifetime.

Derrick's grandfather had congestive heart failure, and it had become so severe that he was living with a left ventricular assist device, a pump used in patients who have reached end-stage heart failure. "I was running on electricity 24/7," said Larry. "When I went out, I had two batteries on my side to keep this thing running, and at home I had a power module with a cord that's 20 feet long, so I had 20 feet that I could walk around in at home."

When Derrick found out Larry needed a heart transplant, he talked about becoming an organ donor. He told Larry that he was going to get the heart transplant he needed. "You're gonna be OK, Granddad. You're gonna get a heart." The last thing Larry told his grandson was to be careful out there. Derrick told Larry not to worry; he'd be OK.

A CRUSHING LOSS

But Derrick wasn't OK. Shortly after that conversation, Derrick was murdered. He was at a house party when a fight broke out. Derrick tried to intervene to help his friend, but he was shot in the back of the head, leaving him mortally wounded.

The loss was crushing for Derrick's family and friends who knew him as someone who always looked out for others.

Derrick loved sports and music and had a special place in his heart for his little sister, Demi. His grandmother, Bettie, said, "He always made sure that his sister was first. He did everything centered around her, dropping her off at school, just making sure she was taken care of."

But when Derrick was pronounced dead at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Ill., Gift of Hope notified Larry that Derrick was not a registered organ and tissue donor, so Derrick's parents, Derrick Sr. and Deidra, would have to authorize donation on his behalf.

"It was the hardest thing for me to do, to ask my son and daughter-in-law to authorize the donation," Larry said. "But I understood that [Derrick] could help so many other people; he was so young and in great shape. So, I talked to them, and I got them to say yes."

A DONOR IN SPIRIT'S LEGACY

With the authorization officially signed, the family thought Derrick's legacy of helping others would go on through his gift of organ and tissue donation. Unfortunately, the family was confronted with an unexpected roadblock. Because Derrick's remains were part of an open murder investigation, the coroner could not release his body for organ and tissue donation. In this case, the coroner felt strongly that releasing the body for donation could somehow jeopardize their investigation and interfere with obtaining justice for Derrick.

Larry did eventually receive his heart transplant in May 2016 at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Ill., and no longer needs the left ventricular assist device. He wrote a letter thanking the donor family for giving him a second chance at life. And, although Derrick was unable to become an organ and tissue donor, he is a donor in spirit, and his legacy lives on through the positive and lasting impressions he left on others. His sister, who plays basketball, has taken Derrick's football number 31 as her jersey number, so Derrick will be with her always.