

RACHEL DEAN'S SPIRIT OF GIVING WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED

Rachel Dean was a source of hope and positivity for anyone who met her. The 25-year-old teacher and swim coach was always advocating for others and bringing her bright energy with her wherever she went. So, when Rachel suffered life-threatening injuries in a car crash in September 2017, Rachel's family knew she would want to be an organ and tissue donor as her final gift to others.

Rachel grew up in Normal, Ill., and even as a little girl was an advocate for other kids she met. Her mother, Marcia, recalls one day when Rachel was only three years old and stood up to some older boys who were bullying another girl in their neighborhood. "Here's little bitty Rachel running down the street yelling at those boys to leave that nice girl alone," Marcia said. "Rachel was always trying to take care of everybody else, even me."

Rachel started teaching swim lessons when she was 15 years old and became a lifeguard soon after. She remained passionate about swimming and continued coaching into adulthood, even coaching for the Special Olympics. She also did volunteer work, including volunteering once a week for the school's free lunch program during summers. A rule-follower to the letter, Rachel still knew how to have fun. As a manager at a local pool, she was the target of practical jokes her employees would pull on her all the time, and Rachel loved every minute of it, keeping them in line while enjoying the lighthearted ribbing.

A DEVASTATING LOSS

Rachel's car accident happened on Sept. 14, 2017, when she was on her way to Normal West High School in Normal, Ill., where she was a swim coach. Emergency responders were able to stabilize Rachel at Advocate BroMenn Medical Center in Normal, Ill., before she was airlifted to OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Ill., where she later died.

Marcia was on her way home from the hospital when she received the call from Gift of Hope asking her to authorize organ and tissue donation for Rachel. She knew her daughter wanted to be an organ and tissue donor, so she authorized donation. But soon after, Marcia received another phone call notifying her that Rachel was unable to donate. The reason was that Rachel had lost a lot of blood in the hospital emergency room where medical professionals focused on keeping her stable and alive long enough to



As a donor in spirit, Rachel was a kind and compassionate person who left an indelible mark on the lives of those who knew and loved her.

get her to the intensive care unit, where she would have received a blood transfusion. Rachel died before they could transfer her to the ICU. At that point, she had lost too much blood for the samples needed for the coroner's autopsy and for Gift of Hope to determine if she was an eligible organ and tissue donor.

"Through circumstances beyond anyone's control, she couldn't donate," said Marcia. "The news was difficult to hear at first. I just thought it was unfair because she wanted to do this. She was the type of person that, if she was alive and somebody asked, 'Can I have one of your kidneys?' she would have said yes. She really would've wanted this, and it hurt that it wasn't possible."

A POSITIVE IMPACT

Although Rachel did not become a donor, Marcia believes that Rachel's positive influence and compassionate essence were present in the many things that happened after her death to honor her memory. The Bloomington Normal Swim Club has renamed its fall swim meet the Rachel A. Dean Memorial Meet, and it has started the Rachel A. Dean Scholarship Fund to help more kids get into competitive swimming. Rachel had such a powerful impact on so many lives that her visitation service had to be held after the funeral services to give family, friends and community members as much time as possible to honor her memory. Wave after wave of bright green — Rachel's favorite color — flooded her visitation for nearly five hours to celebrate her life.

Because of the many moving parts involved in the complex donation process, many things can keep organ and tissue donation from happening. Rachel's loved ones know that she would've wanted to

become a donor, and their desire to honor that wish makes Rachel a donor in spirit. Her generosity, kindness and humanitarian nature live on through her willingness to help others and the positive impact she had on everyone who knew and loved her.

Rachel, an avid swimmer, began teaching swim lessons when she was 15 years old and went on to coach for the Special Olympics as an adult.

