

# Seattle man saves life of Alaska woman through heart transplant

JOEL SIGNED UP TO BE AN ORGAN DONOR 10 YEARS AGO, AND AFTER HIS  
PASSING, HIS HEART WAS SHARED WITH A WOMAN IN ANCHORAGE,  
ALASKA.

*Alex Rozier*

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Joel Eggert is remembered for his heart.

The West Seattle man who loved music was killed in a motorcycle crash on December 4th, 2016, but six months after his death he lives on.

Eggert was an organ donor, and his heart saved the life of a woman in Anchorage, Alaska.

It was Sunday, December 4, and Eggert was on his way home around 10 p.m. He was on a motorcycle, which was not uncommon for Eggert.

“He rode that motorcycle all the time. It didn’t matter if it was raining or if it was 30 degrees. He loved that motorcycle,” his mom Laurie Preston said.

“No matter where he went, he got there on his motorcycle,” his sister Stacey Basse said.

When Eggert got to the roundabout at Southwest Thistle and 12th Street Southwest, something went wrong.

“Apparently he was on a street where he forgot where he was or didn’t recognize there was a second roundabout,” Preston said. “He’d caught that roundabout and crashed.”

“They called us and said that he was at Harborview and when the trauma surgeon came out to talk to us, we knew he was gone,” Preston said.

Eggert was only 46 years old when he passed. His friends still talk about his heart.

**Video: Joel sings an original song (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wnlF8QCPxo&feature=youtu.be>)**

“There wasn’t a person he met that was a stranger,” friend Stacey McQuade said. “Right away, they were instantaneously, his friend.”

“He had a heart you don’t see a lot of,” sister Paula Konzcal said. “He just cared. He deep down cared about people.”

That’s why nobody was surprised to learn he had made plans to donate his organs after he passed away. Eggert signed up to be an organ donor 10 years ago, and after his passing, his heart was shared with a woman in Anchorage, Alaska.

Jennie Lawrence was dying.

Thirteen years ago doctors in Alaska diagnosed her with a rare heart condition, and last year, the 36-year-old Anchorage woman spent eight months in a Seattle hospital waiting for a new heart. She needed a match. Just days after Eggert’s crash, she received the news that she had a match: Eggert.

Four days after Eggert passed, Lawrence went in for her transplant.

“Before I could barely walk. It was hard to breathe. And it was horrible,” Lawrence said. “It’s been amazing how good I feel now.”

"I was so scared for years to say 'OK' to the heart transplant," Lawrence added. "But it was all meant to be."

Sadly, most families of organ donors never get to meet the recipient. But this story is different. It started with a letter from Eggert's mom.

Earlier this year Preston sat down in her office in her Marysville home to draft a letter.

"It was dated February 11, 2017," Preston said.

She didn't know who she was sending it to at the time. With help from the organ donation non-profit LifeCenter Northwest, she was able to send a letter that ended up with Lawrence.

She wrote in part:

"Dear person in whose chest our son's heart beats," Preston said. "What can I tell you about Joel that no one else knows? Probably not much."

"He was loved from before he was born and continues to be loved by so many," she added. "He gave the best hugs. It didn't matter if you were his mom or dad or someone he was just introduced to. He gathered you in his arms and held onto you because you were the most important person."

She ended with this thought: "We wish you well; we believe Joel's heart will make and keep you whole for a lifetime of hugs and love," Preston said. "If I can be so bold I would love to hear his heart beat again."

Once she received the note, and after an extensive Internet search, Jennie determined that she had Joel's heart.

She sent this reply to Preston in a Facebook message: "My name is Jennie. I'm alive today thanks to Joel's ever giving heart," she wrote. "It makes me smile knowing that you all want to meet one day and I hope we all develop a long friendship."

"I can't wait to hear more about Joel and learn more about him," Lawrence wrote as her final thought.

Preston responded.

"I wrote, 'Jennie I am Joel's mom. I am overcome with emotion. I will be in touch. Thank you.'"

They were in touch.

In the days that followed, Preston and Lawrence met privately for lunch, and then Lawrence also spent time with Eggert's sister Basse. A few weeks back in the hospital she also spent time with Eggert's sister Konzcal, who was visiting from Minnesota.

They have now formed a friendship that will last a lifetime.

"We get to watch her live the rest of her life, because of Joel, because of our brother, who we lost," Konzcal said with emotion. "We just want to keep him alive in as many ways as we can, in memory, and celebrate Jennie's life, because he gave."