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Hooper: Mother of murdered teen saves lives by connecting to son's "giving spirit"



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I didn't plan on attending the LifeLink Foundation news conference Thursday morning.

But somebody did.

I didn't think I had time to squeeze it into my schedule.

But somebody did.

Maybe it was luck or maybe just serendipity, but I like to think the events of that morning happened for a reason.

LifeLink had called the news conference to unveil two new murals promoting organ donation at the Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office on Hillsborough Avenue. I had received a notice about the event earlier in the week, but decided to pass because I already had a busy day planned.

On Wednesday, however, I lost my wallet (long story and no, I don't want to talk about it). So I figured I could go to the Tax Collector's Office on Thursday, get a new driver's license and cover the news conference after all. I arrived at 8:50 a.m., thinking it would take about an hour to get through the process.

It took all of five minutes. For real.

I considered leaving because I still had a ton of stuff to get done. I shared my story with LifeLink public affairs coordinator Betsy Edwards and asked if she could send a photo of the event we could publish. But just as I stepped toward the door, Orkiya Andrews, the featured speaker for the media event, arrived. She also had come an hour early because she needed the services of the Tax Collector's Office.

She too waltzed through in amazingly quick time.

So in the minutes before the event she shared with me the tragic story of how she became an advocate for LifeLink and organ donation.

On Aug. 12, 2010, Andrews' 17-year-old son, Byron Patty, called to "check on her" three times. For Byron to call his mother that many times on any day was uncommon, as it would be for just about any teen.

Then, in the moments that followed, another teen shot Byron as he played a dice game with friends. A friend called Andrews to the scene and she began to pray as she held the hand of her son, who lay on the ground bleeding.

Doctors told her later that night her son wouldn't make it. He passed two days later.

"I talked to him, I prayed with him," Andrews said, fighting back tears. "I told him, 'If God is calling you home, follow God's path.' "

A LifeLink official also prayed with her, sharing that if Byron died, his organs could be used to extend the lives of others.

"I decided he should give someone else life, because I know my son was a giver," Andrews said.

The decision was difficult, Andrews said, but being a giver in the time of death proved to be a great thing.

There are now six people who are enjoying a second lease on life because of Byron, including a 4-month-old baby and a 21-year-old man in Alabama who returned to playing baseball after receiving a transplant.

Andrews, 45, an administrator for Safepoint Insurance, took solace this week from knowing Byron's memory would be honored in the mural at the Tax Collector's Office. And she needed solace given what awaited her on Friday.

Reginald Jenkins, also 17 at the time of the shooting, was convicted of killing Byron in 2012. But the U.S. and Florida Supreme Court last year declared it unconstitutional to give juveniles lengthy punishments without a chance for release. Like a number of murderers, he received a resentencing hearing on Friday.

The judge again sentenced Jenkins to life in prison.

While that sentence can't give life back to Byron, we're all in a position to give life by saying yes to one eight-word question: *Are you interested in becoming an organ donor?*

Why not, indeed?

That's all I'm saying.

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