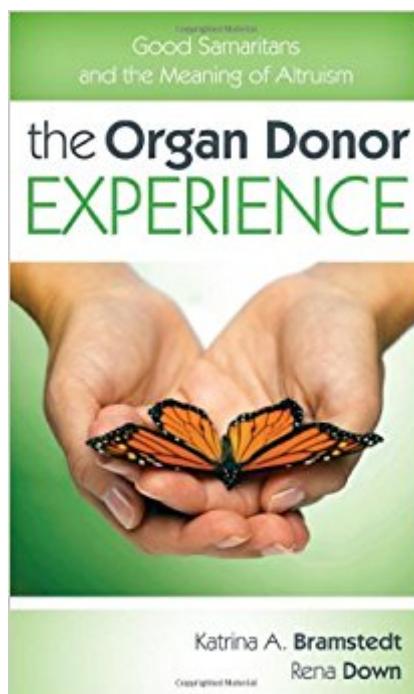


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# The Organ Donor Experience: Good Samaritans And The Meaning Of Altruism



## **Synopsis**

With a current US need of over 115,000 organs one would think that Good Samaritan donors would be welcomed with open arms by transplant centers and society in general; however, this is often not the case. Tell someone that you have donated an organ to a stranger and the reaction is likely to be one of astonishment and disbelief. Some doctors even consider people who offer their organs to strangers crazy. Why would anyone do that? Who are these people so committed to helping others-strangers-that they would undergo surgery, discomfort, and disruption of their lives? This book profiles donors who have offered their organs to strangers and helps readers understand the meanings behind their donations. For the donor, altruism should always be the primary motivation, though other motivations often come into play. Often, there are also subconscious reasons for performing this great act of kindness. The Organ Donor Experience gives living anonymous organ donors of kidneys, liver lobes, and lung lobes the opportunity to tell their stories as they understand them, and for others to understand the motivations and the meaning of true altruism.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Approximately 28,000 organ transplants are performed annually in the U.S. Although the majority utilize organs from deceased individuals, about 100 cases involve living Good Samaritan organ donors. Bramstedt and Down look at the motivations and experiences of 22 Good Samaritans who have donated a kidney, a lobe of the liver, or part of a lung to a stranger. What prompts these people to make such an extraordinary gift to an unrelated recipient? Is it altruism, a religious reason, or, perhaps, atonement? Most of them feel compelled to save someone's life or at least ease suffering. Although members of this generous group share some similar attributes, a variety of

personalities are represented. One man even had a tattoo of a kidney inked on his back where the donated organ was formerly positioned. Concepts of altruism are also considered: Are we prewired for it, or do we learn it? The authors provide information about the evaluation of potential candidates for organ donation, the surgery itself, possible complications, and the effects on family members while telling the stories of Good Samaritan organ donors. --Tony Miksanek

Many discussions of organ donation focus on the shortages of organs and the needs of recipients. This book provides a unique and compelling perspective. Bramstedt (consultant, California Transplant Donor Network), a medical ethicist, and Down, a writer and recipient of a kidney from a stranger, have written an engaging book that highlights the lives of living donors who have given organs to people whom they do not know. The authors seamlessly weave together a scholarly analysis of organ donation to strangers and the stories of these donors. The stories illustrate commonalities, such as a history of altruism and a sense of abundance, and unique aspects of donors' lives, such as the decision-making processes by which individuals became donors. The analysis and stories are challenging, leading the reader to welcome the appendix of resources for those who want more information. The authors are honest in presenting the risks of donation, but the overall tone is positive. Bramstedt and Down are to be commended for informing readers about an underreported aspect of organ donation and honoring these "good Samaritans" in this scholarly and readable book. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All readership levels. (CHOICE)The book quickly...gets interesting. The authors sprinkle little informative tidbits along the way--Asian-Americans constituted only 3.4% of U.S. donors--and bring their points alive through little vignettes when examining the origins of altruism. The authors would make brilliant sales reps: they put forth a convincing argument about what a great humanitarian effort living donation is then patiently explain the evaluation process to reassure readers of the minimal costs. The few downsides are reviewed and discussed--for example, how to deal with family members who do not support the decision to donate or the devastation donors might experience when a recipient dies. Resources, bibliography, and index occupy a full 36 pages, yet for the most part this book escapes the drudgery of a research-laden study and instead reads as a fascinating story about a very human issue. (Publishers Weekly)Approximately 28,000 organ transplants are performed annually in the U.S. Although the majority utilize organs from deceased individuals, about 100 cases involve living Good Samaritan organ donors. Bramstedt and Down look at the motivations and experiences of 22 Good Samaritans who have donated a kidney, a lobe of the liver, or part of a lung to a stranger. What prompts these people to make such an extraordinary gift to an unrelated recipient? Is it

altruism, a religious reason, or, perhaps, atonement? Most of them feel compelled to save someone's life or at least ease suffering. Although members of this generous group share some similar attributes, a variety of personalities are represented. One man even had a tattoo of a kidney inked on his back where the donated organ was formerly positioned. Concepts of altruism are also considered: Are we prewired for it, or do we learn it? The authors provide information about the evaluation of potential candidates for organ donation, the surgery itself, possible complications, and the effects on family members while telling the stories of Good Samaritan organ donors.

(Booklist) Bramstedt & Down's *The Organ Donor Experience* has done what none have before: tell the story of all phases of organ donation from the donor's perspective. By doing this, the reader is thrust into the mind of the donors, to understand their motivations and ultimately, what is altruistic behavior. This is an essential read for all those interested in organ donation. (Richard Fatica, M.D., Medical Director Kidney Transplantation, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH)

I bought this book because I am a recent Good Samaritan kidney donor. The book would actually be more pertinent to someone considering organ donation but I found the stories and experiences of the donors profiled in the book very interesting. There are many ethical issues involved in organ donation and this book does a good job of bringing those issues to light. The book also highlights some of the emotional issues donors and recipients may go thru preceding their procedure and after it. If you are considering donation, read this book. You will most likely follow your instinct and become a donor, which is a beautiful thing!

One of the prerequisites for organ donation in the United States, as explained by Katrina Bramstedt and Rena Down in this fine book, is that it be "altruistic," that is, the donor can not be motivated by the hope of any benefit. The act must be completely selfless; and to assess that it is, to the extent possible, prospective donors are subjected to extensive psychological evaluation. Some hospitals even go so far as to refuse donations from strangers, from "Good Samaritans," relying instead on the hope of a match from relatives and friends of the patient. Although Dr. Bramstedt and Ms. Down explain the case for altruism very convincingly, I came away still wondering if such a stringent ethic is really necessary when the need is so great and so relatively few people (myself among them) have the necessary courage to volunteer. After all, who delves deeply into the motives of the members of our armed services when they show up to enlist, or questions their acts of bravery because they receive a government paycheck? But while "The Organ Donor Experience: Good Samaritans and the Meaning of Altruism" raised questions that made me reassess many of my

previous opinions, it only increased my sense of awe in the face of the exemplary acts of courage and kindness by the twenty-two "Good Samaritans" profiled. Their stories are compelling and moving. The book is an inspirational read for anyone who has ever been tempted to do a good deed.

As a living organ donor, it is sometimes difficult to explain the WHY part of giving the gift of life. Katrina Bramstedt and Rena Down have done just that in *The Donor Experience: Good Samaritans and the Meaning of Altruism*. This unique book is a gift in itself, written for people in all walks of life, including physicians, to better understand the selfless act of living organ donation in order to save a life of a complete stranger. In reality, the stranger is part of the global family whose pain and suffering affects us all. The impact of *The Donor Experience* is akin to organ donation itself -- profound -- because it allows the reader to hear from organ donors as to their rationale for giving a part of their body to someone for whom they care but, in most cases, have never met. In the organ donor world, altruism is the rule, not the exception. Katrina and Rena have excelled at pinpointing for inquisitive readers the passion possessed by the living organ donor and the endless positive results it creates for friends, family and local communities. *The Donor Experience* is a must read for anyone who has considered living organ donation and was stopped in the process by a web of questions and unknown scenarios. Katrina and Rena provide the answers and tell it like it is. The life-giving experience is as unforgettable as the book itself.

This book has great stories about kidney donors, and great information about kidney donation! One of the kidney donors mentioned in this book, Chaya Lipschutz, was not interviewed for the book but is briefly mentioned. Chaya had donated a kidney after seeing an ad in a newspaper for someone who was in need of a kidney. Feeling like she didn't do enough, she wanted to do more. So she ended up becoming a kidney matchmaker and has saved many lives, so far. She doesn't get paid anything - volunteers her time. Two of Chaya's kidney donors are also mentioned in this book - Rabbi Ephraim Simon, a father of 9 from New Jersey and Lori Palatnik, mother of 5, wife of a Rabbi, from Maryland. If anyone wants to donate a kidney - you can contact Chaya. She has a lot of people who contact her that are in need of a life-saving kidney and is always looking for kidney donors, so she can help save more lives. Her e-mail address is [KidneyMitzvah@aol.com](mailto:KidneyMitzvah@aol.com). More about Chaya on her website, [...] or [KidneyMitzvah.com](http://KidneyMitzvah.com). The writers did a great job on writing this book! I hope many others will be inspired to donate an organ as result!

Nearly everyone has read or seen a news story or two about Good Samaritan organ donors. However, never until now has there been a thorough examination of not just the stories but also the facts, feelings, ethics and philosophy behind the stories. This book isn't just science - though science is well represented. It also gets into the minds and hearts of altruistic donors with different backgrounds and outcomes. The analysis is sound and the recommendations to the organ donation community will no doubt facilitate a wider acceptance and participation in this unique act of humanity. Whether you've been affected by organ donation or not, your faith in the courage and character of complete strangers will never be the same and that's something we can all use.

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