

Cottage Grove Sentinel
 116 N. Sixth St.
 Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment
 Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



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Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:

nhickson@cgsentinel.com

A heartfelt letter to the family of Ashley Mathews

(Editor's Note: Jane Mathews, grandmother of Ashley Mathews, brought the following letter into The Sentinel.

Ashley died in a car wreck on the Wyoming border while returning from South Carolina to be with her brother, who had just been in a terrible car accident here in Cottage Grove that left him a quadriplegic.

Ashley's heart was donated to a young woman named Courtney.

The following was written to Ashley's family by the mother of Courtney.)

To the loved ones of our donor:
 Hello, my name is Michelle and I would like to express my respect and gratitude to your family for the miracle of life that was given to my daughter, Courtney, because of your inconceivable generosity.

Courtney was the recipient of your loved one's heart. Without this precious gift, she would not be here and alive today.

Courtney, myself and our family would like to convey our deepest and heartfelt sympathy for your loss.

We can only imagine how extremely painful this must be for your family. Yet even in the midst of your grief, you were able to make such an unselfish and thoughtful decision to give the ultimate gift and save a life — my daughter's life.

We are eternally grateful.

Courtney began showing signs of heart failure in the winter of 2016. As she returned to school in January 2017, she progressively got worse.

By mid-February, Courtney was taken to the hospital for complete heart testing. It was at this time that we



Ashley Mathews (above) was killed May 15, 2017, in a car accident. Her heart was donated to Courtney (above right) by her family in Cottage Grove.

were told the devastating news that she would need a heart transplant in order to survive.

By the end of March, she was taken out of

"I want to live for my donor and myself. We are forever intertwined now. We have merged together in a way that will live on in me."

— Courtney, heart recipient of Ashley Mathews

school and admitted to the hospital in CICV and put on life support measures.

Throughout seven weeks of waiting, she was well aware that she was in critical condition.

The reality of knowing she was not able to go home without a life-saving heart transplant and the knowledge of the chain of events that would need to occur weighed heavy on both our minds.

Her only hope was a donor.

Courtney tried so hard throughout this incredibly difficult and emotional time to keep a positive attitude and be fearless despite the painful treatments and scary surroundings.

She would say, "I will be strong and brave just like I believe my donor would be. If I get a new heart, I will make them and their family proud

they saved my life."

When her doctor came into her room that night and woke us up to say they believed they had found the right

match — the perfect heart for her — it was so bittersweet. We felt an overwhelming sense of sadness and immense sorrow for your loss.

Our thoughts and prayers were with you, your loved one and your family in this agonizing time. At the same moment, we also felt overwhelming love, hope and tremendous joy for the precious gift that was being given, and so incredibly humbled by the ability of a stranger to make such an amazingly heroic decision to save someone's life.

As Courtney went through those operating room doors that morning, she was determined to survive this life-saving operation and come back with a new heart beating within her. She said, "I can do this, I'm going to make it, for my hero ... my donor." She seemed at peace as she was wheeled away.

After the operation, Courtney fought fiercely through the long and painful recovery process. She came back so strong and passionate and said at one point, "I want to live for my donor and myself. We are forever intertwined now. We have merged together in a way that will live on in me."

"I feel my donor's presence and will always treasure the gift of life that was given to me."

I wanted to write so much sooner, but I just could not find the right words and still don't know if I have in order to appropriately convey the depth of gratitude for saving my daughter's life — for my family and I to watch her grow into a young woman — to fulfill her dreams with the glow of the life of her donor shining through her.

We know the loss of your loved one is still extremely painful. We are so very sorry but hope and pray that this letter may bring you some solace and peace.

Courtney continues to live each and every day to the fullest, knowing how precious life truly is.

With all of our gratitude and love,

—Michelle and Courtney

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