

With each step, the lad winced to hear dry leaves and twigs crackle beneath his feet. The owl did not stir. Closer...closer...and at last young Walter was standing under the limb just within range of his quarry. Slowly he reached up with one hand and grabbed the bird by its legs. He had captured it! But the owl, waking suddenly, came alive like no other animal Walter had ever seen. In a flurry of beating wings, wild eyes and frightened cries, it struggled against the boy's grasp. Walter, stunned, held on.

Now it's difficult to imagine how what happened next, happened. Perhaps the response was sparked by gouging talons or by fear itself. But at some point the terrified boy, still clinging to the terrified bird, flung it to the ground and stomped it to death.

When it was over, a disbelieving Walter gazed down at the broken heap of bronze feathers and blood. And he cried. Walter ran from the orchard but later returned to bury the owl, the little pet he would never know. Each shovelful of earth from the shallow grave was moistened with tears of deep regret. And for months thereafter, the owl visited Walter's dreams.

Ashamed, he would tell no one of the incident until many years later. By then, the world forgave him. For that sad and lonely summer's day in the early spring of Walter Elias' life brought with it an awakening of the meaning of life. Walter never, ever again, killed a living creature. Although all the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being.

For it was then that a grieving seven-year-old boy, attempting to atone for a thoughtless misdeed, first sought to possess the animals of the forest while allowing them to run free—by drawing them.

Now the boy, too, is gone, but his drawings live on in the incomparable, undying art of Walter Elias...Disney. Walt Disney. And now you know the rest of the story.”

I'm sure that all of you recognize the name Paul Harvey, a radio commentator from Chicago who uncovers a lot of fascinating background information on famous people and uses captivating words and phrases to tell us “the rest of the story.” I'm sure you all recognize the name Walt Disney. You probably all have a favorite movie of Walt Disney's and probably a favorite Walt Disney character. Mine happens to be Peter Pan. I dream a lot about flying. Flying with my arms outstretched, not in front of me like Superman, but to the sides, like Peter Pan. I think I fantasize about being eternally youthful and always taking care of those in need. I have to be careful though, especially lately, because of the book The Peter Pan Syndrome. But I do enjoy Walt Disney and his work. As Paul Harvey wrote, “All the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being.” From a tragic event in the early days of Walt Disney came life, and Walt Disney left a legacy of fantasy, laughter and joy.

Conclusion A—for funerals:

We are reminded of that, somewhat, today as we bury _____. I presume that _____, as all of us, watched Walt Disney's movies and had a favorite star. (His family mentioned that he enjoyed the character _____ from the movie _____. The legacy of Walt Disney will live on for a long time. Likewise the legacy of _____ will live on in a number of different ways. The happy memory of the things that he and his family did together. We can see that the family that he raised, the home he provided and the farm business that he nourished and cultivated. We will recall the many times he worked with us in our parish and the times we saw him as an active part of our city.

Those memories will bring us some joy and maybe some laughter as the pain of our loss begins to fade. And we can find further comfort in the fact that _____ life, in a sense, did not end, but rather his life changed. We believe he has joined his Creator and Father and his Savior because he has been faithful to the request of Jesus to love Jesus and to love his fellow man and woman. Jesus promised us that salvation would come on Easter as a result of the sadness and tragedy of Good Friday. New Life did come to us out of the death of the crucifixion. And if we continue to follow the covenant we have with God, we, too, can experience the joy of redemption.

Another beautiful way in which the legacy of _____ will continue is through a decision that his family made when he died. I am pleased that they have permitted and encouraged me to mention to you, his friends and acquaintances, that _____ was and organ and tissue donor. As you know, the hospital does support the donation and transplant programs, and through his family's generosity, _____ cornea, kidneys, heart, and bone tissue were used to save the lives of several other people. Through the tragedy of _____ accident and death, more than six other human beings will have a longer life, and for some, a richer and fuller life. The recipients may never know who the donor was; but they can again experience laughter, joy, hope, and happiness through his miracle of donation and transplantation. I compliment _____ family for their choice and reaffirm that we are proud to have known him and we will all miss him for what he did for us when he was alive, as well as what he has done for others after his death.

Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the soul of all the faithfully departed rest in peace. Amen.

Conclusion B-for Easter or Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week:

We are reminded of that his weekend. The death of Good Friday's crucifixion resulted in the life of Sunday's resurrection. From sin comes salvation; from the negative comes the positive, from the destructive come the creative. To Christians throughout the world, Easter Sunday means life. Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead so that all people could be given a new life. Easter belongs to the season of new life, to the season of spring. Organ and tissue donation also means new life for thousands of men, women, and children who are awaiting organ and tissue transplants. Therefore, it is fitting that this year, National Organ and Tissue Donor Week begins today, Easter Sunday.

Organ and tissue donation is an opportunity to make a positive, valuable contribution out of a tragic death. It is considerable comfort for families to realize that their loved one has given others a new life. Our local community, as you know, has a growing interest and involvement in donation programs. You might even know of someone near you who can see again because of a new cornea or work again because of a bone transplant or function normally because of a new kidney. I encourage you today to think about your decision regarding organ and tissue donation. I would encourage you to discuss it with your families and sign your driver's license. There has been a great deal of publicity about the great needs of people all over the United States. I appeal to you to make a positive life-giving decision to donate the organs and tissues of you and your family so that others might live more fully. I encourage you today to consider your involvement in organ and tissue donation programs, so that like our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, like Walt Disney, we might be able to bring life out of death. Finally, I would like to read you a poem, a very beautiful poem that I carry around with me. It is entitled, "To Remember Me" (Refer to page VI-28).

SEOPF/UNOS. *Organ and Tissue Donation: A Reference Guide for Clergy*. 4th Ed. Cooper ML, Taylor GJ, eds. Richmond, VA:UNOS; 2000.