

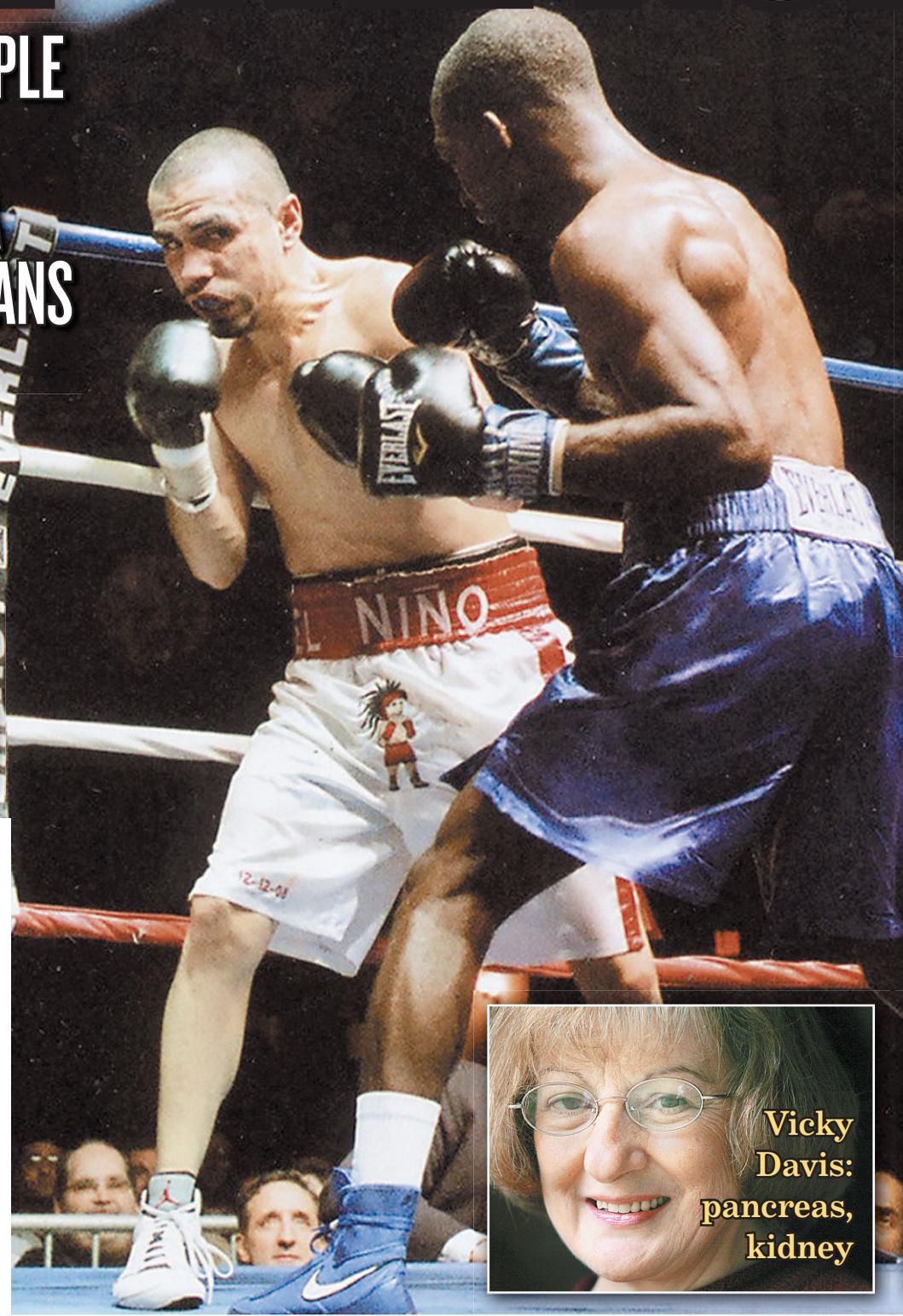
# OFF THE ROPES

## THE FIVE PEOPLE SAVED BY THE GIFT OF A BOXER'S ORGANS

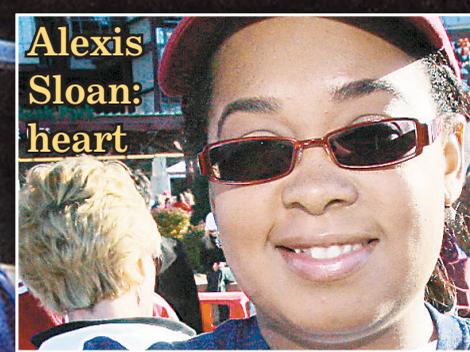
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The organs of Francisco 'Paco' Rodriguez (left) were donated after he was declared brain-dead following this Blue Horizon fight a year ago.

# DAILY NEWS SPORTS



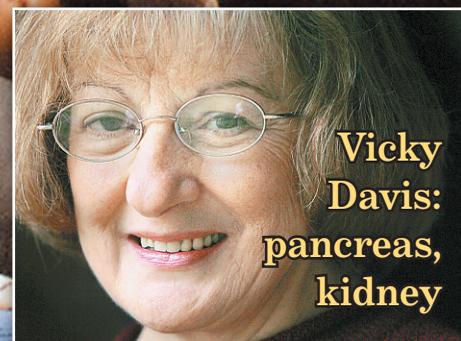
**Ashley Owens:** lungs



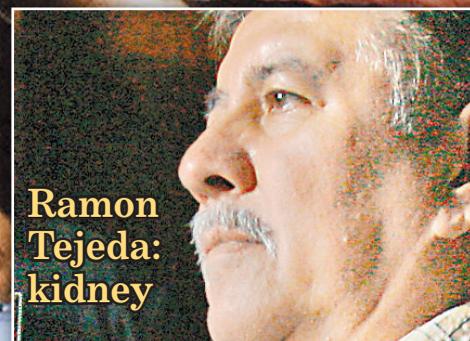
**Alexis Sloan:** heart



**Meghan Kingsley:** liver



**Vicky Davis:** pancreas, kidney



**Ramon Tejada:** kidney

PELTZ BOXING, ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

**DeSEAN SPEAKS PAGE 72 | SIXERS WIN AGAIN PAGE 66**



Francisco “Paco” Rodriguez died following a bout at the Blue Horizon last November, devastating his large family in Chicago that had been devoted to boxing. In the immediate moments after his death, a decision was made to donate his organs.

In this series, the *Daily News* looks at the family he left behind and the people whom Rodriguez has given life to through organ donation.

Organ donation is confidential. The recipients have agreed to be part of this series after consultation with the Gift of Life Donor Program, which is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the donor and the recipients.

For more information about Gift of Life, visit its website at [www.donors1.org](http://www.donors1.org).

**YESTERDAY:**

The Rodriguez family — Remembering Paco and coming to grips with his death

**TODAY:**

The recipients — How the Rodriguez family decision changed five lives.

**VIDEO/PHOTOS:**

Watch Sarah Glover’s video with Ashley Owens and view a photo gallery from Alejandro A. Alvarez at [www.philly.com/seePaco](http://www.philly.com/seePaco)



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

Ashley Owens, who received two lungs from Francisco ‘Paco’ Rodriguez, in her third-grade classroom at Limerick Elementary School.

# BLESSED BY PACO

## FIVE SURVIVORS CHERISH GIFTS OF LIFE FROM BOXER

*Second of two parts*

By **MARK KRAM**  
[kramm@phillynews.com](mailto:kramm@phillynews.com)

**D**EATH WAS NEAR. They told her that. Chances were it could be weeks — perhaps longer but not significantly unless she had a lung transplant. For years, Ashley Owens had known that she would not live to be 30 or even 25, that cystic fibrosis would sweep her away one day before she would have a chance to have a career or a wedding or children. It was a given she had come to accept. But now that she was coughing up blood and was in what her doctors called the “the end stages,” the sudden finality of her circumstances terrified her. All of it seemed to be happening too soon.

They told her that they would be moving her to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. It was not something she wanted to do, if only because she had become accustomed to St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children. She had been going there three or four times a year since she had been an 8-year-old and had befriended the nursing staff. But her doctors told her that there was a surgery that she would have to have, and that it was perhaps a good idea to become acquainted with the transplant team at Penn. Oddly, a feeling of calm settled over her at that point — what she would later describe as a “a trance-like state.” So she found a pen and some paper and began writing goodbye letters: to her parents, Bob and Charlotte; her young brother, Robert; and her boyfriend, Jesse, the young man who stood by her through her worst days.

With a shaggy beard and gentle bearing, Jesse Quinter swept her off her feet, both figuratively

and literally. When she had been too weak to walk somewhere, Jesse lifted her then 5-foot, 69-pound body up and carried her on his back. They had met each other in study hall at Owen J. Roberts High School in Pottstown. Ashley told him before their first date how sick she was, but he just shrugged and told her: “I like you for you.” However worrisome her ordeal would become, Ashley would come to depend on Jesse to cheer her up. When she tearfully told him on the phone that day that she would be leaving for Penn, he left early from his job at the Warwick Child Care Center in Lionville and hurried to her side.

They talked. But she was upset and no words could seem to soothe her. Even when Jesse reassured her that she would be fine, she was in a forlorn place that seemed beyond even his reach. It

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**SUNDAY, Nov. 22**  
**11:30 p.m.** After discussion with family, Sonia signs the consent form for Paco to be an organ donor and directs kidney to Paco's uncle, Ramon Tejada, if compatible.  
**Midnight** Information relayed to the Chicago organ donor program, Gift of Hope, regarding directed kidney donation to Paco's uncle.

**MONDAY, Nov. 23**  
**1 a.m.** Medical testing to determine organ suitability begins at Hahnemann University Hospital.  
**4 a.m.** Donor blood sent to Chicago for kidney compatibility testing for Paco's uncle.  
**9 a.m.** Organ-matching process is initiated by the generation of a list of potential recipients for each organ. Transplant physicians of potential recipients are contacted so they can evaluate suitability for their patient.  
**1 p.m.** Organ-matching for heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and pancreas completed.  
**6:40 p.m.** Transplant teams begin surgical removal of donated organs.  
**8 p.m.** Alexis Sloan is wheeled into the OR at Hahnemann Hospital for heart transplant.

**9 p.m.** Meghan Kingsley is wheeled into the OR at Johns Hopkins for liver transplant.  
**9:07 p.m.** Heart is removed, preserved on ice and transported to a second operating room at Hahnemann, where heart candidate awaits transplant.  
**9:15 p.m.** Lungs removed, preserved on ice, and transplant team departs by ambulance to Hospital of University of Pennsylvania for transplant.  
**9:30 p.m.** Ashley Owens is wheeled into the OR at HUP for a double lung transplant.  
**9:50 p.m.** Liver removed, preserved on ice, and transplant team departs by helicopter to Johns Hopkins Medical Center for transplant.  
**10 p.m.** Pancreas removed and preserved on ice.  
**10:13 p.m.** Kidneys removed, preserved on ice and right kidney is taken to Gift of Life Donor Program. Pancreas and left kidney and transplant team are driven to Geisinger Medical Center in North Central Pennsylvania.

**TUESDAY, Nov. 24**  
**2 a.m.** Vicky Davis is wheeled into the OR at Geisinger Medical Center for kidney and pancreas transplant.  
**6:15 a.m.** Right kidney is flown to Chicago on first available flight.  
**10:30 a.m.** Right kidney arrives at Rush University Medical Center for transplant.  
**11:30 a.m.** Ramon Tejada is wheeled into the OR at Rush University Medical Center for kidney transplant.

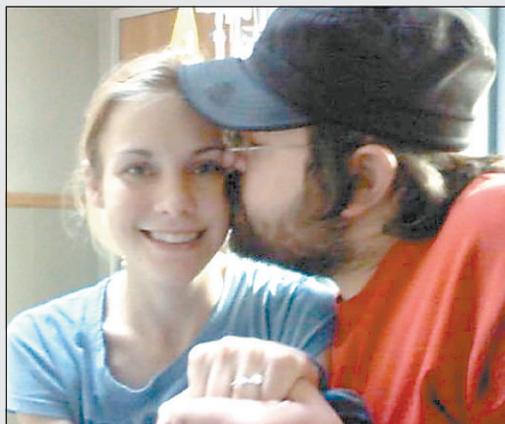


Photo courtesy Ashley Owens family

Ashley Owens shows off her engagement ring with fiance Jesse Quinter.

**ASHLEY OWENS: Both lungs**  
 23, of Spring City, Chester County  
 She says she began “going downhill” at age 20 or so, a period during which her lung capacity dropped to as low as 20 percent. “When I was 21, they told me I had 1 year to live. I was scared.”



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

Ashley Owens in her third-grade class at Limerick Elementary.

**PACO**  
*Continued from Page 78*

was then that an idea popped into his head. He excused himself and said he had to get something from his car. When he came back, he sat down in a chair by her bed and resumed their conversation, which he always tried to keep light. Instead of dwelling on the sobering prognosis that faced her, Jesse would ask what she wanted to do when she got out of the hospital, where she would go to dinner and what trips she would like to take. It went on like that until he paused.

“I have to talk to you about something,” he said.

Casually, Ashley replied: “About what?”

Jesse got down on one knee and displayed a diamond ring.

And with eyes wide, Ashley cried, “Oh, my God!”

On the very evening this scene was unfolding last year — Friday, Nov. 20 — Francisco “Paco” Rodriguez was preparing to step into a boxing ring at the Blue Horizon, where he had a scheduled 12-round bout with Teon Kennedy for the vacant United States Boxing Association super bantamweight title. Paco was stopped by Kennedy in the 10th round, passed out in his corner and died of a head injury 2 days later at Hahnemann University Hospital. But it was there that one story ended and another began, the tale of how with a stroke of a pen on a consent form, a grieving widow bestowed life upon five people by offering seven organs from the body of her beloved husband for transplant donation. What began in a place of unutterable grief ended up in a realm of hope reborn.

Eighteen people die each day in the United States waiting for a transplant. In the case of the five

people who received organs from Paco, each of their histories is tied together by a common thread: They had endured untold suffering in the grip of their various illnesses. Only days away from death in some cases, they looked upon themselves as fighters in the same very real sense that Paco had been. With the exception of his uncle, Ramon Tejada, who received a kidney in a “direct donation,” none of them had ever heard of the young boxer from Chicago. Given what they have received from him — a heart, a liver, two lungs, two kidneys and a pancreas — none of them will ever forget him. While the recipients have not yet met, they share a bond that now unites them with someone they had come to cherish: Paco.

The five are:  
 ➤ Ashley Owens, 23, of Spring City, Chester County: Both lungs.

As a 10-month-old baby, she

weighed less than 7 pounds. Initially, doctors suspected she had a tumor. But tests revealed that she had cystic fibrosis, which compromised her breathing and to some extent her digestion. Simple childhood pleasures such as running and swimming were beyond her ability. In and out of the hospital during her school years, she became an excellent student with the help of a tutor. Physically, she began “going downhill” at age 20 or so, a period during which her lung capacity dropped to as low as 20 percent. Without the help of oxygen her lips would turn blue. Concerned by the statistics that foretold of an uncertain outcome for lung-transplant recipients, she held off going onto the waiting list until just hours before she suffered a collapsed lung on Nov. 13, 2009. Of the pain her daughter endured, Charlotte Owens says,

*Continued on Next Page*

“I want to be sure they are OK and taking care of themselves, not just because they are carrying a piece of Francisco with them but because life is supposed to be lived. I pray for them every day.”

**SONIA RODRIGUEZ**

Continued from Preceding Page

“Some days she would push through it. Other days it would be more than she could bear.”

Ashley says: “Until the last 2 or 3 years, I had an OK handle on it. But when I was 20, I had stopped responding to the medication I was taking. My body had become so full of it that I had become immune. They told me I had 2 years to live. When I was 21, they told me I had 1 year to live. I was scared.”

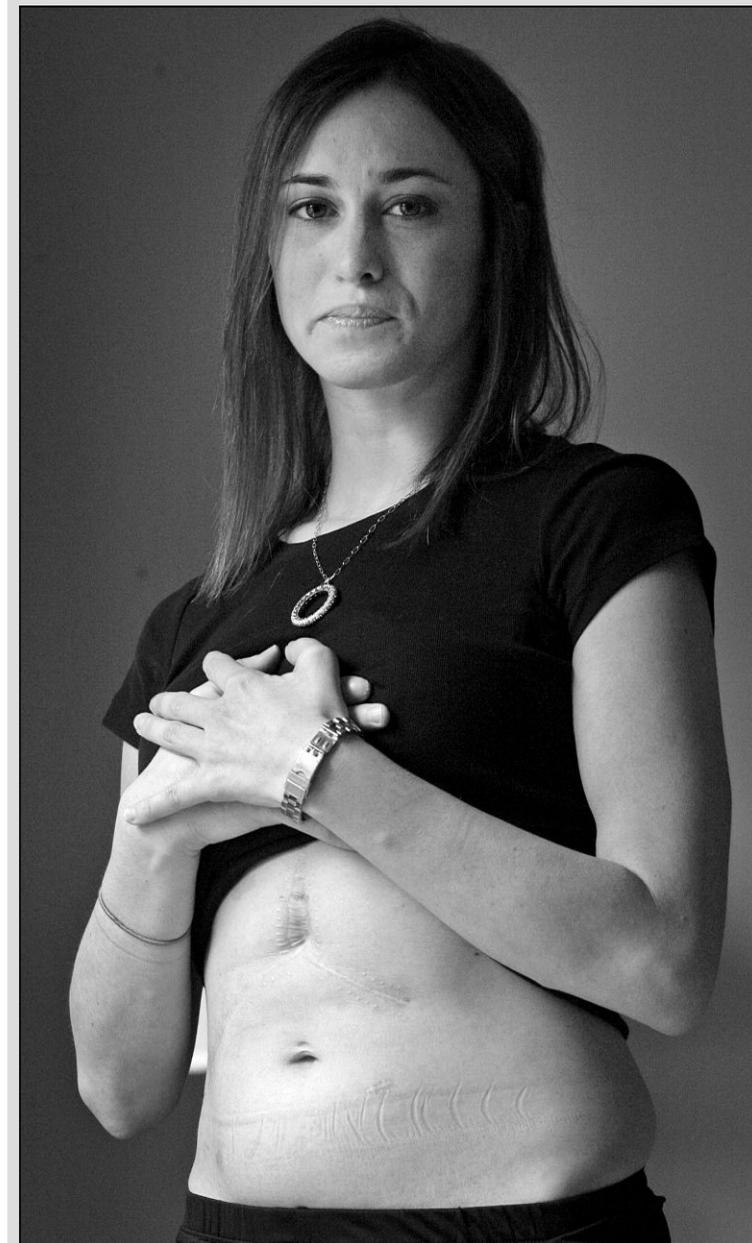
► Meghan Kingsley, 26, of Gaithersburg, Md.: Liver.

At 16, she was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis type 2, characterized by the growth of non-cancerous tumors along the nerve that transmits information from the inner ear to the brain. An exceptional competitive swimmer who had dreamed one day of going to the Olympic Games, she underwent surgery in June 2001 for the removal of a tumor and was left deaf in one ear. In October 2007, she had decompression surgery on another tumor that doctors chose not to remove. In an effort to preserve what remained of her hearing, they instead carved away some bone that would allow the tumor room to grow. However, she began experiencing significant hearing loss and in September 2009 enrolled in a study for the experimental drug PCT299. By November, she was in the throes of liver failure.

Meghan says: “I became very, very ill and ended up in Johns Hopkins. I remember I was constantly burping; I had so much fluid in my stomach. I became jaundiced. [The whites of] my eyes were green and yellow. Mom said I looked like ‘The Grinch.’ I no longer had any bodily function. They later told me I was within 48 hours of dying.”

► Alexis Sloan, 27, of Norristown: Heart.

At 22, she was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, prior to which she had experienced symptoms that included a dry cough, fatigue and shortness of breath. “A lot of big words were thrown at me,” she says. “Scary.” Within a year of her diagnosis, she received a biventricular pacemaker and defibrillator implant. Efforts to manage her condition with medication failed and in March 2007 she says she “coded,” which



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

## MEGHAN KINGSLEY: Liver

26, of Gaithersburg, Md., showing off her scar. In November 2009, she was in the midst of liver failure. “I no longer had any bodily function. They later told me I was within 48 hours of dying.”

is hospital slang for going into cardiopulmonary arrest. Doctors then equipped her with a left ventricular assist device (LVAD), which she found to be an unwieldy contraption. Battery-operated, it had internal and external components that left her feeling on some days as if she was a robot. To get on the waiting list for a heart, she had to fulfill a standard set of requirements that proved that she would submit to postoperative care. In May 2008, she had done that and was given a

pager, with which she would be contacted when a heart was available.

Alexis says: “When they gave me the initial diagnosis, it was devastating. It seemed like a death sentence. There was a lot of confusion. When I got the LVAD, I was not happy with it. No young person should have to live that way. With the protocols I had to go through, it seemed like it was taking forever to get on the list. I became depressed and one point even suicidal. I just thought: ‘I am

going to die anyway . . . ’ ”

► Vicky Davis, 58, of Clifford Township, Susquehanna County: Pancreas, kidney.

At 37, she was diagnosed with diabetes, which through the years became progressively worse. In December 2005, she was told that her kidneys were failing. She went on dialysis in April 2006 and within a year was placed on the waiting list for a new kidney and pancreas. Initially, she says, she was told the wait would be just a few months. But whenever she received a call that there was a potential donor for her — and she says she received nine of them — the kidney and pancreas would end up going to someone else or there would be some other issue that would come up. For 3½ years, she spent 3 days a week on dialysis, a process by which the blood is cleansed of toxins.

Vicky says: “Going to dialysis was like having a job. I would have to be there by 5:30 a.m. and I would not get back until 10 a.m. And it was so draining. People would ask me, ‘Do you work?’ And I would say, ‘No, I am on dialysis.’ It takes a lot out of you.”

► Ramon Tejada, 58, of Chicago: Kidney.

At 40, Tejada had his left kidney removed because of kidney stones. In December 2003, his right kidney began to fail. It was full of cysts and functioning at only 10 percent. He began dialysis and was placed on the waiting list for a kidney. Increasingly, the 3-day-a-week, 4-hour-a-day dialysis treatments began to wear on him. Depression set in. Though he says they were keeping him alive, they were not eradicating the underlying problem he had. Unable to continue in his factory job, he went on disability. On dialysis for 6 years, he had inched to the top of the waiting list when he received word last November that Paco had died and that his kidney was being offered to him in a “directed donation.” Paco was the son of his cousin, Maria.

Ramon says: “I was not doing too well. I had been on dialysis for so long. When I heard what happened to Paco, I was so very sad, very depressed. I remember him as a boy. Knowing that the kidney would come from him was hard, but it was something I knew that Paco would have wanted me to accept.”

“I just knew it was him. I could feel his presence.”

**MEGHAN KINGSLEY,**  
after learning the liver had  
come from a  
25-year-old male from  
Philadelphia and then hearing  
from a friend that a boxer  
that age had just died in the city

Ramon pauses and says, “He was giving me a gift.”

Jesse had told Ashley that evening when he proposed: “We have been through a lot of stuff, and we will have more stuff to go through. This is not the end. But whatever happens between now and whenever, I just want you to know that I will be here for you. Whatever happens, you can count on me.”

And with that he slipped the ring on her finger, which had become so bony from her weight loss that it had to be reinforced with tape to keep it from slipping off. Ashley gazed at it as her eyes pooled with tears.

Immediately, the hopelessness that had engulfed her seemed to lift. From the hallway, the nurses came into the room to admire it, one after another. Suddenly, she says she found “the courage” to go over to HUP, where she was transported later that evening. There, she and Jesse had an impromptu engagement party. He ordered in pizza and wings. What they were unaware of as they sat there eating was that Paco was slugging it out with Kennedy at the Blue Horizon, the outcome of which he had hoped would propel his boxing career into a place where he could command larger purses and better support his wife Sonia and their baby daughter, Ginette. Uncertain of when she would get the transplant she so desperately needed, Ashley said good night to Jesse and went to sleep.

Whatever else the process of organ recovery and the ensuing transplant surgeries are, it is a synchronization of many moving

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parts. In the case of Paco, it began when he was declared brain dead on Sunday, Nov. 22, at 7:42 p.m., at which point Janet Andrews, the transplant coordinator for the Gift of Life Donor Program, introduced herself to the Rodriguez family, offered her condolences and arranged for a priest to come by at their request. At 10:30, Andrews sat down with them and offered them the option of organ and/or tissue donation. Sonia signed the consent form an hour later. Only when that occurred could Andrews move forward. She alerted the Illinois Organ Procurement Organization of the availability of a kidney for Ramon and arranged for Paco to undergo a series of tests to evaluate his suitability to be a donor, including an echocardiogram to test his heart. Until his organs were recovered, he would remain on a ventilator with his heart beating.

On Monday at 9 a.m., GOL began the organ allocation procedure: Multiple potential recipients are identified and the organs are offered to the transplant surgeons, who assess them and reply via mobile device if they are interested or not. If they are, GOL contacts them by telephone and advises them of where they are on the list. By 1 p.m., the allocation procedure had been completed, the operating room space been reserved and the recipients had been contacted. Upbeat, Ashley says she prepared as if she was going to get better by taking a shower and braiding her hair. Told by her surgeons that they had found “a great liver,” Meghan sat up in her hospital bed and said, “Let’s go for it.” Alexis was contacted not by her pager but by cell phone and told, “Come and get it. It’s yours.” At her dialysis appointment, Vicky was informed in a call and replied: “Are you sure?” Ramon could not help but think of Paco and how hard it had to be for Maria to lose a son.

That Monday at 6:30 p.m., four recovery teams entered the operating room at Hahnemann, where Paco was prepped and draped. Each organ has to be implanted within a certain span of time once it has been recovered. Says Howard Nathan, the president and CEO of GOL: “You have 3 hours for the heart, 6 for the



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

## ALEXIS SLOAN: Heart

27, of Norristown, with her stepmother Roz Rucker at Citizens Bank Park.

Spent 18 months on the wait list for a heart after going through the stringent protocols. “It seemed like it was taking forever to get on the list. I became depressed and one point even suicidal. I just thought: ‘I am going to die anyway.’”

lungs, 6 to 12 for the liver, 12 for the pancreas, and up to 48 for the kidney.” In the course of the 3½-hour surgery, the heart and other organs were cooled by separate cold perfusion lines and are removed one by one. At 9:07, the heart was recovered, triple bagged and transported to the adjoining operating room for Alexis. At 9:15, both lungs were recovered and rushed to HUP for Ashley. At 9:50 p.m., the liver was recovered and flown by helicopter to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for Meghan. And at 10 p.m., both kidneys and the pancreas were recovered. A kidney and the pancreas were hurried to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pa., for Vicky, and the other kidney was flown the following morning to the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago for Ramon.

Given that Paco had been a high-

ly trained athlete, his organs were exceptional. In fact, Charlotte Owens said that the surgeon told her that he had never worked with better lungs, which Ashley discovered worked wonderfully. Suddenly, she discovered that she could breathe deeply, and that she had stopped coughing. Within weeks of their operation, the other recipients reported excellent progress. Alexis says she could hear “the perfusion of blood” running through her, “that ocean sound,” and that each of her senses became amplified. “I could think better,” she says. “I was even answering questions off of ‘Jeopardy!’” While Meghan has been hospitalized seven times since her transplant for periods ranging from 4 to 23 days and still has “dozens of tumors” in her body from her neurofibromatosis, she says she is “no longer dying but living.” And Vicky

and Ramon both say they have regained strength.

But curiosity set in. With the exception of Ramon, none of the others knew who the donor was. Confidentiality guidelines are such that the identities of the donor and the recipients are guarded and cannot be set aside unless either party agrees to share information. Consequently, there was always only speculation on the part of the recipients on the identity of the donor. While she was in her initial recovery, Meghan says that some friends tried to piece it together: The liver had come from Philadelphia from a 25-year-old male. When the friend told Meghan that a boxer of that age had just died in Philadelphia, she remembers thinking: “How bizarre! In this moment, I could not be fighting more.”

Meghan says, “I just knew it was him. I could feel his pres-

ence.”

Outside, a November rain was slanting from the gray sky in heavy sheets. But inside the third-grade classroom at Limerick Elementary School, it was dry and warm and filled with the enthusiasm of children, who were seated on the floor at the front of the room with their student-teacher, Ms. Owens. In preparation for a book the class would be beginning soon, “The One in the Middle is the Green Kangaroo,” by Judy Blume, Ashley asked them to predict what certain items she placed before them would have to do with the story: A jar of peanut butter; a doll with a broken leg; a kangaroo; and a green marker. Working individually and then in

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ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

## VICKY DAVIS: Pancreas, kidney

58, of Clifford Township, Susquehanna County, on her porch with her husband Stewart.

Began dialysis in April 2006 and within a year was placed on the waiting list for a new kidney and pancreas.

“People would ask me, ‘Do you work?’ And I would say, ‘No, I am on dialysis.’”

*Continued from Preceding Page*

groups, Ashley recorded some of the suggestions on an easel.

She stepped back to look at them and said, “These are all good predictions, but guess what? None of them are right.”

The children moaned: “Awww-wwww!”

“So,” she continued, “we are going to have to find out what happened compared to the predictions. OK? It should be a lot of fun.”

Scarcely taller than some of her students, Ashley had always hoped to become a teacher, specifically third to sixth grade. She enjoys the enthusiasm that the children bring with them to class each day. When she graduates this month from West Chester University, she plans to start look-

ing for a teaching job in Pennsylvania or New Jersey, somewhere she and Jesse can settle down. Doctors have advised her not to teach children any younger than third grade because it would place her at an elevated risk for infections. Such warnings are heeded by her but not just because of her own health. She says she has a responsibility not just to herself but to “the gift” that she has received. To show her appreciation to Sonia, she has crocheted a pink blanket for Ginette.

It is something the others also say, that they feel a connection to Paco and his family. With the aid of Lara Moretti, the family services supervisor for GOL, Sonia reached out to the recipients in a letter to let them know who her husband was, how deeply she loved him and how she hoped that they were doing well. Says Moretti,

who vets each correspondence: “Typically, families look upon the donation as a small bit of good that can come out of something terrible.” One by one, the recipients replied — again, through Moretti. They told of their ordeals and of how grateful they are, how the organ they received allowed them to become fully alive and be with their loved ones. In a way that she had not anticipated, Sonia found the letters she received to be helpful to her as she had moved through the stages of grief. Sonia says she hopes that she can remain in contact with them.

“The 25 years that Francisco lived were awesome,” says Sonia, as a photograph of her husband looks down at her from the dining room of his boyhood home in Chicago. “He was healthy and enjoyed life to the fullest — and now

[the recipients], who have suffered for so long, have that opportunity. I want to be sure they are OK and taking care of themselves, not just because they are carrying a piece of Francisco with them but because life is supposed to be lived. I pray for them every day.”

Along with what Sonia has told them, the recipients have found out more information about Paco online, where there are portions of a few of his bouts. Alexis says that she became “obsessed” with learning more about him. Given that she is a big boxing fan, she says she is surprised she had not been at the Blue Horizon for his bout with Kennedy. It was an event she would have attended, and can only think that she stayed at home that evening because of her health. But she has looked into who Paco was and

says “he was no slouch,” not just a fine amateur and pro boxer but a good family man, “known for joking around and laughing.” Says Alexis: “I was happy to learn that he had that kind of spirit.”

The bond to Paco that they feel is a deep one. In the hard days that followed her surgery, during which she experienced periods of dementia, and in her subsequent hospital stays over the course of the last year, Meghan would find herself saying, “Come on, Paco! We can do it. Work with me on this.” Once, she looked down at her hands, which for a period were covered with gloves. She said to herself: “Look! I am a fighter, just like Paco!” When she had a setback in March, she rubbed the scar at the site of her incision and promised Paco: “You know, if you get me out of this, we’ll go see your wife and your little girl.” Meghan says she hopes to do that at some point, if only just to thank Sonia and the Rodriguez family in person.

“I feel I am not just doing it for myself now, but I am doing it for him and his family,” says Meghan, who is a graduate of Elon University in North Carolina. “I want to know how Sonia is doing. I want to know how Ginette is doing. I want to go there and visit, and see the gym where Paco boxed. Me, being an athlete, I understand the dreams he had. I had wanted to be a champion. So I want to be a part of that. I would like to think of them as my extended family.”

Vicky has a photo of Paco taped to her refrigerator. “When Sonia wrote me, I read her letter three times,” she says. “He was so young. And she is young. But you could see there was this strong bond between them. I hope that we can become close. I would like that. Like the daughter I never had.”

Vicky pauses and adds, “Somehow just saying thank you is not enough.”

There will be a wedding. Bob Owens did not think he would ever have the chance to do it, but he will walk Ashley down the aisle and give her to Jesse. While there are still plans to be arranged, Ashley says she would like to have her wedding outdoors at the Valley Forge National Park and then hon-

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# Reid, DeSean say everything's fine

By **LES BOWEN**  
bowen@phillynews.com

Andy Reid showed up in fence-mending mode yesterday. Went to the NovaCare podium carrying the post-hole digger, the staples, the shovel, the wire stretcher and the wire cutter, and got to work. Figuratively, at least.

Reid mounted a vigorous defense of wideout DeSean Jackson, after 2 days of reports about Reid singling out Jackson in the postgame locker room in Chicago for an insufficiently attentive demeanor.

"I love that he loves the ball. That's what I love," Reid said, emphatically. "Man, he wants it and he wants it now, and he wants it in crunch time. There are a lot of guys that would rather climb under this table in crunch time. He wants the ball. I like that, it's a beautiful thing. I'll take care of everything else, man, I love that part."

The "everything else" presumably includes occasional diva-esque behavior.

Jackson finally spoke with reporters yesterday, after ignoring them after the game and after Monday's practice. He didn't go into detail about his Monday discussion with Reid, and he did not gush over the coach the way Reid gushed over DeSean, but Jackson did indicate there were no problems between them going forward.

"Yeah, we're good," Jackson said, when asked if he and the coach were OK. "There's nothing to clear, no air or nothing . . . I'm here to play football, and win football games."

Asked about the controversy, and speculation over the cause of his postgame sullenness Sunday, Jackson said: "I'm not here to talk about any of that. What we talk about in the locker room [is not for public disclosure] . . . People can say what they want, talk about what they want. I can care less about any of that. I'm here to play football and win football games. If it doesn't have to do with winning football games, I could care less about it."

He said he and the team "are not going to get caught up in anything else" other than preparing to face the Houston Texans tomorrow night.

**"Yeah, we're good. There's nothing to clear, no air or nothing . . . I'm here to play football, and win football games."**

**DESEAN JACKSON**  
When asked if he and Andy Reid were OK

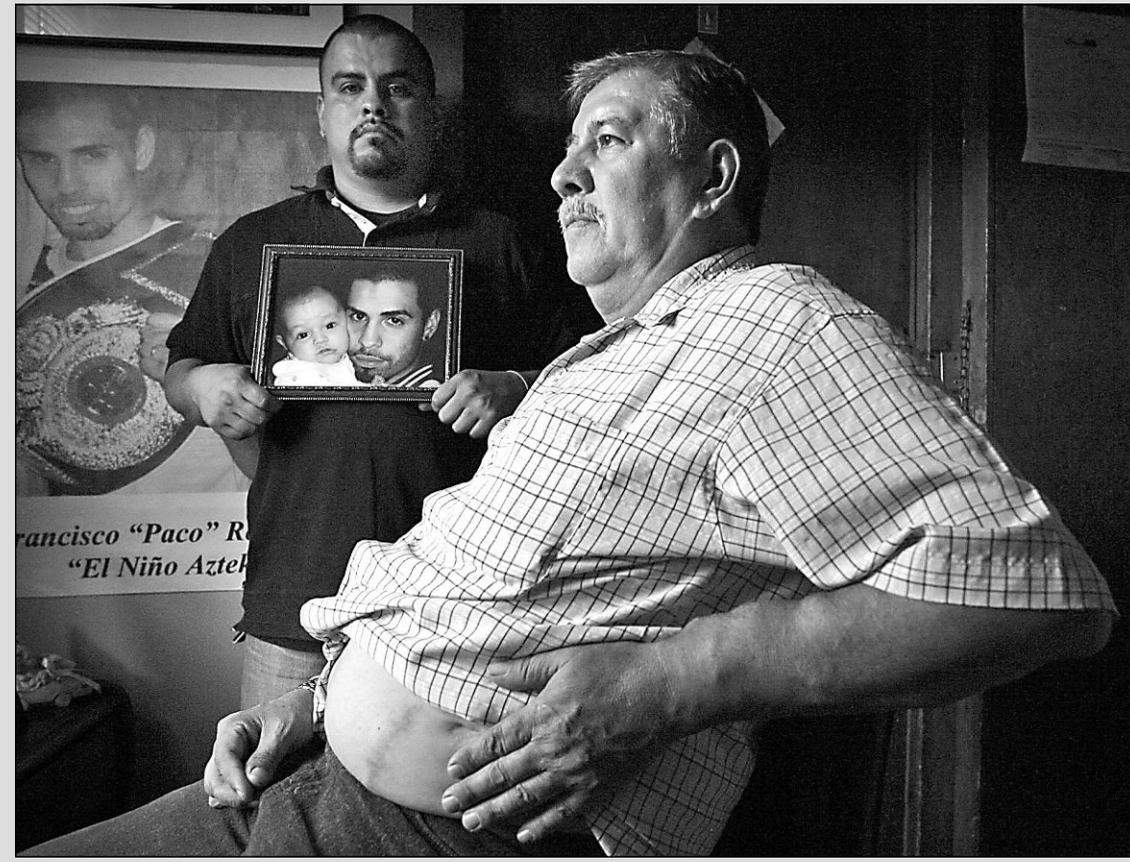
Jackson declined to answer a question about whether the team needs to find ways to get him the ball more. Asked pretty much the same thing in a slightly different way, he said: "It's not about me, it's about us winning the

games. If we're not winning the games, myself, none of that, that doesn't matter.

"The type of player that I am, I feel we should go out there and find different ways to take advantage of some things. You've just got to be patient. You're not going to always be able to score touchdowns and do other types of things, because people watch films and people prepare, just like we have."

Jackson made it known in the offseason he would like to see his contract reworked, something the Eagles have said they can't do because of rules on how much sal-

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ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff photographer

## RAMON TEJEDA: Kidney

58, of Chicago, with nephew Tito Rodriguez, holding photo of Francisco 'Paco' Rodriguez and daughter Ginette.

Is an uncle of Paco's and received the kidney through direct donation. Spent 6 years on the waiting list and was undergoing dialysis. "It was something I knew that Paco would have wanted me to accept . . . He was giving me a gift."

## PACO

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eymoon in Greece. Jesse says he would prefer to go to the United Kingdom, but says that Greece is fine, that he keeps telling her: "You set it up. Go where you want to go and I will follow. I want you to enjoy yourself."

Given that it is very likely she would have died were it not for the transplant, Ashley looks upon each day as precious, even if there are some worries as she moves forward. While her doctors have told her there is no physical reason she cannot have children, she is aware that the life expectancy statistics for lung-transplant patients are somewhat less encouraging than they are for the other organ recipients. "They say only 50 percent survive 5 years and 20 percent survive 10 years," says Ashley, who adds that she

has also been told the absences of setbacks in the initial year are a positive indicator. But what also has her concerned is how she is going to continue to pay for the care she has to have, which includes 25 prescription drugs each day. While she and the other recipients have been covered by health plans, it has offset only a

## WANT TO HELP?

Ashley Owens has set up the Lucky Lung Foundation to help pay for medical expenses that are not covered by her insurance. Contributions are tax deductible and the foundation has been set up through the IRS so money can only be used for medical expenses, Owens said. Contributions can be sent to Lucky Lung Foundation, P.O. Box 123, Spring City, PA 19475.

portion of the costs that they have incurred.

But Ashley does not dwell on any of this. Instead, she thinks of Paco and Sonia and Ginette; she thinks of her parents, Bob and Charlotte, and her brother, Robert; and she thinks of Jesse, who held her hand before she was wheeled into surgery and held it again when she came out. She thinks of what she can now do that she could never do before: get on a bike and go wherever she pleases; dive in a pool and hold her breath underwater; and slip on a pair of running shoes and just take off. It was something she did last March when she and her family were at Longwood Gardens. Seeing a big field stretched out before her, she challenged her brother to a race and shouted, "Daddy, take a picture!" And off she ran, the sun on her back, the wind rushing over her face. ★