

How one infant's death made important contribution to research

When she found out early in her pregnancy that one of her identical twins would die at birth, Sarah Gray began a five-year journey that culminated in Philadelphia.

She had to carry the sick baby to term in order to protect his healthy twin. And she also looked into organ and tissue donation.

"Instead of thinking of our son as a victim," she said, "I started thinking of him as a contributor to research, to science."

He died after six days. Within hours of Thomas' death, his eyes and liver were recovered and sent – along with umbilical cord blood from him and his brother – to researchers.

But that wasn't the end of it for Sarah Gray.

She often wondered – what became of his eyes, his blood, his liver?

The Grays had received a thank-you letter from the Washington regional transplant organization, telling them their son's corneas had been sent to the Schepens Eye Research Institute in Boston, and his liver and the cord blood to Duke University in North Carolina.

Two years later, on a business trip to Boston, Sarah Gray called the eye institute, which is affiliated with Harvard Medical School.

"I donated my son's eyes to your lab," she said on the phone. "Can I come by for a tour?"

The receptionist said she had never had such a request. "I'm not sure who to transfer you to," she said, "but don't hang up!"

The next day, Gray met James Zieske, the institute's senior scientist, who told her "infant eyes are worth their weight in gold," because, being so young, they have great regenerative properties. Thomas' corneas were used in a study that could one day help cure corneal blindness.

Read full original article: [Thomas Gray lived six days, but his life has lasting impact](#)