

MAX and KEIRA MAKE A CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

This is a story about a little girl called Keira and a little boy called Max. Max and Keira had never met, but they will become very close, and together will change many lives.

Keira was a happy child, she had a mum and dad that she loved, two older sisters and a younger brother, all of who she adored. Life was very happy and normal. Keira enjoyed playing with her friends and attended a local primary school like most kids her age.

With four kids there were plenty of squabbles, but Keira was a most kind child and if there were fights over things like sweets, Keira would always give her last ones away.

Max was also a fun loving and caring young man. He also loved playing with his friends and going to school, but lately Max had been very sick. He was constantly out of breath and had frequently become too sick to attend school. Max had to continue school online, when he was well enough.

HOPES AND DREAMS

Keira dreamed about maybe becoming a veterinarian as she loved animals and when her dog became sick the vet helped him out. She thought it would be so cool to help animals. Other times she thought it would be great to be a marine biologist and perhaps go to Antarctica, she loved

swimming in the sea, when the brief English summer was in full force, and loved all sea creatures, especially the seals.

Max dreamed about going to university one day and majoring in political science, ethics, and industrial psychology. He thought these fields could help him make a difference. He sometimes dreamed about becoming a pilot and soaring through the skies, maybe as a profession, but more likely as a hobby. However most days he just dreamed of being alive. Max had discovered the reason he was always out of breath and tired was that he had a life-threatening heart condition.

WAITING

Max was told by the doctors that he needed a heart transplant and this was the only way he would get better. But he was also told this may take time and he and his family would need to be patient and wait. While Max was waiting he began thinking and asking his parents lots of questions.

“Why does it take so long to find a donor?” Max asked his mum.

His mum told him - “not everyone knows how important it is to donate organs and also the organ needs to be a match.”

This got Max to thinking more, he wondered why someone wouldn't donate their organs, after all, they don't need them anymore, why wouldn't someone want to help others in their passing?

He asked his Mum again, “ Why doesn't everyone know and decide to donate their organs?” His Mum didn't know. “Do they think they can still feel pain?” he laughed. “We need to tell them they can't feel anything. Mum.” “How are you going to do that?” mum asks, “Perhaps there needs to be more publicity.” His mum explained that people who have been

helped by donors going on TV or the Internet and saying they are only there because of a generous donor helps the cause.

Max didn't just lie and wait. He thought long and hard. He looked up information about organ donation and thought about how he might be able to help promote this further so more people would know and the waiting lists wouldn't be so long. He thought there might be so many more people like him waiting for organs and how unfair it is. He thought about people not knowing how important organ donation is and that they probably might have wanted to donate if they knew how important it is. But he figured most people might have simply never considered it or told their loved ones.

Max's resolve deepened one day when a little girl he saw regularly in the pediatric hospital he frequented just didn't make the wait.

A PLAN WAS FORMED

Max found out that people can opt-in for donation on their driver's license in some countries. But he thought that isn't enough. It's too difficult.

Then one day Max came up with an idea. What if there was new a law about donating organs that made it easier for everyone?

While Max was still waiting to hear if he would receive a heart, he had lots of time alone as he wasn't well enough to play and couldn't do much apart from read, so he read more and more about organ donation and organ donation laws. He asked his parents for ideas about how he might be able to make it easier for everyone to donate.

IN THE MEANTIME

Keira, in the meantime, was enjoying her school holidays and was looking forward to visiting her grandparents in another part of England. It was not too far away but would be a long car trip.

She packed carefully for the week away. Her favourite clothes, her favourite toys, and a present she had made herself for her grandmother, a necklace out of seashells. She was very excited about the trip. It was only her, her mum, and her brother who would travel, as her older sisters were studying for exams and her dad had to work. She would miss them, but there was lots of fun to be had with her grandparents who lived on a farm. She would enjoy baking with her grandma, as she was the best baker, and she always let Keira lick the bowl. Her grandad always told her lots of fun stories and let her help with the animals. Their grandparents also had a lovely garden with roses and vegetables which always looked so perfect. When Grandad taught her how to tend the garden she dreamt of having one of her own one day. The family apartment only had a small section and she wondered if one day she would have a house with a garden, or maybe even a farm like her grandparents.

Max was still deliberating over the problem of organ donors. Max researched some more and found out that he could campaign his local MP and have a change of law put on the agenda for parliament. If they could make a petition and if enough people agreed, the government would need to listen.

His thoughts wandered to what it would be like to get the bill through parliament, would the press cover it? Would there be lots of people there to celebrate? When he told his Mum and Dad they encouraged him

and his excitement grew. Max's Mum and Dad had not seen him so excited since he first became sick and the whole family got to work helping Max with the goal.

THE MIRROR

Max's family decided to contact a newspaper to help in the campaign. They found a contact at *The Mirror* who wanted to help. He told the family about the opt-out laws in other countries and how much it could help. He also helped run stories for the campaign to create more awareness.

Before long, it seemed Max was not the only one who thought this was a great idea and, with the help of the newspaper and lots of effort from all the family, soon there were thousands of signatures supporting the new law.

Max was so wrapped up in the campaign, he almost forgot about the long wait he was enduring, and the months flew by.

A TRIP

The day was finally upon her, despite the long road trip ahead, Keira's spirit was high. She packed her tablet for keeping busy on the road and her Mum packed some snacks and drinks. After saying all their goodbyes to Dad and big sisters, around 8 am they set off, wanting to get to their destination in time to unpack before lunch.

The trip was uneventful asides from her little brother being generally annoying, which was to be expected, especially in close confinement. She loved him, but she had forgotten what it was like to be little now that she was in upper primary.

SUDDENLY EVERYTHING CHANGED

Before Max could finish the campaign, Max and Keira's lives would meet and change their world forever.

Out of the blue Max's Mum got the call she had been hoping and praying for these long months, which she knew her son needed so desperately. They had FOUND A HEART!

At the same time as being ecstatic, she was deeply fearful, she didn't think the mix of emotions could be so chaotic. While she had prepared herself for so long, she still knew the risks, Max had to go through a lengthy and dangerous surgery, and there was still a chance of the body rejecting the organ.

In the sister hospital to the pediatric facility where Max had spent the good part of two years, Keira's mum woke up paining all over. What the h#\$l had happened, the thoughts rushed through her mind. The last thing she remembered was chatting with Keira about what Grandma might be cooking for lunch while minding the traffic along the freeway. Now the smell of disinfectant, the colours, the bed, and the pain, had there been an accident? She simply couldn't remember, and where were her children?

The nurse appeared and confirmed Mrs Ball's worst fears – there had been an accident. The nurse explained to Mrs Ball that she couldn't give her any more details, but assured her that her husband would be along soon.

After what seemed like an agonising few hours, Mr. Ball appeared. She knew from the look on his face the news was not good. While she was still unconscious, both her kids had been fighting for their lives. There was no way to say it without pain, and it would blindside Mrs. Ball so badly that she forgot all about the pain she herself was in.

Keira didn't make it.

KEIRA LIVES ON

While she was still in hospital, the family was preparing for a funeral. But he had received one request and he had to make the decision on his own since it couldn't wait. Could Keira, always helpful in her life, be helpful one more time in her passing? The Ball family never hesitated. They knew it was what Keira would have wanted.

Max never met Keira, but he would never forget her. She was the reason he had a second chance at life.

The operation was successful, and while still in incredible pain, since in heart surgery the surgeon must break the ribs along with all the other sewing and cutting, Max couldn't be happier.

After a time, Max was finally allowed to go home, but they were not out of the woods yet. Now the family waited on edge to see if Max would recover, or if his body would reject the new heart.

Days went by, then weeks, and gradually Max became stronger and stronger. And while he was looking forward to all the things he couldn't do while he was sick, like playing with his friends again and going back to school, Max hadn't forgotten the wait and made a promise to himself to keep going with his campaign to help make donors easier to find, to try to make a difference so that others could be as lucky as he was.

MAX AND KEIRA – A LEGACY

On the 20th of May 2020, almost 4 years after Max began supporting the initiative, a new law was passed in the UK. They called it Max's Law. But Max told them it wouldn't have been possible without Keira and her family, and from then on the law was dubbed "Max and Keira's Law". The law was a tribute to the contributions of Keira in her passing and for Max's tireless efforts and achievements during his illness to help make a difference to all those on donor waiting lists.

Max and Keira's Law is based on an Opt-Out rather than an Opt-In system. From this point on, everyone living in the UK who is over the age of 18, is not in an excluded group, and has not gone to the effort of "opting out" will be required to donate their organs on passing.

In 2021 alone, the new law saw 296 more donors, which wouldn't have been possible without it. This resulted in 714 people, over 25% of transplants, who had their lives saved by Max and Keira's law. And every year this number will grow.

EPILOGUE

Countries that have adopted the “Opt-Out” donor laws have some of the shortest waiting times and the highest number of successful transplants.

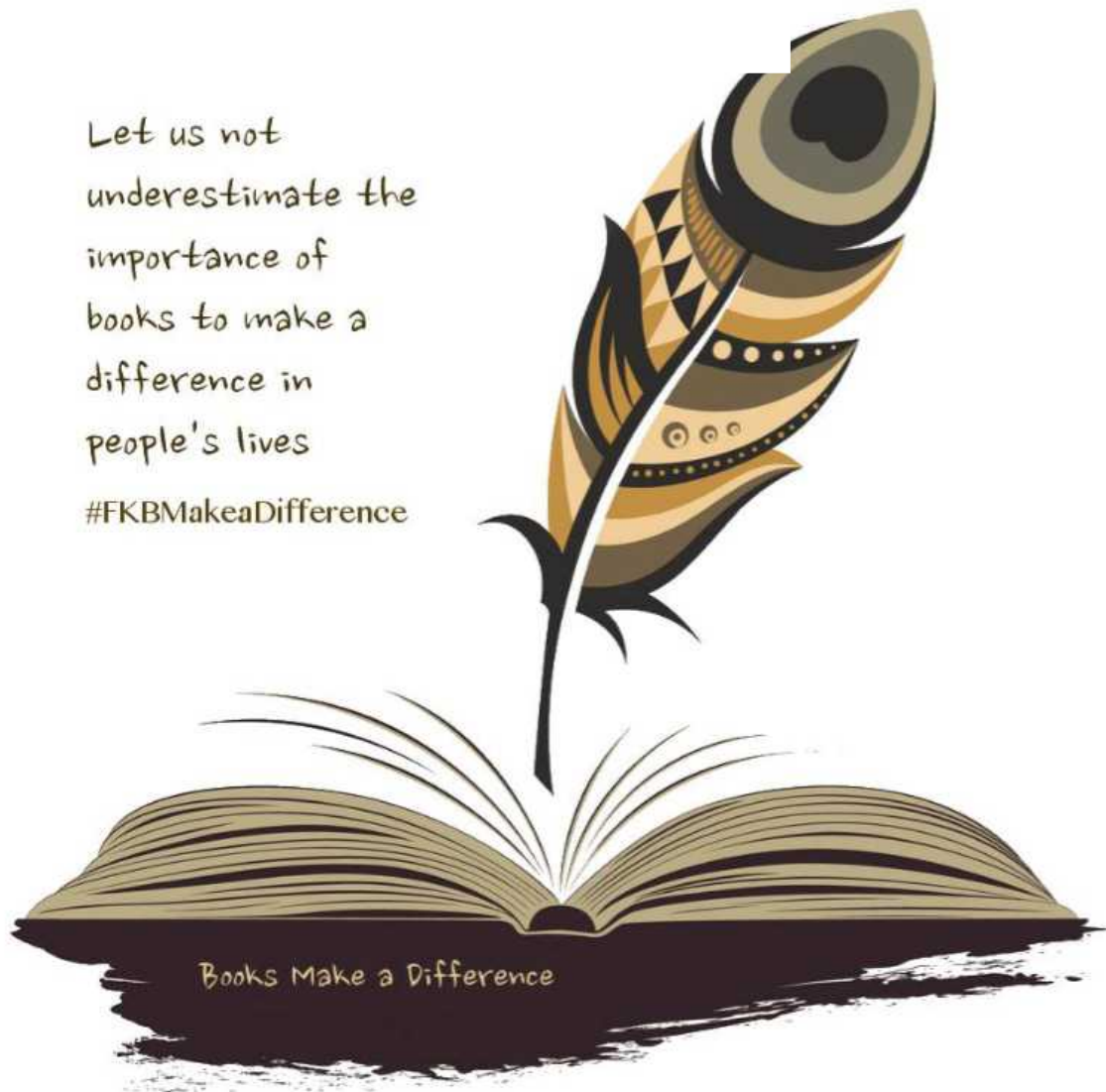
We have created this book to spread awareness because we believe all countries should have opt-out laws. If you want to help, find out about your country's donor laws, and if you don't have an opt-out law, get in touch with the national organ donation organisation, and the media and see if you too can make a change like Max and Keira did. If you want support please do get in touch with us at the details provided on page 2.

To donate to the charity set up by Mr and Mrs Ball, Keira's parents in her memory, see: <https://www.facebook.com/inspiredbykeira/>.

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This book is based on a true story and helps kids understand that they can make a change if they try hard enough.

The facts about Max and Keira's Law being promoted by Max Johnson, Keira Ball's family, and The Mirror are true as is the story of Keira's organ donation. The backstory is fictional.

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