

NEW JERSEY Jewish Standard

Film on organ donation highlights local family

Abigail Klein Leichman | Local |

Published: 04 November 2010



Members of Robert Leifert's family hold photographs of him in a video on organ donation. From left are Dina, Michal, Aryeh, Jackie, and Harvey, with grandchildren Maayan, Ahuva, and Yona Leifert. Courtesy Halachic Organ Donor Society

Teaneck resident Jaclyn Leifert and her children appear in a new five-minute film on organ donation by Orthodox Jews. Produced by the Halachic Organ Donor Society, the film can be viewed at hods.org or at youtube.com.

Leifert's late husband, Robert, was one of the few Orthodox Jews who was both an organ recipient and an organ donor. Nineteen years before he died at age 60 in April 2006, his brother had donated a kidney to him. After his death, in accordance with his wishes, his liver was transplanted at Hackensack University Medical Center into a father of three in his mid-50s.

"Unless you go through a situation like this, you cannot possibly appreciate it fully," Leifert told The Jewish Standard. "My children and I got 19 more years with Bob because his brother donated a kidney. You can't say you'll be a recipient and not a donor; it's just not fair."

At the Salute to Israel Parade the year before his death, Leifert joined the line of march with HODS, pushed in a wheelchair by his son, Aryeh. Aryeh, his sister Dina, and their mother marched the following year with a poster of Leifert. "It was very hard to do that, just two months after he died," said his widow, who also spoke before a HODS conference a few months after the parade.

In early 2010, HODS Director Robby Berman approached the family about appearing in the promotional video. Aryeh Leifert and his wife, Michal, had moved to Israel, so they waited to film the segment until the Leiferts were all together in June.

The film's release coincides with Donor Shabbat, a November program endorsed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to raise public awareness about transplantation and the critical need for donated organs.

According to HODS, more than 110,000 Americans are waiting for transplants, and about 18 Americans die every day waiting for an organ. Rabbis are being requested to dedicate one Shabbat sermon in the month of November to speak about Jewish law and organ donation.