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## **The Conversation**

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The conversation about my son's car accident, in 2006 when he was only 18, often leads to this question: Did my work as a nurse help me cope with the loss? As a parent, when you hear the words "I'm sorry" nothing in your background matters. That loss is devastating and you are no longer a nurse — you are entirely a grieving mother. What helped in coming to terms with Brandon's death was not a career in healthcare or even a life dedicated to patients and families. I found my solace in the conversation my son and I had about organ and tissue donation. It was his last wish that I was able to honor, and his generosity gave the gift of life and quality of life for others.

This selfless motivation of Brandon's has become the cause of my life. All of my ability and training — including a nursing degree, license and certification from San José State — is now going into Brandon's Crossroads Foundation. This nonprofit will give students the information they need to make informed consent as they fill out organ donor cards with their drivers' licenses starting as young as age 16. The foundation also has a message for parents: Please have the hard conversation with your child about their end of life wishes. It is heart wrenching to think of your child's mortality, but that conversation is a godsend if that horrible day ever comes.

Persistence and tenacity, those attributes built by my early experiences in a family of migrant farm workers, have taken over my life. This month, I join the first class of students in the Fresno State and San José State joint Doctor of Nursing Practice Program. The DNP will add to the skills I can draw on to preserve Brandon's legacy in the foundation. The program will also allow me to study family decision making in organ and tissue donation as my primary research focus and project.

The ability to identify with another person is the hallmark of a compassionate caregiver. I empathize deeply with every parent, spouse or loved one who hears the words "I'm sorry." As a mom who has made the difficult call on tissue donation, and a nurse who has seen the overwhelming gratitude of organ recipients, I know the choice is worth it.