“My husband was diagnosed with AD in 1988, and we came to Washington University School of Medicine in 1991 because of a suggestion from a friend. We both enrolled as a team and did the Memory & Aging Project. It took an effort for me to make the decision, but so many members of his family were troubled with this ailment....”

“Because we had children, I felt that they may be at risk. My giving his brain may help the facility learn more of what causes Alzheimer’s. I was contributing to that research.”

“He was at the VA when he died. I talked to the pathologist and told him what I had in mind to do. We did get the brain because a nurse, who is a friend of mine, came to the hospital upon his death and the VA shipped his brain to the University.”

“I would suggest to people thinking about donating, don’t feel guilty about it and don’t feel bad about it. Take personal feelings out of it. It’s for the benefit of others. He was my loved one. I really loved my husband, but with so much of that in his family, I had to do this. I talked to my children and they all agreed.”

Brain Donation:
A Gift for Future Generations

Memory & Aging Project
Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center
Washington University, St. Louis
Why is brain donation important?

A brain autopsy is the only way to confirm the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease. Information from the autopsy is helpful to researchers working to better understand Alzheimer’s and find a cure.

How is it a gift?

Alzheimer’s disease can run in families. Knowing that you truly had the disease (or not) allows your surviving family members to seek help and make plans for the future. It is a gift to them.

Who can donate?

Current and past participants in the Memory and Aging Project (MAP) are welcome. If you wish to donate, it is important for your family members to know your wishes and be a part of the decision-making process.

Does it cost anything?

The autopsy is free, but certain transportation charges may apply.

How is the autopsy done?

Your family must notify MAP of your death quickly (within 2 hours). Your body is then taken to Barnes Jewish Hospital where the brain is removed through an incision in the back of the head. Not to worry, your face will look normal afterwards at the funeral home.

Who can give permission?

Missouri law lets a person give consent for autopsy while still alive and also authorizes others to do so after death or if a person becomes incompetent.

What does my family receive?

Your family will receive a written report on the autopsy. This letter tells the diagnosis, summarizes other findings, and includes a number to call if there are questions.

Can I have an open casket funeral?

Most definitely yes. The brain is removed in such a way that your face and hair are not altered. This is a common thing for funeral directors and morticians. Your funeral director will know what to do to make you look your best.

What if I decline on religious grounds?

You can decline for any reason, religious or otherwise. Donating is your choice. It is a good idea to talk with your family and your pastor before finalizing a decision.

Call the MAP Autopsy Nurse at (314) 286-2683 for more information and to discuss your situation.

Photos courtesy of the USDA Photography Center