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License plate memorializes sister

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Bill Wippert/Buffalo News

Theresa Guenther pays tribute to her sister Julie and organ donation with her license plate.



When we issued a call for vanity license plates, the response was heavily weighted to messages advertising the owner's participation in hobbies, sports or entertainment. But there are some who use their plates to call attention to serious issues, life and death even, as today's featured plate does.

Plate: 4JULIE, used on a plate with an organ donor logo On: Blue minivan Caravan

Owner: Theresa Guenther, an attorney who is a confidential law clerk.

Why: Guenther wants to honor her sister, Julie, who died 14 years ago at age 21 while undergoing a liver transplant operation.

"Julie was only 9 years old when she was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver," said Guenther. "Her body was attacking her liver and no one could offer any explanation as to why. We believe now that it may have been an autoimmune disease.

"She was my best friend," said Guenther, the older sister by four years. "If you talk about having a soul mate, she would have been that person. When she first passed away, it was hard to talk about her and organ donation.

"But when I saw the organ donation plates come out a couple of years ago, I was so excited to get one. Since getting this plate, I have had some incredible conversations with friends and strangers about organ donation. I have met organ donors and we have exchanged stories about our loved ones."

Sometimes people have been confused, saying: "I didn't know your name was Julie," Guenther said, which gives her a way to explain the message. Other openings occur when she has to give her license plate or she stops for an oil change, she said.

"I feel like I'm doing something good in Julie's memory," said Guenther. "It is really unbelievable how much awareness and goodwill can come from that little piece of metal."

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