

Natalie McCleary Bio

Natalie (Nato) Marie McCleary grew up in the close-knit community of Fruitland, Iowa. Raised by a devoted stay-at-home mother and a father who cherished spoiling her and her brother with hayrack and gator rides after work, Natalie thrived in the warmth of her family and the small-town environment.

Natalie excelled academically and embraced extracurricular activities, such as volleyball, basketball, and softball, showcasing her athletic talent. Her passion for drama shone through middle school plays, but her true gift lay in music. A skilled pianist, Natalie consistently won competitions, her performances leaving a lasting impression.

Known for her playful spirit, Natalie delighted teachers and family with her “dad jokes.” Her final joke, shared with loved ones, was, “Why did the kid eat his homework? Because the teacher said it was a piece of cake!” With a grin, she declared it “a knee slapper,” spreading joy even in simple moments.

Tragically, Natalie quietly battled depression, keeping her pain to herself, and on December 3, 2022, she made the heartbreaking decision to take her own life. She was taken to the University of Iowa Children’s Hospital, where her family fought alongside her. Despite efforts, Natalie’s death was declared on December 7.

Throughout her life, Natalie demonstrated a heart for others, often donating her hair. Her family knew she would have wanted to help others through organ donation. By being a donor, Natalie’s legacy endured. Her family stayed by her side, receiving support from the Iowa Donor Network during this profoundly difficult time. On Saturday at 9:30 AM, friends and family lined the halls for Natalie’s honor walk, where they shared their final words with her.

Through her action, Natalie saved six lives, including a 9-year-old girl who received a heart. Iowa Donor Network continues to support Natalie’s family, honoring her memory and providing comfort through the knowledge that her generosity lives on.

Natalie’s story is a powerful reminder of the impact organ donation can have. By registering as an organ donor, anyone can carry a legacy of hope and healing, just like Natalie. Consider being an organ donor to make a difference in the lives of others.