

Doujon's tragedy brings an amazing outcome

To say thank you for a life-saving transplant would not have been possible in Australia, writes **Rick Feneley**.

With their son's heart beating in his chest, Kosta Gribilas has flown across the world to thank Oliver and Rosemarie Zammit for his life. It is a remarkable story that we can only tell because the Zammits' son, 20-year-old Doujon, died after nightclub bouncers allegedly bashed him in Greece, where his heart was transplanted.

Had it happened here, Australian laws would have forbidden medical authorities from identifying the Zammits or the Australian-born Kosta "Con" Gribilas, or from helping them establish contact. It is likely they would never have met.

Which would be sad for 32-year-old Mr Gribilas. He now regards the Zammits as family, and Doujon is forever in his thoughts. "With every beat of our heart," he told the Herald yesterday. "I say our heart because it belongs to two people; firstly Doujon, then myself. I feel Doujon. He is my guardian angel."

Greece also has strict privacy laws covering organ donation. But in the blaze of pub-

licity surrounding Doujon Zammit's alleged murder, the organ recipients' names became public. The Zammits have met three of the four recipients in Greece, which Mr Zammit says has been a "nice touch".

It is Organ Donor Awareness Week in Australia, where donor numbers are low by world standards. The Zammits' gift to Mr Gribilas raises

the question: what better way is there to make Australians aware of the value of organ donation than to tell such powerful stories of life and



TOP: Extended family . . . Kostas Gribilas and Oliver Zammit share a moment of sadness and joy in Sydney yesterday. Photo: Dallas Kilponen



LEFT: A year ago... Doujon Zammit, left, with his father, Oliver, mother, Rosemarie, and brothers Laurent and Zeak.

BOTTOM LEFT: Sacrifice ... the heart machine that kept Costas Gribilas alive for six months until he received the heart of Doujon Zammit (inset).



death?

Even Transplant Australia, which supports anonymity "for very good privacy reasons", is wrestling with this question after witnessing the reunion of the Zammits and Mr Gribilas at a benefit night in Sydney on the weekend.

"Organ or tissue recipients should never feel obliged to form a relationship with a donor family," says Transplant Australia's chief executive officer, Chris Thomas. "They have already endured a terrible medical trauma. Likewise, donor families' privacy must be respected. One bad experience - for donor families or recipients - would be one too many."

"However," Mr Thomas concedes, "the relationship between the Zammits and Kosta is a powerful demonstration of the human dimension of such a gift, and it provides an inspiration to Australians to talk to their families about becoming organ donors ... these are real families with real stories, and they are saving real lives."

After the alleged assault on

the island of Mykonos in late July, Doujon Zammit was on life support. By now his father

was by his side. A doctor reminded Mr Zammit that his son had ticked the organ donor's box on his NSW driver's licence. Mr Zammit called his wife at their Cecil Hills home. She told him: "Well, that is what he wanted. We'll donate."

Mr Gribilas, meanwhile, was in "grim" health in hospital. His implanted mechanical heart was failing. He had been following the news, and now he prayed that "Doujon's heart would be able to save one of the many wonderful people waiting for a miracle". On August 2, Mr Gribilas became the one. Now his doctors are so happy with his progress that they allowed this trip to Sydney with his Australian wife, Poppy, who he met here in 2006 before they returned to live in Athens.

Mr Zammit says the "hype" over his son's story had an enormous impact in Greece. "They have the highest accident rate and the lowest organ donor rate in the world. But since then there's been 220 per cent increase in heart transplants, and a 90 per cent in-

crease in general organ transplants."

He adds: "If people like us aren't willing to tell our stories, if we can't open people's eyes to the value of organ donation, well ..."

And yet Mr Zammit can also see reasons for a strict privacy policy. "I can see the bad side to contact. We had no expectations. We gave the organs with no expectation of forming a relationship. What if a donor family did? What if they thought the recipient was too old? What if they had problem with their race?"

Some families involved in donations have used the internet and media reports - a nearby car crash on the night of the transplant, for instance - to trace people. One donor family in Queensland found all five of their loved one's organ recipients. But what then if donor families learn that organs have been rejected, or that recipients have died?

Mr Gribilas acknowledges the need for privacy and says his story is "unique" worldwide, but he adds: "People all over the world have been inspired by Oliver Zammit and his family. Due to Oliver and Rosemarie's selfless act, organ donation has increased all over the world."