

The Song That Started a Conversation

The singer and songwriter Bonnie Raitt was watching TV when she saw a news story she couldn't forget. The story was about a meeting between two strangers, a man and a woman. The woman was the mother of a teenage boy who had died in an accident. After he died, she donated his healthy heart to someone who needed a heart transplant. The man in the news story had received the boy's heart.

"Would you like to listen to his heart?" the man asked the woman. "Sit next to me and put your head on my chest." The woman put her head on the man's chest and listened to her son's beating heart.

For weeks, Bonnie couldn't stop thinking about the story. Finally, she decided to write a song about it. She gave her song the title "Just Like That."

In English, the expression *just like that* is used to describe things that happen suddenly and unexpectedly. For example, someone might say, "It was raining hard all day. Then, just like that, the rain stopped, and the sun came out." Or someone might say, "She had always wanted to be a musician. Then, just like that, she decided she wanted to be a doctor."

In the song "Just Like That," a woman's life changes suddenly and unexpectedly twice: first, when her little boy dies in an accident, and then, 25 years later, when she meets the man who received her son's heart. Bonnie gave the woman the fictitious name Olivia Zand.



The song won an important award: the Grammy Award for Song of the Year 2022. Some of the most famous songwriters in pop music were also nominated for the award—songwriters such as Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, and Adele. (Some music critics predicted that Adele's song "Easy on Me" would win.) No one expected Bonnie Raitt to win the award – including Bonnie Raitt. When she walked onto the stage to accept the award, she said, "I'm so surprised. I don't know what to say. This is just an unreal moment."

After "Just Like That" won the "Song of the Year" award, thousands of people listened to it on YouTube. The song had not been a big hit, and many people were hearing it for the first time. Almost immediately the comments started coming in.

There were dozens of comments from people who had received an organ transplant. One man wrote, "I am like the guy in the song. I received a heart on Aug 8, 2020. I met my donor family and learned all about their 26-year-old son Zachary, who died of a sudden epileptic seizure. Their pain doesn't end, but together we all celebrate his life. Thank you, Bonnie Raitt. This beautiful music will save lives. Please, everyone, talk to your family today about organ donation."

Other comments were from people who had donated a loved one's organs. One woman wrote, "My son, Sam, died in a motorcycle accident in July 2019 at the age of 22. Sam saved four lives with his organs. I was able to meet Jeff, Sam's heart recipient, last July and hear Sam's heart beating inside Jeff's chest. Sam's heart is strong, and my heart is a little less broken. Thank you for this beautiful song, Bonnie. You are making a difference."

Doctors and nurses wrote comments, too. A retired doctor who had worked in a hospital emergency room for 40 years wrote, "Somewhere, sometime, someone will check the organ donor box for their driver's license, and one of those someones will save the life of another human being. That will happen because Bonnie Raitt wrote and recorded this song. It's possible that Bonnie Raitt will save more lives than I ever did—I very much hope so."

Bonnie Raitt wrote the song "Just Like That" because she was inspired by a true story. She did not write it because she wanted to start a national conversation about organ donation. But that's what her song did—just like that.

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