

Views & Voices

February 2014

a magazine for women

A photograph of a young man and woman smiling and holding a large, red, heart-shaped wreath. The woman is on the left, wearing a white top and a red scarf. The man is on the right, wearing a dark shirt. They are both looking towards the camera with joyful expressions.

A ring thing

*Suitors seek
the perfect
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Cardiac cooking

*Recipes offer
healthy options*

The gift of life

*Transplant brings
hope & humility*

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Heart to Heart



ALLEGHENY GENERAL HOSPITAL
TRANSPLANT SERVICES



A transplant patient makes peace with his gift
as he honors a grieving mother.

By Sandy Marwick

March 30, 2011, was a day of unspeakable loss for Mary Grace Hensell. While driving to work that morning, her 24-year-old son Brian was killed in a car accident.

Her grief will never dissipate, she explains: She will just have to learn to live with it.

"It's sort of like having your heart ripped out without any anesthesia," said Mary Grace, 55, who splits her time between Pittsburgh and Baltimore, Maryland.

"Unfortunately, I'm sort of inducted into this club. I don't want to be — but I am."

That day also changed the destiny of Melvin Protzman, a heart patient who had endured a four-year wait on the transplant list. He had not expected the call from Allegheny General. Melvin had been on the list for so long, he was on a first-name basis with hospital staff. So when he saw the caller ID, he picked up the phone and said, "What do you want, Deanna?"

"How would you like to come down today and get a heart?" she answered.

Brian Hensell was the donor.

"I had the attitude that the heart I got was special"

"I went silent. My chest just got real tight," recalled Melvin, 61, of Butler.

"My family all just went to work. I had to get them called back. That took about an hour — and I was there. I was tense. I was scared."

Once in the room, Melvin's wait began. "The heart's the last to come out," he explained of the process involved in procuring organs. His operation finally began at 8 or 9 p.m., but it lasted until after midnight. "It was April Fool's Day," he said.

In the days that followed, Melvin perceived he was getting VIP treatment. He assumed it was due to his knack for breaking records: the longest wait for a heart, the shortest transplant surgery, the largest heart removed and the quickest bounce-back in terms of getting out of bed and taking long walks around the hospital.

"The doctor started calling me his poster child," Melvin recalled. "I had the attitude that the heart I got was special, and I guess I was showing it. I was grateful. I was alive. I felt regenerated Friday after I was coming out of the anesthesia. I could tell I had my energy back."

Later, Melvin would learn the heart was special. Mary Grace — having spent 11½ years as a nurse at UPMC and 11½ years at Allegheny General — was known and loved by the medical community. As a single mother, she had sometimes toted her two sons into work. Many of the workers had known Brian.

"I was told right away that the liver went to Presby and the heart had gone to Allegheny General," Mary Grace said.

"How apropos, because they went to the two institutions I worked."

"The girls over in Allegheny General: They never violated any of the regulations, but I was called. They said, 'It went to a really nice person. We just wanted you to know that. Between the doctors and all of us, it was one of the hard-

CORE

Center for Organ Recovery & Education

A Pledge for Life

The Center for Organ Recovery and Education, or CORE, is one of 58 organ procurement organizations in the United States. Located in Pittsburgh, CORE's service area encompasses Western Pennsylvania, one county in New York and the state of West Virginia.

According to Misty Enos, director of professional service and community outreach, procurement organizations like CORE bridge the gap between donation and transplantation, and federal law requires hospitals to notify the organizations in cases of imminent or actual death.

"Our responsibility is to work with the family," Enos said. "We take care of the donor. We set up the transplant process. ... We coordinate finding recipients for the gift of life." Enos said people can become organ donors through a designation on their driver's license or by creating a living will. Both documents are legal and binding in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

CORE is required to uphold this law, but the organization works with families by offering grief counseling and other services before and after transplantation.

A common myth is that medical teams will let donor patients die in order to procure organs. But Enos said the belief is not true. According to CORE literature, "Medical teams will do everything in their power to save your life. Also, transplant teams are separate from medical teams." Enos said 46 percent of Pennsylvania residents are registered organ donors. Nationally, 18 people die every day while on the transplant waiting list.

For more information, go to www.core.org.



Opposite page:

Melvin Protzman and Mary Grace Hensell. Pictured above: The plaque that Melvin Protzman made in honor of Brian Hensell

est operations — but we did it for you.”

A short time later, Mary Grace learned she was connected to Melvin in another way. A friend and former coworker, active with Mary Grace in the Association of Operating Room Nurses, approached her at the funeral home and whispered in her ear.

“I think I know who got your son’s heart. I think it was my cousin.”

“I’m a health care person. It’s my nature to be inquisitive,” said Mary Grace, explaining that receiving the information was not unsettling.

Typically, the region’s organ procurement organization — the Center for Organ Recovery and Education, or CORE — will facilitate donor family-recipient meetings if all parties express an interest. In most cases, the process begins with an exchange of letters in which sender identities are not disclosed.

But shortly after Melvin learned of

the family connection, he returned home one day to a voice on his answering machine. The caller was Mary Grace. Melvin contacted CORE, hoping the agency at least would confirm her identity. Instead, CORE gained Mary Grace’s consent to arrange for a meeting.

In the meantime, the blinking light on Melvin’s machine continued to plague him. His anxiety compounded as he came to terms with the reality of what had happened.

“(I realized), ‘This aint my heart beating in me. It’s somebody else’s. How can this be?’” he said.

“You don’t think too much of it until you get home. ... When I was out walking, a neighbor stopped me and asked, ‘What are you going to do with your new life?’

Man, she put me into a head spin.”

That night, Melvin called Mary Grace with no plan on what he would say. Shortly after his introduction, both began to cry. Their conversation lasted four

hours.

When the day came to meet at CORE in Pittsburgh, Melvin was taken to a back room to wait. The meetings are orchestrated around the needs of donor families, Melvin explained — because without donors, there would be no recipients.

When Mary Grace arrived, she presented Melvin with an album containing photos of Brian.

“We went through the album,” Melvin recalled. “And finally, she looks up at me and said, ‘Can I listen to my son’s heart?’

“I unbuttoned my shirt, and she put her head to my chest. ... I could feel her tears on my chest.”



For Mary Grace, Melvin was a source of comfort. “I wanted to know who got my son’s heart. I wanted to know who he was a part of,” she said.

“I think there’s something special about a heart. ... It was such an excitement to meet him. Plus, there’s a sadness.”

Although Mary Grace did not meet

“I wanted to know who got my son’s heart. I wanted to know who he was a part of”



Melvin and Mary Grace pose at a CORE event in May 2013 to honor donor families.

Brian's other recipients, she was informed of their status: A 50-something person received Brian's liver. Someone about the same age received his pancreas and a kidney.

"I know the pancreas did not take, but the kidney did. That person won't be on dialysis," Mary Grace said.

"A 15-year-old girl got his other kidney, and two 60-some-year-olds got his corneas. So somebody will see again. ... Basically, the 15-year-old was a diabetic, so she'll no longer be on dialysis. She'll still be a diabetic, but she won't be hooked to a machine three days a week. The person who got the liver: He's going to live longer.

"We know so many people out there that die waiting," she added. "My father needed a lung transplant. He was never able to receive his lung, so he died. My brother in-law needed a heart. He never got to receive his heart."

According to Misty Enos, director of professional service and community outreach at CORE, transplant recipients like Melvin are often plagued with "recipient guilt" — keenly aware of the loss that surrounds their gift.

"I struggle with a lot of questions," Melvin confirmed. "(I ask) Why me? What did I do in this life to deserve this gift? Why did God take Brian at 24?"

As part of their healing process, Mary Grace and Melvin participate in CORE events to raise awareness for organ donation.

They also rely on each other.

"We've helped each other out in the healing process," Melvin said.

"He calls me, he helps me. Hopefully we help each other, but he definitely helps me," Mary Grace answered.

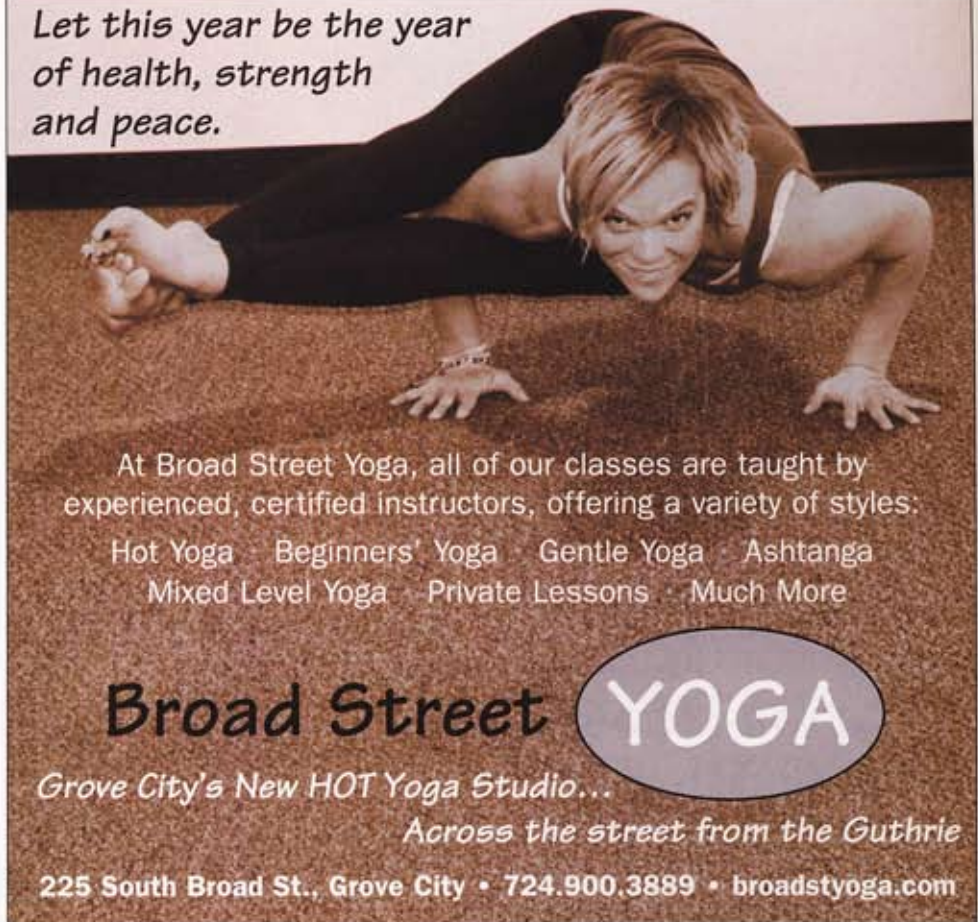
"It is a really good feeling to know that your loved one lives on, and that other people might be able to do a lot of really good things in life — even though your loved one isn't here," she added.

"I feel (Brian) lives on in other people. I think he does his work — or God's work — through other people. A good example of that is Melvin." **V**

Mary Grace Hensell is a nurse manager in the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Building operating room at Johns Hopkins Hospital. She was part of the team that completed a double arm transplant there in December 2012.

Melvin Protzman worked as a welder before his heart condition and subsequent transplant necessitated his retirement.

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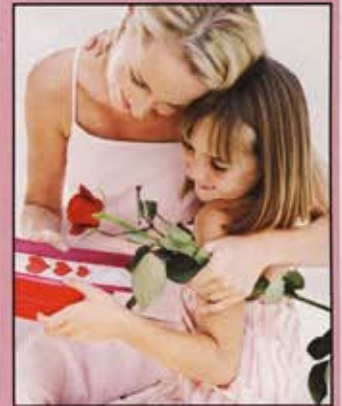
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During February Heart month take time for your health.

All women face the threat of heart disease. But becoming aware of symptoms and risks unique to women, as well as eating a heart-healthy diet and exercising, can help protect you.

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