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# NEWS

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\*\*\*Six lives touched by one death:  
donors support transplant program.

DALLAS--Somewhere in Hawaii there's a place that's very special to the James Glisson family of Duncanville, Texas. It's a cliff jutting out over the Pacific. Their high-school-age sons loved to approach it on the back of their dad's motorcycle or hike there together to watch the soaring hang gliders.

Recently the two young men, now adults and closer than they were as boys, spent a weekend together in San Antonio, where Rick is stationed at Brooke Air Force Base. They relived happy times like these and talked seriously together about life and death. Each reminded the other that if anything happened, he had made the decision years ago to donate any vital organs that could help someone to live or improve the quality of a life. They also decided that in case of death, each wanted the other to scatter his ashes from the top of the beautiful cliff that had played such an important part in their growing-up years.

Two weeks later David, 19, was dead. The death came as a result of a fall when he was changing an outside shopping-center marquee advertising the movie theatre where he worked part time. His parents pulled into the hospital emergency room just ahead of the ambulance that carried David. However, in the early morning hours doctors pronounced David dead.

It was his father who remembered his son's wish to donate his organs. David had to have a kidney removed when he was 16. After that time, Glisson said, his son was always conscious of the fact that if anything went wrong with his remaining kidney, he would be dependent on the generosity of a donor and the availability of an appropriate organ.

Within days of the young man's death, six lives had been touched by David's own generosity and compassion for other people. The same Saturday that his family and friends were assembled for a memorial service at a nearby Baptist church in order to celebrate the life of this young man, surgeons in a Dallas hospital were performing a bone transplant made possible by David's gift. Because of the 19-year-old's decision to be a transplant donor and his family's respect for their son's intent, three men have been given a chance to walk normally again, a man and a woman who live in different parts of the country may regain their sight, and the victim of an explosion with massive burns was helped in his fight for life by a skin transplant.

According to Dr. Charles Baxter, this is the first time that six transplants from one donor have been made within such a short period of time. Baxter is head of the Parkland Burn Center and medical director of the related "bankable" organ transplant program at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas. ("Bankable" organs are those that may be stored for transplant at a later time.) Currently the program handles donations of corneas, skin for burn and other victims of large traumatic wounds and bones used in hip, knee, back and jawbone operations. It is the first and, currently, the only transplant program dealing with multiple-organ donation as a coordinated effort although it is serving as a prototype for other centers interested in setting up similar units.

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Baxter and his associates are in charge of the largest skin-banking effort in the country and have long been involved in eye-banking for cornea transplants and research. Bone-banking is a more recent involvement, beginning with the addition to the faculty four years ago of Dr. Marvin Meyers, an orthopedic surgeon who is one of a handful in the country who perform these still-experimental surgeries. Meyers, a pioneer in bone transplants, has done 38 knee and 21 hip transplants in the past eight years. The first surgeon to perform a hip transplant, Meyers now heads one of only six teams performing these surgeries in the U.S. and Canada.

Meyers explained that the use of artificial joints in hip replacement may be adequate for older people. However, young people, who are much more active, often put too much stress on the cement holding the metal devices in place, causing a high incidence of loosening. On the other hand, using human bone to replace the damaged portion of the joint allows the recipient's bone to replace and incorporate the donor bone. At the same time, the joint cartilage continues to function and stays alive.

The orthopedic surgeon says that there is a great need for these transplants, but the number that can be done is limited by the number of donors.

Patients receiving the bone transplants at St. Paul hospital were:

\* Rickie, a 21-year-old cowboy from a small town in West Texas, was the victim of a motorcycle accident. He was riding his motorcycle, usually used only for recreation, while his pick-up was in the shop for repairs.

"I'm really pretty cautious, even when I'm rodeoing. I don't even drive my pick-up fast. But this was one wreck I just couldn't avoid."

A nice looking young man with dark hair and big brown eyes, Rickie has always led an active life. Besides riding in high school and junior rodeos, he has been coaching younger rodeo riders. While he was in school, he played high school football and worked at a truck stop.

"Changing 21 flats--and that was on big trucks--in an eight-hour period was pretty normal," he said.

Until his accident Rickie was working at a paint and body shop and helping his grandparents on a small farm. Now he's looking forward to recovering from his hip transplant and getting back to a normal life.

"I don't know whether I'll ever get to rodeo again," he said, "but I know I'll be able to have a normal, active life with the transplant."

How does Rickie feel about the Glisson family's decision that led to his chance at life without being crippled?

"It's beyond gratefulness. There's no way to explain how happy I am," he said.

"I hate it that someone had to die so I could get better. I hoped it would be a long time (till the operation). But if someone did have an accident, I wanted to benefit from it."

Now he wants to be in a position to help others as he has been helped. Rickie, who didn't know until his accident and his surgery in Dallas that skin and bone were considered organs for transplant, asked about a donor card while he was still in the hospital.

\* Brian, a mail carrier in San Diego, is just 28. But for the last three years the knee he injured in a softball game has been painfully deteriorating. Every day he walked 13 miles on his route. And every day the pain got worse. He says he would go home to his wife and baby daughter and prop up his knee, which would have swelled to twice its normal size, so he could go out again the next day.

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Things got worse, and this year he was forced to take a medical retirement with a reduced income. Dark days of depression followed. Now back at home, Brian's spirits are soaring. He sees the prospect for a new life ahead and is encouraging everyone in his family and all his friends to become organ donors so others can have a second chance like his.

\* James, 42, had a 15-month wait for a new chance at walking normally. Now he's thrown his cane away. As director of data processing for a state agency in South Carolina, he's lucky he doesn't have to be on his feet much. But even with the transplant he realizes it's no more tennis for him. He, too, says he is talking to his friends about transplants.

"I might need something else," he said with a wry chuckle.

Other patients who received tissue include a 34-year-old man who received skin grafting over the most badly burned areas of his body. The skin was used as a "dressing" to seal the wounds to keep out infection and slow down the loss of fluids. A 62-year-old woman who lost her sight from an eye disease received a cornea transplant, as did a 28-year-old man from Ohio. These were only a few of the 650 patients receiving transplants last year through the program.

The bankable organ transplant program has donor cards available and state law permits citizens to express their wishes to donate organs by signing an indication of intent on the back of their driver's license. However, the most important thing is for potential organ donors to make sure their families understand this intention, said Ellen Heck, coordinator of the transplant program. Her office can be reached for information by writing the health science center or dialing 214/688-2609.

The Glisson family agrees.

"People have to discuss this kind of decision with their families until it is accepted absolutely and totally," said David's father. "We couldn't have made the decision that night. We would have agonized too long. The horror is so great at the time you can't deal with another thing."

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