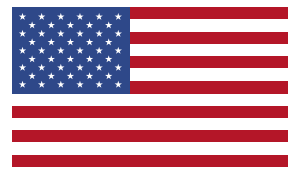




BEARS' BLOCKBUSTER YEAR BEST SPORTS STORY

BACK PAGE

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FLY THE FLAG

FRIGID Pages 2A, 35A

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2001

Late Sports Final

THE GIFT

A TRANSPLANT JOURNEY

Last of four parts

Questions of the heart—and of medicine

By Chris Fusco | Staff Reporter

A little more than a year earlier, Mark Mucha and I had stood in this same cemetery after singing at the funeral of our friend Kevin Patula's mom. Mark had no idea then that he was sick.

Now, on this late March day, I was at Mark's funeral. The liver I gave him nearly four months ago had failed. A second transplant couldn't save him, either.

More than 1,200 people—from our elementary school teachers to the clients at the bank where Mark worked—came to his wake. For hours, the line at the funeral home stretched out the door and around the corner of the building.

At Mark's grave the next day, the Rev. Patrick O'Neill of St. Terrence Church in Alsip summoned us for final prayers. My wife and I were swept into different positions—Jennifer at the foot of the casket with Mark's wife, Kelly; I, farther back, next to Kelly's father, John Frank, who was holding Mark's 11-month-old son, Jacob.

Everybody else cried, but Jake looked at me and smiled. **Story continues on Pages 14-18A**



ME MARK
Seventh-grade honor society induction 1985

Ben Fusco, 12 months Jake Mucha, 20 months
December 2001

RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

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THE GIFT A TRANSPLANT JOURNEY

'With a sense of humor, we're all going to get through this'

kissed him on the cheek and held him with his grandpa.

He stayed quiet during the service, oblivious to what was happening.

After the prayers, I put my pallbearer gloves on the gray, steel casket and hugged my parents, my wife and friends.

Gerald Beeson, who was ready to give Mark part of his liver before several tests disqualified him, pointed at a statue near Mark's grave. Mark, who prided himself on his 100 percent Polish heritage, would be buried just feet from St. Patrick, patron saint of the Irish.

"If that's not Mark joking with us, I don't know what is," Gerald said, cracking a smile.

■ ■ ■

I remember everything about that cool, sunny morning at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Those of us close to Mark have been trying to move on, but losing him still hurts deeply.

Kelly, her in-laws and family are trying to put their lives back together.

My wife is drained. Sometimes, she has nightmares about me dying, even though I've recovered from surgery.

Jake, now 20 months old, and my son Benjamin, who turns 1 on Monday, are the joys of our lives. But watching them play together sometimes reminds me that Mark won't be there when we go to ballgames together.

An education fund for Jake got a boost from the Mark Mucha Memorial golf outing, organized by Kelly's family, and a fund-raiser Mark's co-workers ran at a Clarendon Hills tavern. About \$25,000 has been raised.

And after a summer of uncertainty about Mark's \$1 million-plus in medical bills, Kelly's financial picture is getting better. As of Friday, all but \$28,800 had been paid, with insurance expected to cover most of that amount.

Meanwhile, the safety of adult-to-adult, live-donor liver transplants is being called into question. Three University of Chicago doctors fueled the debate earlier this year, when they wrote that the procedure "has been disseminated too quickly . . . and that inadequate data are being collected on outcomes for both recipients and donors."

■ ■ ■

The day after Mark died, Kelly traded in both of their cars for a Ford Explorer and dumped his "Mucha 72" vanity plates. She and Jake moved out of their Orland Park town house right away and in with her parents.

Within three weeks of the funeral, Kelly told us she wanted to spend "one more good night" at the town house. Jennifer and I joined Kelly and a few other friends there.

We found Kelly in their bedroom, sobbing. She had been organizing Mark's wardrobe and wanted to clean the house quickly so it could be put up for sale.

"I just want my life back," she said.



RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

Mark, who prided himself on his 100 percent Polish heritage, would be buried just feet from St. Patrick, patron saint of the Irish.

"If that's not Mark joking with us, I don't know what is," Gerald said.

THE STORY SO FAR

Mark Mucha, a 28-year-old new dad, is diagnosed with liver cancer. His friends and family answer the call to be his liver donor. His boyhood friend, Sun-Times reporter Chris Fusco, is chosen to give a piece of his liver. Things look good after surgery until complications develop. Suddenly, the new liver fails. Mark—and his wife, Kelly—fight valiantly in an unsuccessful attempt to beat the odds.

On the Web: Read previous parts of "The Gift: A Transplant Journey" online at www.suntimes.com.

E-mail: Send comments to cfusco@suntimes.com, or mail them to the Chicago Sun-Times, 401 N. Wabash, Chicago 60611.

Editorial: Organ donors share most important gift; Page 37A

"Why did this have to happen to him? Why did this have to happen to Jake? It should have been me. He could have handled this better."

Jen pulled Kelly out of the room and tried to calm her. I took over boxing up my friend's life. Every piece of clothing sparked memories.

I recognized the shirts Mark wore when we went out to dinner with our wives, and the suits he wore to the bank. Then, there was his athletic gear—golf shoes, softball spikes, old Marist High School football T-shirts and the Tom Waddle Bears jersey (No. 87) he wore to the Turkey Bowl—our annual Thanksgiving Day football game—just five months earlier.

His dresser had dozens of religious statues, holy-water bottles and prayer cards, most of them gifts. He and Kelly pulled them out nightly when he was sick, asking God for more years together.

A few weeks after that awful night, the town house sold.

Kelly has had her share of good days and bad days since then. Though still grieving and wanting her old life back, she recognizes she has a life to lead and a son to raise.

She recently bought a cute, three-bedroom, brick house in a south suburb. Her brother, Patrick, moved in with her.

She's back working part-time as a speech pathologist, but considering taking a job with the transplant team at the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center, where Mark and I had our surgeries. Mark told her she'd be an asset to any transplant patient, judging by the way she managed his care.

It hasn't been easy, but the rest of us are moving forward with her.

Jennifer, who supported my surgery during her pregnancy, feels cheated and angry about Mark's death. On days when Kelly isn't doing well, my wife talks to her often, listening to her every word. Sometimes, she cries when she gets off the phone. Still, she's a strong woman. I love her so much.

Mark's mom, Alice Mucha, wonders what gave Mark cancer and how come it couldn't have been diagnosed sooner.

"There isn't a day we don't talk about him," she said. "Life will never be the same."

■ ■ ■

And me? I'm worried. Worried about Kelly, Jake and the Muchas. Worried about my wife. Worried about the impact this story is having on those I love.

At the same time, I know tremendous good can come from others knowing about Mark.

In late May, the University of Chicago doctors—David C. Cronin, J. Michael Millis and Mark Siegler—published an article warning that too many adult-to-adult, live-donor liver transplants are being performed too quickly, and without proper oversight.

"Many key aspects of liver transplantation in adults with the use of grafts from living donors remain unclear," they wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. They cited "a lack of agreement" on the best surgical technique and said adult-to-adult, live-donor liver transplants were happening at an "alarming" rate.

Mark and I were among 267 such transplants in the United States last year, more than 10 times the total performed in 1998, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing.

Two more donor deaths have been confirmed since Dr. Enrico Benedetti, UIC's transplant chief, first briefed us about the operation. That brings the total number to four worldwide, though the U. of C. doctors suspect there might be more. Since their article appeared, the U. of C. doctors also have learned that two donors in the United States required liver transplants within weeks after their surgeries. Both survived.

In July, the National Institutes of Health announced it is creating a program to track donor and recipient outcomes of adult-to-adult, live-donor liver surgeries. "This information is needed to aid decisions made by physicians, patients and potential donors," the agency wrote. "Too few cases are performed at any one center, and approaches to the patient are too diverse . . ."

Benedetti says there is "a very steep and very difficult learning curve" for the surgery, "regardless of the individual ability and experience of the surgeons." Since Mark's death, UIC has hired a new surgeon, Dr. Giuliano Testa, to perform live-donor liver transplants.

Testa is one of only a few surgeons worldwide who has done more than 80 such transplants, Benedetti said.

Benedetti agrees with the U. of C. doctors that standards for screening donors and performing the surgery need to be established.

I hope this story helps make that a reality.

I also hope it will move more people to become organ donors, for, despite years of public-service campaigns, there are nowhere near enough cadaver organs to go around.

Last year, 1,650 people on U.S. waiting lists for liver transplants died. In 1999, 1,782 people died.

Our transplant gave Mark his best shot at life. And even in cases like ours, where things go wrong, recipients still survive.

In an Arizona case at the Mayo Clinic Scottsdale, for example, a 30-year-old man lost the liver his 24-year-old brother gave him in March because of a



RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

Jennifer feels cheated and angry about Mark's death. On days when Kelly isn't doing well, my wife talks to her often, listening to her every word. Sometimes, she cries when she gets off the phone. Still, she's a strong woman. I love her so much.

blood-clotting problem. He survived an emergency second transplant the next month from a cadaver.

The liver-transplant team at Northwestern Memorial Hospital has performed 15 adult-to-adult, live-donor surgeries since August 1999, said Dr. Michael Abecassis, its director. All of its donors recovered completely, he said, and 13 of the 15 recipients are alive.

Though the outcome wasn't the same for Mark, I don't regret doing the transplant.

Neither does Kelly. Mark had a choice: Fight or die. He chose to fight.

■ ■ ■

When Mark and I discussed my writing about our surgeries, we envisioned there would be a photo of us holding our children that would appear with the final chapter.

At Mark's funeral mass, I thought a lot about what that picture would have

looked like, as our friend, Erik Kantz, read the eulogy. Erik and I wrote it together, with help from Kelly, family and friends.

He read it in a strong, steady voice:

All of us here have a connection to Mark.

To some, he is the consummate business professional who works hard, charms clients, manages accounts and has perhaps the longest voice-mail greeting of anyone in the banking world. To others, he is the incoming chamber of commerce president—so dedicated that he convinces his wife to dress up as Mrs. Claus at the group's Clarendon Hills holiday celebration.

He also is an athlete. He remembers every second he was on the football field in high school and plays Sunday softball as if the World Series is on the line. His favorite holiday is Thanksgiving, not because of the pilgrims or

TRANSPLANT FACTS

■ Nationwide, more than 76,000 adults and children await organ transplants. More than 4,500 of them are from Illinois.

■ On average, 15 people a day die because of a lack of donor organs.

■ Every 13 minutes, another name is added to the national transplant waiting list.

■ Illinois has the largest organ-donor registry in the country, with 63 percent of registered drivers (5.3 million people) intending to donate when they die. Being on the registry does not guarantee donation. People also must sign the backs of their driver's licenses and discuss their intentions with family. Donation can't take place without next-of-kin consent.

■ All major Western religions support organ donation. Open-casket funerals are possible for organ donors.

HOW TO HELP

To join the state's organ-donor registry, call (800) 210-2106 or register online at www.sos.state.il.us. People also can join when they renew their driver's licenses.

Donations to the Mucha family can be sent to the "Mark Mucha Family Fund," in care of Fifth Third Bank, 3101 W. 95th, Evergreen Park, Ill. 60805.

turkey, but because of the 10 a.m. football game that, by the way, will again be touch, not tackle, this year.

That's only the beginning of what makes Mark extraordinary. His voice should be trademarked, as it has entertained thousands of people in church, the theater and at parties, bars and festivals with the rock band Nothin' Else. His sense of humor always shows through, whether he's playing Father Pat's straight man at the end of Sunday mass, or telling a corny joke.

His accomplishments are too many to list, but here are just a few: first place in the Lincoln Speaks contest in School District 126; All-Star catcher in Little League; football team captain; nominee for the Marist Faculty Award, the school's highest honor; magna cum laude college graduate.

Mark's dad, Ed Mucha, describes him as the glue that holds the family together. His mother, Alice, says he's the only person that can really keep his brother, Matt, and sister, Sandi, in line.

As for Sandi and Matt, they have more Mark stories than Mark has jokes.

One of the best is the time Mark didn't believe a person's tongue would stick to a metal post in freezing weather like in that scene from the movie "A Christmas Story." Mark was so sure he was right that he bet Matt his tongue wouldn't stick to the basketball post along the Mucha family driveway.

Keep in mind, Mark was a working professional when he made this bet. Pieces of his tongue still are on that post, and Matt became a few bucks richer that day.

There's no doubt that many of us, especially Kelly, have seen Mark's stubborn side. But it is his unwillingness to stop fighting for what he believes in that makes him a great colleague, friend, brother, son, husband and father.

Kelly, rest assured Mark could not be the man he is without you. Look at all the things you shared:

■ Playing opposite each other in the
Turn to Page 17A

THE GIFT A TRANSPLANT JOURNEY

MY STORY ■ BY KELLY MUCHA

'Maybe I've been this strong all along'

Shortly after 3 p.m. on March 25, my very best friend and the greatest love of my life was gone. Standing at his side, holding his hand and kissing him in the hospital, I was positive I couldn't go on.

Seven months earlier, my husband, Mark Mucha, was telling me he knew that he had cancer, but just felt too good to have a disease that could kill him.

The way we handled his illness still amazes me. Aside from all the testing, we tried to continue our life as usual.

Mark kept working; I juggled a part-time job as a speech pathologist with taking care of our son, Jacob. Getting stuck at the "why us?" stage, we reasoned, would only drive us crazy.

That's not to say that we weren't scared and sometimes irrational. After Mark's diagnosis on Aug. 17, 2000, every night I silently prayed that we could trade places. I broke into tears telling him how I felt after one of his many hospital stays.

I remember his response like it was 10 minutes ago.

"My pain is now and will end if I die," he said. "Yours started the day I was diagnosed and will never go away. If and when I die, I will be in heaven, without pain or worry. You will be left here to pick up the pieces and move on."

"It's a helluva lot easier being me, Kel. . . . If it were you, I couldn't function the way you do."

His words completely astonished me. Mark—despite vowing never to stop fighting—considered dying a real possibility. More than that, he thought I was the strong one.

Every time he came home, we would be encouraged that he was getting better. Even treating and dressing his chest wound after a particularly bad hospitalization became part of our regular routine. We would laugh that my hands were inside his chest and that our bedroom looked like a hospital storage closet. I teased him that this was more of him than I ever expected to see.

The level of devastation at losing Mark after doing such things is beyond words. I spent 16 days straight sleeping at the hospital to support Mark. I agonized over leaving Jake with my parents, but I knew it was important to do everything possible to help save his dad.

None of it worked.

The wake was excruciating. All I wanted was for everyone to go away so I could try to cope.

But, looking back on it, I'm glad 1,200 people—the most the funeral directors had ever seen in one night—came. The experience helped give me the strength to speak to everybody at Mark's funeral.

"Mark handled every step forward,



RICHARD A. CHAMPMAN / SUN-TIMES

"Mark and I had more in 12 years than most people attain in a lifetime . . . Jake and I will carry this strength through and be OK."

and setback, with grace and courage of which I am amazed and in deep admiration," I said.

"Mark and I had more in 12 years than most people attain in a lifetime. . . . Jake and I will carry this strength through and be OK."

On many days, I doubt the last part. But Jake is the force that drives me, and I am trying to carve out a new life for us.

Mark made me promise him that, if he died, my life would go on. If it had been up to him, I'd be remarried by now.

That's not something I'm worried about at this point, but I can tell you that I'm learning to find some joy in parts of my new life. I'm going out with friends, meeting new people and making the best of what I have. I can tell Mark is with me; he's helping me along the way.

Mark and I decided that, after this ordeal, we would buy a house with a back yard for Jake. Jake now has that back yard, where he plays with his

neighborhood buddy, Jack.

I'm back working part-time as a speech pathologist at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn and am considering a position with the transplant team that cared for Mark at the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center. It's exciting to think I might be able to help somebody else survive what I've gone through.

I feel good about those things, but there's still a lot of uncertainty about the future.

Some days, bill collectors call. They want to talk with Mark about the hospital bills for his potential donors.

I tell them he had a transplant and that he's no longer with us.

Single-parenthood also is challenging. Sometimes, Jake gets carted off on errands with me; sometimes, I ask friends or family to watch him. I miss having Mark around to reassure me that I am making the right decisions about Jake.

Even though our little boy isn't old enough to understand, I tell him stories about his dad and how his birth was the happiest day of Mark's life. As he grows up, Jake will know a terrific father through the memories that my family, friends and I have.

Besides raising Jake, there are days when I'm forced to look like I'm doing well with all of this, but it's really tearing me apart inside. It's not in my nature to crawl into bed, so I get through those times by forcing myself to function.

When Mark was first diagnosed, I told him I wanted the two of us to run far and fast. It just felt like if we could distance ourselves from this, it might go away.

It didn't.

Now, I've been forced to start a different race—one I never thought I could run without Mark, but am running every day.

My husband was a good judge of character. Maybe I've been this strong all along.



Mark + Jake: May 2000

“In all seriousness, Mark’s becoming a father was the most wonderful part of his life . . . Falling asleep with Kelly at night and waking up with Jake in the middle of it, he told many of us, were among the things he cherished most. . . . He wants us to move on and be better people. We’re already better people for knowing him.”

Continued from Page 15A

Mother McAuley production of “Carousel” in 1989 and continuing to sing together, whether at a wedding or around the town house.

■ Attending St. Xavier together, both graduating in 1994, and going on to successful careers.

■ Getting married in front of friends and family.

■ Drinking too many Red Stripes and pina colodas on your honeymoon in Jamaica.

■ And, most of all, the birth of Jacob, who seems to have gotten the best of both of your gene pools. He appears on track to grow beyond Mark’s 5 feet 8 inches tall, thereby assuring him a college football scholarship and first-round selection in the NFL draft.

In all seriousness, Mark’s becoming a father was the most wonderful part of his life. Equally important was that he

realized he led a wonderful life long before he was diagnosed with cancer.

Falling asleep with Kelly at night and waking up with Jake in the middle of it, he told many of us, were among the things he cherished most.

Many of us left this same church last year inspired when Mark told us “with a sense of humor, we’re all going to get through this”—the “this” being his battle with cancer. He continued to inspire us as he went through nearly a dozen surgeries between then and now.

Mark also said his illness taught him not to sweat the small stuff. When those close to him would snap over trivial things, he would tell them “to be the better person” and let go of whatever the issue is.

Even in times when he was in great pain, he still managed to thank any doctor, nurse or visitor that helped or came to see him.

Readers praise series; Page 18A

He never stopped being concerned about the strain his illness was putting on Kelly, his parents, siblings, in-laws and friends.

Most importantly, Mark realized Kelly was at his side, supporting him, and regularly told her he loved her. And when Kelly wasn’t around, he told others he loved her, too.

If Mark were here in person now, you can bet he would take the podium with a joke, something like: “Three guys walk into a bar, one ducks.”

And after a good laugh, he would agree with us that this whole situation is terribly unfair.

To us. But not to him.

Mark, as Father Pat attested to in his homily at Mark and Kelly’s wedding, is a man of strong faith. He kept fighting to stay here with us, but, for a

reason we can’t understand, he’s now with God. And that means he’s probably splitting up this year’s Turkey Bowl teams with advice from Walter Payton, Brian Piccolo and Papa Bear Halas.

Mark is in the place that we, as believers, hope we someday will go. And while that’s of little solace to us today, it’s something Mark hopes we can understand over time.

He wants us to move on and be better people. We’re already better people for knowing him.

■ ■ ■

Someday, I hope Jacob Mark Mucha and Benjamin Robert Fusco will read this story. I can’t guarantee they’ll be friends like their fathers, but there’s something I want them to know.

I miss Jake’s dad every day.
I always will.

THE GIFT A TRANSPLANT JOURNEY

Special today E-mail to Chris Fusco

By mail: Letters to the Editor, Chicago Sun-Times, 401 N. Wabash, Chicago, 60611

By fax: (312) 321-2120; **By e-mail:** letters@suntimes.com

Or connect with the Sun-Times Web site at www.suntimes.com

Letters must include name, address and a daytime telephone number.

Letters may be edited for space or content.

'You have kept Mark's memory alive'

Mark Mucha, a 28-year-old new dad, was diagnosed with liver cancer. His friend, Sun-Times reporter Chris Fusco, donated half of his liver. The story, which concludes today, beginning on Page 1, touched readers' hearts. Here are some of their e-mails:

You made me want to call every friend I have and let them know how much I love them, how much richer they make my life. And I plan to start this week.

Regina Knapp

I was on the train in tears and still am now as I write this letter. Mark truly was lucky to have wonderful friends. The message you sent is that everyone is important and can make that same difference in someone's life. It makes me so glad I'm an organ donor.

Katrina Santiago-Valdez, Southwest Side

Your story is moving, and your friendship was remarkable. I just finished Part 3 and feel a sense of loss and sadness. The saying "only the good die young" is so true. I lost my mom a few years ago, and a friend told me, "God chooses his angels." I am sure your friend Mark is looking down on all of you and smiling.

John DiCanio

I really want to read Part 4 now! I feel like I know all of you and want to know that you are all right. Thanks for a great story.

Lisa Urzen

While at work tonight one of my fellow emergency room nurses came to me and said you need to read this article. We have become accustomed to illness and heartbreak in our everyday lives, and this is why I have to comment on this story. It hit home for the majority of us in the ER. It has been circulated to all of the staff as a "must read." Thank you for reminding me of why I became a nurse, and why I continue to do it in the face of sorrow, sadness and pain.

Dawn Lantz

I can only hope that I have friends as good as you guys are.

Holly Swanson

What a wonderful story! You had me sobbing. I looked forward to the next edition each day. Reading [Friday's] edition made the tears flow from my eyes. My heart is aching and goes out to you and Mark's family. I feel like family after reading this. Thank you for a beautiful and loving story.

Rosalie Ortega, Hegewisch

I was touched as deeply as I can remember by your transplant articles. What a truly amazing story of friendship and bravery.

I sat holding my Sun-Times this morning and cried when I completed the story. I didn't think that he was going to die. It seemed impossible that he didn't make it. My heart goes out to all of you who were involved.

Nancy Wilcox Karger

I have never been so touched by a story in the newspaper. I thank you for sharing your experience about your friend.

Karyn Miller

I couldn't wait for the next day to see what happened. You've shown so many people what true friendship means. I cried this morning when I read that Mark had passed away. I thought for sure that he would pull through. My heart goes out to his family, especially that beautiful little boy of Mark's.

Hopefully, Jake will know some day what a courageous, lucky person his father was. Some people can live 100 years and never experience the love that Mark did.

Jenny Massie, Mount Prospect



JIM FROST/SUN-TIMES

Reporter Chris Fusco received many e-mail and phone messages from readers touched by his story.

I was moved by this story so much that, even though I said I would be a donor and filled out donor cards in the past, I never signed the back of my license — until this morning. Thank you for making me believe.

Joe Green

Words are hard to even type right now, after reading Part 3 of your remarkable story. Mark's fight for life is the most courageous I have ever heard of. I was very saddened to read of his passing, the loss his wife is suffering and for his infant son, who will not personally know his father. I will never forget this story.

Dolores Tapia, Chicago

What you have done is absolutely remarkable. I wish that my friends would jump to my aid if I were in need, like you jumped to Mark's aid. Congratulations on the great articles. I am going to keep them for inspiration for me to be the best friend I can be.

Jill Heikkila, North Side

As my 6-month-old baby napped, I read Part 3 of your story. Now that I am a parent, it is so difficult to think about a child losing a mom or dad. Thank you for sharing your story, and God bless you all.

Joan Brandt

I have a similar group of close friends from my days at Marist, and while we've never had to go through something quite like this, I'd like to think that we'd all support each other in a similar way should the need ever arise. You should be commended for being able to put it all on paper the way you have.

Mike O'Malley, Washington, D.C.

I have finally stopped crying and am calm enough to write this letter. Not only is this a story of courage and strength, but a reminder of just what life is made of. I am a married mother of one little boy (20 months) and now know, more than ever, what it means to feel complete, unconditional love for someone. It is now your job to keep teaching Mark's son, Jake, about the wonderful dad he was given.

Nancy Swidler, Buffalo Grove

I could hardly finish reading Part 3 through my tears. My prayers are with you and Mark's family. Thanks for sharing this incredible story.

Nancy Bjorkquist, Glenview

As with the Sept. 11th attacks, your story reminds me about who (not what) is important in my life and what I need to do to be a better daughter, sister, sister-in-law, aunt, friend, soon-to-be-wife and whoever else I am in the lives of others. I need to spend more time thinking about my family, friends and health.

I will never know what will cross my path or if I will be prepared to handle it.

But I do know that my family and friends will always be here for me, and I will be here for them.

Martha Rokiciak

I would run to the little store across from where I work every day to read this story. I cried every day as I read it, and I just realized that this story didn't have the fairy-tale ending I had hoped for.

You should feel very fortunate that you actually got to be there with your friend while he

was fighting this terrible complication. I'm sure if he didn't have friends and family who loved him like you people did, he might have gone a long time ago.

Anthony M. Ramirez

I lost a friend to a horrible disease. When you watch your best friend who you thought was the toughest guy you know get run down and watch the life slowly leave him, it's heart-breaking, to say the least. Leukemia took my friend's life after a two-year battle. You try to move forward, but there is always an ache. You have kept Mark's memory alive.

Rick Erickson

I sometimes get frustrated and wonder: Do good people exist? Well, your articles answered my question.

Nicole Garcia

I found myself praying for strength and a miracle reading of Mark's difficult times and, during the good times, I was praying that this trauma was finally over.

Mark was truly blessed not just with a network of supportive family, but true friends who were willing to lay down their lives for a friend.

Toye M. Spencer, Chicago

A story such as yours and Mark's reminds us that it really is the little things that count: the joy of holding a baby, the laughter produced by shared memories, the smiles of familiarity, the importance of time with friends, the talks that emerge from a dinner table. These are the things by which true success is measured. Thank you so much for the reminder.

Mary E. O'Malley, Jefferson Park

Chicago Sun-Times

An Independent Newspaper

Organ donors share most important gift

Would you give up half your liver for a friend? Would you undergo major surgery—painful, life-threatening surgery—for the chance, and it would only be a chance, to save someone else's life? Would you have that much love in your heart? Would your friends volunteer to do the same for you? Readers of the Chicago Sun-Times have been riveted by the tale of reporter Chris Fusco, who donated part of his liver last year in an attempt to save the life of his boyhood friend, Mark Mucha, after Mucha was diagnosed with liver cancer.

The story combined an excruciating modern medical odyssey with a joyful tale of friendship and humanity, concepts that are not given nearly enough importance in the world of health and healing. As advanced as medicine is, with marvelous machines and fantastic capabilities to transplant organs and to save lives, at the bottom of everything is the human bond, a connection that transcends all. Without willing donors, there would be no livers to transplant, and all the technology in the world would be useless to save a single life. Medicine has been modernized. Now it must be humanized. For decades, modern science labored to pull medicine out of its chest-thumping infancy. Now our problems are reversed, and doctors, nurses and medical personnel need to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by technology. To keep the HMO forms and blinking lights from blinding them to the individual—often a hurt, frightened individual—who is there within the most incapacitated patient.

There is also a message here for we who are not medical personnel. Mucha needed a liver, and his friend, Fusco, whose wife was about to give birth to their first son, had to make a decision. His selfless choice is one that most of us will never have to face, thank goodness, though as exotic procedures become more routine, it is a choice that will be faced by more and more people. In light of that generosity, we should all make a tiny gesture that pales in significance compared with what Fusco did. Take out your driver's license. Sign the donor consent form on the back. Tell your family of your decision. It will cost you nothing, either in money or pain. But it could mean the world to someone else, and to their family and loved ones.

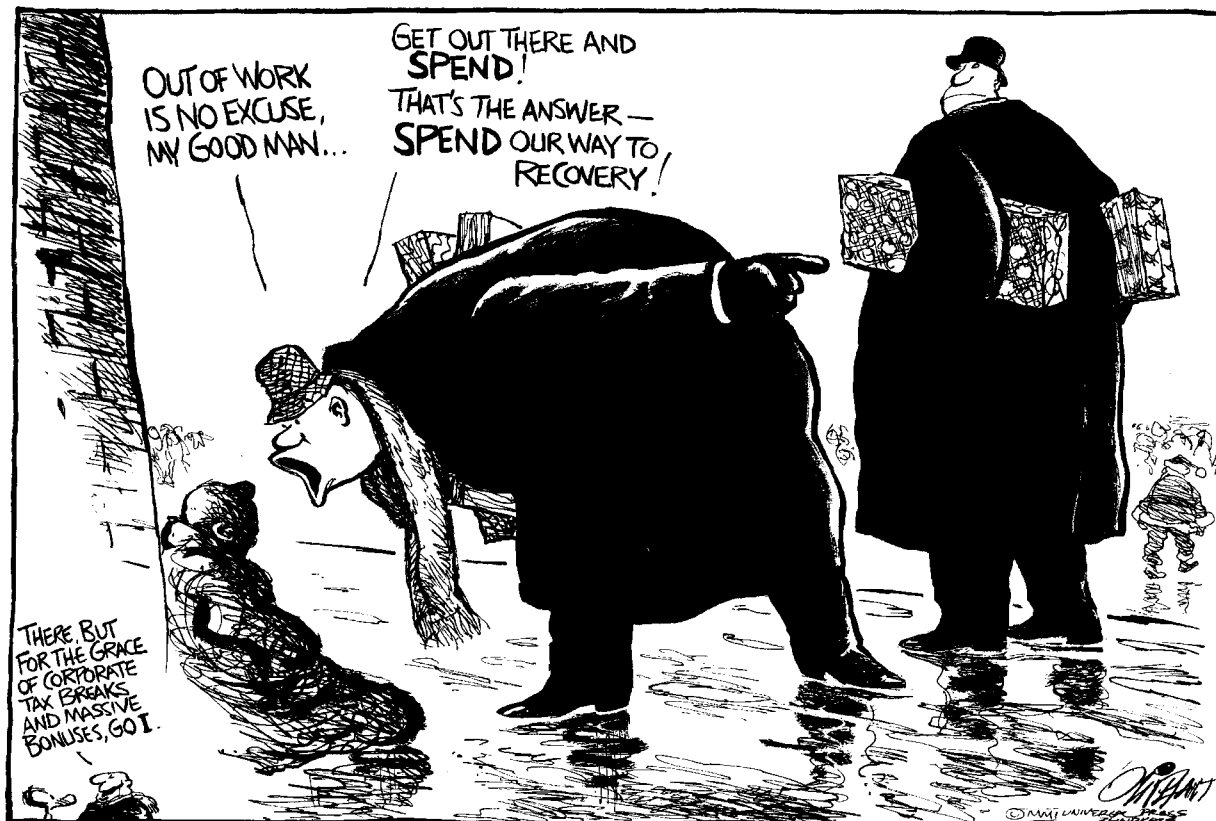
If goodwill toward humanity is not enough, then feel free to rationalize the act as pure self-interest. You would want someone to do it for you. If, years from now, you need a liver, or a kidney, or a heart, you would hope that someone's family would, in a moment of tragedy, look beyond their own pain, and do a good deed for someone else. Chris Fusco did. And his act serves as an inspiration.

What the 'experts' said

"Remember the optimistic remarks a couple of weeks back about the way American bombs were eviscerating the enemy? This has given way to somber comment about the Taliban's dogged resistance. Evidently our leaders gambled on the supposition that the unpopularity of the regime would bring about the Taliban's rapid collapse. . . . Vietnam should have reminded our generals that bombing has only a limited impact on decentralized, underdeveloped, rural societies. . . . All of this raises questions about the competence of our national leadership."

—Arthur Schlesinger, historian, 11/2/01

Pat Oliphant/Universal Press Syndicate



Invoking executive privilege

Bush repeats claim by Clinton: responding to House subpoenas would set dangerous precedent

A shouting argument erupted shortly before Christmas when lawyers for the Justice Department and the House Government Reform Committee unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate congressional investigators' demands for government documents.

President Bush has followed his predecessor, President Bill Clinton, by invoking executive privilege in rejecting the committee's subpoenas. Chairman Dan Burton renewed his request for internal Justice Department recommendations for an independent counsel probe of Clinton-Gore campaign financing that had been spurned by then-Attorney General Janet Reno. Burton also has subpoenaed information about FBI informants.

Burton and Attorney General John Ashcroft share conservative ideology. But in the heated talks, Ashcroft's lawyers claimed that responding to the House subpoenas would set a dangerous precedent in revealing confidential advice within the executive branch.

Dodd for president?

Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut has advised friends that he is considering a run for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination. He has indicated he will decide soon.

Dodd, 57, has good national connections among Democrats. He served as the party's general chairman for two years after Sen. Tom Daschle defeated him for Senate Democratic leader after the 1994 elections.

Two factors complicate his presidential ambitions: Dodd is up for re-election to a fifth Senate term in 2004, and his junior colleague from Connecticut, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, is better known after being the Democratic vice presidential nominee and is interested in the presidency.

No special session

Prominent House Republicans were disappointed that President Bush did not call Congress back into session im-

mediately after New Year's Day to consider economic stimulus legislation. They wanted to confront Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle with a Bush-backed bill that would pass the Senate if permitted to come to a vote.

However, Bush advisers welcome the administration having the media stage to itself until Congress reconvenes Jan. 23. And the president is not inclined to play confrontational games with the principal Democrat in Congress.

Dakota big money

Next year's South Dakota Senate race, between Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson and Rep. John Thune, is triggering what may be the country's fiercest 2002 fund-raising competition in a state with a population that ranks 46th of 50.

The competition results from the Democrats' taking control of the Senate when Sen. James Jeffords left the GOP. Johnson became chairman of the Financial Institutions subcommittee, gaining access to campaign contributions normally not available to a first-term liberal Democrat from a thinly populated Great Plains state.

The national Republican establishment fears that Thune could be outspent after Bush talked him out of a safe race for governor of South Dakota. A frantic GOP fund-raising effort is quickly raising \$1 million for Thune.

GOP's target

Democratic Sen. Max Cleland of Georgia, a Vietnam veteran considered a heavy favorite for re-election, has been put on the GOP's list of top 2002 targets. Private Republican polls show Cleland, a four-time statewide winner in Georgia, running only seven percentage points ahead of Republican Rep. Saxby Chambliss, making his first statewide race. Cleland may suffer from his party line voting record on gun control, abortion and labor.

Cleland ranks with Tim Johnson of South Dakota, Jean Carnahan of Missouri and Paul Wellstone of Minnesota as the most endangered Democratic senators. The most vulnerable Republican senators are Bob Smith of New Hampshire, Tim Hutchinson of Arkansas and James Inhofe of Oklahoma.

Robert Novak appears on CNN's "Capital Gang" at 6 p.m. Saturday and "Evans, Novak, Hunt and Shields" at 4:30 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. Sunday.



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