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The greatest gift

11:29 a.m. CST, December 21, 2009

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Never has **the Christmas** tree looked as beautiful for me as it does this year. The white lights seem to have a life of their own, as they illuminate the ornaments that gently rest upon the branches. Each ornament brings back a memory from a Christmas past. The tree itself seems taller, almost mammoth-like. It stands tall and proud even with the absence of presents. The void below the Christmas tree caused me to ponder what I want this year for Christmas. Anything that can be store-bought seemed so meaningless and cold. It was then that I realized my Christmas had come early this year, and that I have

already received the greatest gift of all, the gift of life.

This Christmas, I wouldn't be able to stare at this magnificent tree if it were not for my donor, from which I received a new heart and kidney. This Christmas, I get to watch old holiday films. This Christmas, I feel the same excitement that I did as a child on Christmas morning as I dashed frantically down the stairs to see what Santa had brought for me. I would have never been able to do any of this if it were not for the family of my donor, who in their darkest hour mustered the ability to step outside of their pain, so that they could take away mine.

I've realized what I want more than anything this year for Christmas. I want the donor family to be happy. I want them to be thankful that they have each other. I want their holiday to be filled with the same traditions, and for the New Year to bring them only happiness, because they gave me happiness. I am thankful for them, and I am thankful to be alive.

I encourage everyone to make a simple New Year's resolution this year and pledge to give the gift of life by registering to be an organ and tissue donor at www.DonateLifeIllinois.org. It will only take a moment, but could someday save a life like my own.

-- Bill Coon, **Lake Zurich, Ill.**

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Your story about Organ Donation highlighted the tragic shortage of human organs for transplant operations.

At least 9,000 of the 105,000 Americans on the national transplant waiting list will die before they get

a transplant. Most of these deaths are needless. Americans bury or cremate 20,000 transplantable organs every year.

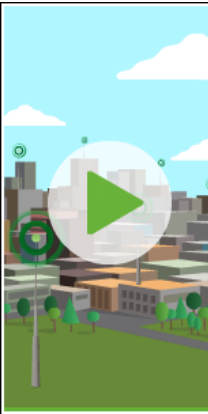
There is a simple way to put a big dent in the organ shortage %u2013 give donated organs first to people who have agreed to donate their own organs when they die.

Giving organs first to organ donors will convince more people to register as organ donors. It will also make the organ allocation system fairer. People who aren't willing to share the gift of life should go to the back of the waiting list as long as there is a shortage of organs.


Anyone who wants to donate their organs to others who have agreed to donate theirs can join LifeSharers. LifeSharers is a non-profit network of organ donors who agree to offer their organs first to other organ donors when they die. Membership is free at www.lifesharers.org or by calling 1-888-ORGAN88. There is no age limit, parents can enroll their minor children, and no one is excluded due to any pre-existing medical condition. LifeSharers has over 13,400 members at this writing, including 809 members in Illinois.

LIFESHARERS (12/21/2009, 6:33 PM)

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40 celeb deaths under 40

The tragic death of Brittany Murphy reminds us far too many celebs died before their time.



Winter wedding wonderland

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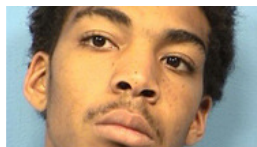
Naughty elves on parade

Scope out festive photos from the Boystown bar crawl.

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