



Organ donation grants salvation to afflicted

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Have a heart.

It's a statement my grandfather has been waiting to hear for the past five years ... though not in its most common context. He's on a waiting list for a donor heart.

Organ donation isn't a topic many of us have a real opinion about; it's just not a subject that people afford much thought. After all, when was the last time the word "organ," without perhaps a precursory "reproductive," came up over a cup of coffee?

I'll be the first to admit that I hadn't given my own guts much thought prior to writing this column; they have their responsibilities and I have mine, and when my work is done, 70 or so years from now, they're done. Who's going to want my heart after 90 years of abuse, anyway? The unavoidable fact is that it probably won't take 90 years for the majority of us

- I could step in front of a

bus or be crushed by the Mir space station tomorrow. This is the essence of the uneasiness surrounding organ donation - to think about donating one's organs is to think about one's own mortality.

If there is one thing in this life which we take for granted more than anything else, it is the inner workings of our bodies.

Many of us don't know what our organs look like (Valentine's Day providing the prime example), let alone how they work or what might happen if they didn't work. The typical college student, at least *this* typical college student, spends more time corrupting his organs (whether it be the liver or the lungs) than he does maintaining them.

The paranoia of constantly being aware of one's own mortality is undoubtedly taxing on a healthy heart; I can't imagine its effects on a heart such as my grandfather's. Imagine, for a moment, the psychological torment of having to reach for a bottle of pills or clutch a defibrillator at the slightest ache or pain in your arm or chest. It is one thing to be in tune with your body, but it is another thing entirely to be in constant fear of it.

Heart disease has run rampant through my mother's side of the family, claiming all but two of my grandfather's brothers and threatening his own life several times, as well. A heart attack nearly took my grandfather out of this world at about the same time I was being brought into it. I'm not sure how the genetics of heart disease work, but it may be a problem I, too, must consider in years to come. And if such an eventuality came to pass, I would hope that someone would pass a better piece of equipment along to me. Unfortunately, there are far too few viable organs available to accommodate those in need.

What will you gain by taking your organs with you? Religions that place any spiritual substance in the flesh are few and far between; in fact, every organized religion supports and encourages organ donation. Both Catholicism and Protestantism consider organ donation to be an act of Christian charity comparable to the sacrifici-

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cial act of Christ himself. Judaism asserts that if it is possible to save a life by donating an organ, it is obligatory to do so. Donating one's organs accomplishes a certain degree of immortality in itself. This conception of immortality might not be particularly participatory in nature, but those atheists among us will have to take what they can get. And when the rest of us achieve a more conventional form of immortality, saving a life must be a nice thing to have on the résumé.

Misconceptions abound concerning the prac-

tice of organ donation.

Donor bodies are never mutilated during the extraction process; organ

removal is performed as delicately as any surgical procedure, and the procedure is never charged to the donor's family. Many people fear that if a doctor is aware of their status as an organ donor, that doctor will not attempt to save their lives "at all costs." The truth is that the organ removal team is not even notified until all life-saving efforts have been exhausted.

Becoming an organ donor can be as easy as mentioning your assent to family members, or as complicated as signing the back of your driver's license in the presence of a witness. When was the last time saving a life was as easy as carrying around a piece of paper with a couple of signatures on it?

Nobody wants to think about death - there are, after all, more important things to think about at this point in life. If you prefer not to think about your own relatively reliable mortality, consider instead the mortality of someone in need.

Please, have a heart.

Billionaire benefactors could prevent poverty

Bill Gates' fortune would feed millions



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“Don't tell me capitalism is great. I can't buy that theory with what most of the labor force makes.”

Call me a socialist or even a raging communist, but I think serious change is needed to fix the disgusting distribution of wealth in the United States.

Forbes magazine recently published its annual list of the United States' 400 richest people. Topping the list, to no surprise, is software tycoon Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp. Since last year's list, he has reportedly doubled his net worth and is now estimated to be worth \$39.8 billion. Following him on the list are Warren Buffet, \$21 billion; Paul Allen, \$17 billion; Lawrence Ellison, \$9.2 billion; and Gordon Moore, at the bottom of the top five at \$8.8 billion.

Wow, Gates' \$39.8 billion is fun to say. It's an even bigger riot to look at this gargantuan number when you take it out of Associated Press writing style. Let us examine it: \$39,800,000,000. Most calculators can't even handle a number with this many zeros.

So what can you do with \$39.8 billion? Well, if you are Gates then you use it to turn that number into \$80 billion for next year's Forbes list. But then what? Up to \$160 billion the following year? Then \$320 billion?

Now I have this crazy metaphor on the theory of money. Let's pretend that the world economy is really a small group of guys huddled around a poker table, smoking cigars and gambling a little pocket cash. Bill comes to the table with \$39.8 billion; four of my closest friends and I each come with our fortunes, \$10,000 each (wishful thinking). That brings the total amount of wealth to the poker table to \$39,800,050,000 (39.8B + 50K). There is no way Bill could be beat without an act from Congress. Quicker than life, my friends and I would have no money left. The only way around it is if we were to break either the rules or Bill's neck. But the two points to this scenario are:

1) There is no way for Bill to lose his money to my friends and me when he has so much to work with, even if I brought 1,000 of my closest friends to the poker table in a combined effort.

2) There is a specific amount of wealth at the table as there is a specific amount of wealth to the global economy. In other words, if Bill Gates doubles his money for next year's Forbes 400, then somebody, actually a large group of somebodies, is out \$39.8 billion.

So, if I haven't lost you yet, what I'm trying to set up is a basis for showing that the American capitalist system doesn't allow for a fair game between the haves and the have-nots. Is

there something that can be done about this? I've seen numbers that say America's wealthiest 1 percent have an equal share of the wealth that the bottom 93 percent of Americans do. I admit I can't find the source of this statistic, but let's just see what effect Bill's billions would have on a large population of have-nots that I can find a source for.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, there are more than 268 million U.S. citizens today, and roughly 14.4 million of them are considered very poor (those whose total income was less than one-half of their poverty threshold). If Gates wanted, he could give every single man, woman and child living in that category a personal check for almost \$3,000. A \$15,000 boost would do more than wonders for a poor family of five.

And this is from Gates' wealth alone! The wealth of only the 10 richest Americans adds up to a whopping \$131.3 billion! If somebody were convince these men that they should all give their money to the poor, 14.4 million people could receive checks for over \$9000 each, granting a family of five \$45,000 to spend on adequate food, housing and health care.

Let's be realistic, why should a single man have the buying power to purchase a South American country when his neighbor can't even put food on his family's table? Don't tell me capitalism is great. I can't buy that theory with what most of the labor force makes. It's pretty plain and simple to see that if everybody on the Forbes 400 list were to spontaneously combust and leave their money to charity, this country would be void of poverty.

But since they are not going to vanish into thin air, let's deal with the grossly wealthy in a more realistic way. Tax the hell out of them. I don't see any reason why somebody should be able to make more than \$100 million after taxes. Within reason, and with \$100 million a year, a person could do anything he or she wanted. Sure, it isn't enough to buy everything, but who needs everything when some people have close to nothing?

Many would argue that people like Bill Gates deserve the money because of their impact on society. Sure, everybody who has used a computer has also used his software, but so what? Since Gates "earned" his first billion, have the rates of crime, hunger, poverty, drug use, violence, unemployment, teenage sex, obesity, cheating on exams or guys forgetting their wedding anniversaries gone down? No, not really. In fact, the world really isn't that much better of a place at all because of Bill Gates. Sure, we have cool computers with Microsoft Windows 95, but once again, so what? If I had neither, I would pick food on my plate over a snazzy software package any day.

