

**NORTHWEST news**

**R**ichard Moody has a strong heart. Looking at his trim figure and clear gaze, you wouldn't suspect that the organ this 56-year-old gay man carries in his chest wasn't originally his.

It belonged to a 19-year-old college student from Portland who died after a car accident in the Columbia Gorge about seven years ago. But her tragedy has meant life to five men who received her organs, including Moody, who after two heart attacks and bypass surgery was looking at either getting a new heart or dying.

Today, he can look back with some perspective on how life has changed since then. And he likes what he sees. "Unless I sit down and talk to someone about it—like now—I rarely think about it anymore."

Fortunately, he's been able to tolerate the powerful medications he must take to prevent his immune system from rejecting the heart. He also reports—so far—no major adverse health setbacks with the new organ.

The concept of transplantation is not unfamiliar these days, but being a recipient is a more existential matter. As Moody explains it, his heart now feels like his own, but initially it felt weird having another person's organ beating in his chest—especially someone he didn't know.

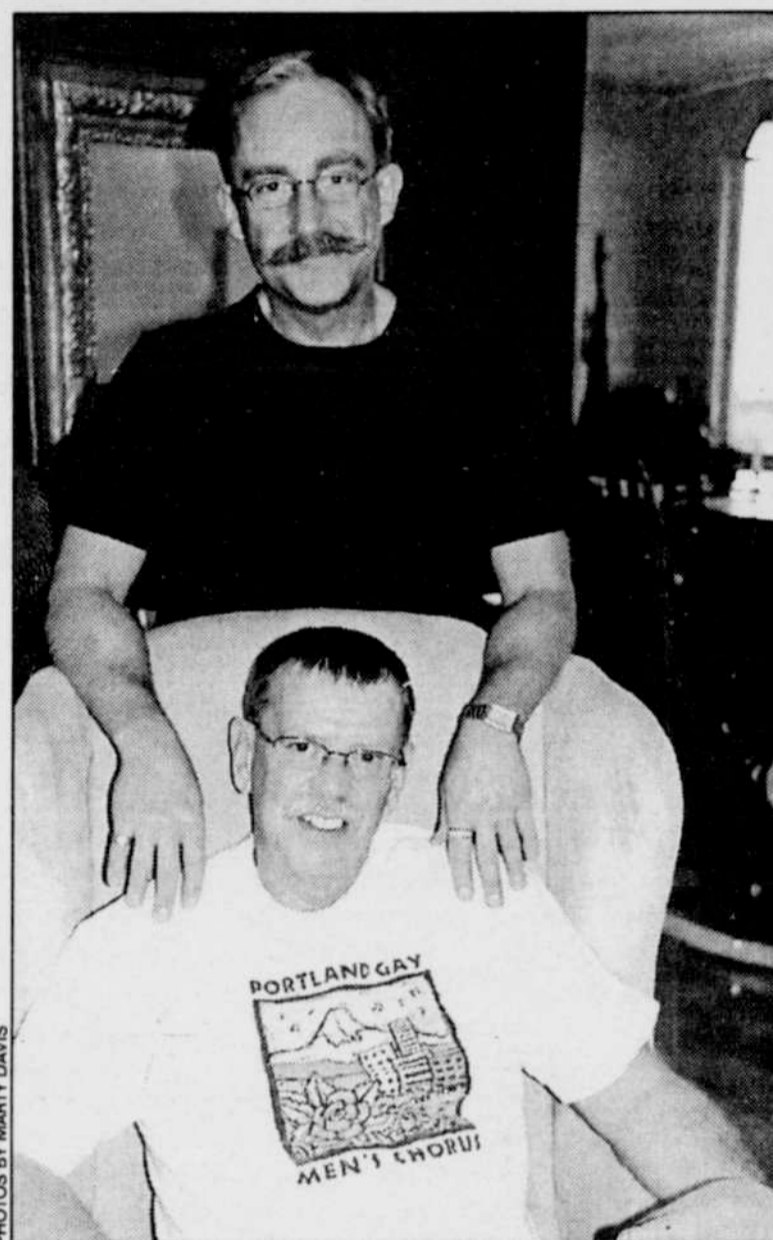
The mystery ended when a woman named Janet Schulze spoke about her donor daughter at a National Kidney Foundation meeting he attended. He put two and two together because the time of Jennifer's death corresponded with his implant surgery. Both Schulze and Moody coincidentally had prepared panels for a huge AIDS quilt to honor their donors.

She describes her introduction to him that day as "quite by accident and amazing." She realizes it took great courage on his part to walk up to her and identify himself without any formal intermediaries.

"We've had the most wonderful relationship," Schulze says. "It is what Richard has done with her heart. I don't think of her being alive, but in some ways, he's returned her gift of life. I think he's helped us to get through all of this."

Schulze marvels at what Moody has accomplished with his new heart. "In four or five years, he's done the Hood to Coast run, he throws pots, weaves, travels to Europe."

Moody sometimes teams with Schulze to speak to schools and organizations on behalf of organ donation. "I would like people to under-



**Richard Moody (seated, with partner Carl Caspersen) hasn't slowed down despite his heart transplant**

stand donor programs," she says. "There is a lot of healing involved. When I think of my daughter I'm really sad, but I can think of Richard and see something good that has come out of it."

Schulze notes almost 80,000 U.S. citizens are waiting for organ transplantation. "If everybody would talk about it, if people let loved ones know they want to donate if anything happens to them, that list would come down," she says.

Moody is a member of the National Kidney Foundation, a strong advocate of organ donation. He gravitated to the organization particularly because of its emphasis on wellness and a holistic approach to life in the aftermath of the transplant experience.

He has participated in the annual Hood to Coast walk with the foundation's team, the Transplant Trotters. He says their goal is "to show our transplants haven't slowed us down."

He also has competed in the U.S. Transplant Games, a quasi-Olympics bringing together organ recipients and their families from throughout the nation. He says the event provides enormous psychological gratification to people who have become active

# BRAVE HEART

**Gay transplant recipient leads active, creative life**

by Jack Turteltaub

and healthy after a major life trauma.

Moody attributes much of his tranquillity and personal satisfaction to his 1999 retirement from a 20-year career teaching elementary school kids in Tigard. "It's one of the best things I've ever done," he says. "I'm really doing what I want to do."

He remains creative and physically active. He teaches art to elementary school children in a private afternoon program.

He also has a kiln at home and makes clay pots. The Graystone Gallery at 3279 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd. is exhibiting some of his work.

Moody also sings with the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. He describes the organization's importance to his life, particularly to his coming-out process.

When he first joined in 1981, he was openly gay in his private life but fearful of publicly coming out because of possible repercussions at the school where he was teaching. In fact, he says some parents actually took their kids out of his class because they suspected he was queer.

Back in those days, it was customary for many PGMC members to ask that they not be listed in the program for fear that employers or others would find out they were gay. But one day Moody decided he wasn't going to hide, and he let his name be printed.

He dropped out of the chorus when his heart problems worsened in the 1990s but rejoined after he retired. Although he hasn't made his transplant widely known to his fellow singers, members and some people

know what he's been through.

Another important support for Moody in the past few years has been First Congregational Church. He has a strong spiritual sense, which he returned to years after he gave up believing as a teen-ager. "The church I belonged to didn't accept that I was gay."

After "almost 40 years outside a church," he attended a PGMC concert at First Congregational a couple of years ago. He liked the tolerant atmosphere and decided to become more involved.

He feels he has "returned to a spiritual base" that is now significant in his life, a foundation that includes the belief in a universal force that has guided him through some of his darker moments. Although the congregation is mostly straight, he describes the church as "very accepting" of sexual minorities and says

a few members are bi and trans.

Moody also is the president of Garden Friends, a club for gay men that holds monthly potlucks and sponsors gardening programs. Some members have traveled together to visit famous gardens in other countries.

Moody lives in the Portland area with his partner of six years, fellow teacher Carl Caspersen, who works in Battleground, Wash. The couple love to travel and tend a big garden with ponds and paths covering about an acre of land.

Moody is thankful to the donor who gave him a new lease on life, to his partner and to his extended family and friends, including people in the organizations that have allowed him to give back so much. This multifaceted man unintentionally has become a kind of role model for people—gay and straight—facing life-changing health problems. **J**

The NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION may be reached at 503-963-5364 or at the Internet site [kidneyorwa.org](http://kidneyorwa.org).

JACK TURTELTAUB is a Portland free-lance writer, coach and psychologist. He may be reached at [turtelta@e-z.net](mailto:turtelta@e-z.net).



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