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# BLACK HISTORY MONTH



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'City of Roses'



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PHOTO BY OLIVIA OLIVIA/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Belinda Olive-Beltran of Portland holds a picture of her late brother, Bobby Olive, who died in 1985. Thirty years ago, his heart was used in the first Oregon heart transplant. The family is hosting a fundraiser in celebration of Black History Month to help others with lifesaving medical transplants.

## Family's Lifetime Bond

### First heart transplant was Black History moment

BY OLIVIA OLIVIA  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Every day across the United States and here in Oregon, someone needs a heart transplant. The process can be complicated, but at least half of those offered a new heart manage to survive an extra 10 years. The lifesaving medical procedure has improved vastly in the past 30 years, but here in Oregon all of that is due in some part to the donation of one young black man's heart back in 1985.

Bobby Olive's heart brought more than just new

life to its recipient. His heart went to Wesley D. Merrill, a 44-year-old white man from Battle Ground, Washington. From then on, two families were suddenly united in a lifelong bond that bridged racial differences.

Olive's heart gave Merrill an extra five years with his loved ones, but as the donor of Oregon's first heart transplant, it also started a new era for what was possible in preserving life.

As one family mourned the death of their young son, another celebrated the survival of their father.

Olive's mother, Martha Van Arsdale, struggled with mixed feelings for years, mourning her son's death but appreciating that his heart gave life to another person.

Olive's sister, Belinda Olive-Beltran, says her brother lost his life in a shooting while he was committing an apartment burglary.

"It was devastating to see our brother die so young," she says, describing how he had just been released from prison and had a job lined up to start the same week, ready to begin a new chapter of his

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