

BELANGER, Joe (cont)

and bottlefuls of prescription pills.

At its best the ailment made Belanger sleep 15 hours daily. At its worst, Belanger experienced extreme moodiness described tongue-in-cheek as 10 times more severe than a woman with pre-menstrual syndrome.

In the 12 years preceding Belanger's transplant, his liver gradually self-destructed. And so did his life.

He was too tired to hold a job. And he was afraid. He was afraid to love for fear of he'd only hurt those who cared.

But during one of his countless hospital visits, Belanger met a man, like himself, whose life hung on a thread. The man was married with kids. And he told Belanger he wouldn't change his life for anyone else's.

That chance meeting changed Belanger's life. Soon after he met a woman named Annette, whom he would later marry.

Unfortunately, his marriage was not meant to be. The disease, along with its side effects, took their toll and the couple split.

His liver disease got progressively worse. Belanger knew he wouldn't live much longer.

But last November 30 Belanger got the call which would save his life.

"Everything really happened fast, I hardly had time to think about things," he said. The eight-hour operation was a success. Belanger owes his survival to increases in transplant technology.

Success rates have improved since 1980. Transplants are almost commonplace.

Unfortunately, medical technology has outpaced organ donation.

Only about 200 organs were donated in Ontario last year, said Multiple Organ and Retrieval Exchange spokesman Pat Sherbin. As of December 738 people in Canada were awaiting transplants. Thirty-five of those had liver disease.

Potential donor recipients are put on a waiting list. Only those in dire need receive the precious organs.

Said Sherbin: "There's still a critical shortage of organs. We have to realize that organs give someone else life."

Intell Feb 13/92