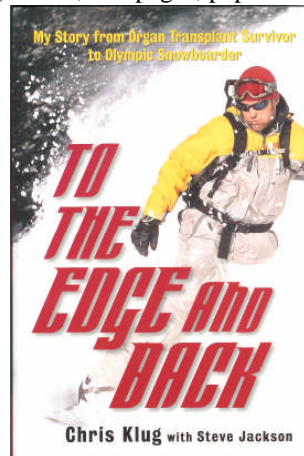


To the edge and Back

My Story from Organ Transplant Survivor to Olympic Snowboarder

Written by Chris Klug with Steve Jackson

Published by Carroll & Graf
(\$14.95, 328 pages, paperback)



Book Review by Jim Gleason

(Bio: Jim received his heart transplant in Oct. '94 and is an accomplished public speaker promoting organ donor awareness as well as author of his own book, **A Gift from the Heart**)

So what can a patient do after a life saving organ transplant? This amazing story of Chris Klug's return to Olympic level athletic competition after his liver transplant in 2000 serves as an inspiration to all of us that we can do just about anything we set our minds to. During his young life devoting everything he has to a love of the then new sport of snowboarding, Chris had come to know the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" and with that, the injuries and pains that come with such a dangerous sport. But even those come backs were only a prelude for the effort it would take to come back after the lengthy battle with liver disease that led to the long wait and extensive recovery from such devastating surgery. Those who have survived similar transplant surgery to get back to "normal" living will come to realize that the Chris' experience is a totally different level of rehabilitation and recovery, one that gives testament to what the human body can do with the determination and devotion that youthful dedication to a dream and an ideal can produce.

If you, like myself, know nothing about the sport of snowboarding, you will learn a lot from this reading, probably more than you ever wanted to know. But in following his story from youth to present day standing on the world Olympic stage accepting the first medal ever won by an organ transplant recipient, such detail gives us perspective to fully appreciate the whole journey, a journey that take him from youthful enthusiasm to professional athletic excellence, only to loose it all to the life threatening liver disease. Applying his determination and skills to the post transplant recovery process, overcoming emotional upsets and the many side effects of the medications we all know only too well,

Chris rebuilds his body against all odds and advice, to an even higher level of performance.

This book uses an interesting style that often provides a candid view from others in Chris' life. From such insights we get a picture of this youthful athlete as he deals with all the trials and resultant outbursts that only youth can express in those growing years. Imagine how you would feel if after devoting your entire life to the Olympic dream with its many years of training and pain, only to have it all dashed with the failing liver that threatens to not only destroy that dream, but threaten your very life. Fellow patients will recognize themselves in this story, and hopefully will read past the physical and emotional valleys to share in the inspiring outcome as he comes back to not only win, but to take center stage to tell the world "that transplantation works" in a way that everyone understands.

For those who are out there sharing stories of transplant success to convince others to "make a decision to be an organ donor (and tell their families...)," this Olympic image is a strong support that can be connected to our own story in making the point clear. Who will ever know how many of those who follow in our steps awaiting their own life saving transplant will benefit from the increased organ donations that result from this highly visible and vibrant message.

Whether at the Olympic Games receiving his medal, or at the 2004 US Transplant Games presenting donor families with medals honoring their loved ones, or the many other ways that Chris supports organ donation, it is easy to share the excitement he brings while helping to make a difference in this transplant world in which we participate together as one big family.

One more final thought to take away from this reading. As Chris deals with the shock of Walter Payton's death, his athletic idol, to the same liver disease Chris himself is facing, he begins to think of his "liver thing" in a motivational way and shares: "Every season, every race, every wave, every snow covered hill – hell, every turn – seemed more precious than the last, and I didn't want to waste any of it. It was back to: ***Enjoy the moment and the people around you, because you never know when it will be your last game together.***" Reading this book just may put your own life challenges into a different perspective as well as giving you the inspiration to make your own life choices in light of such examples in a more empowering way. Just maybe, you will find yourself motivated to come out to the next US Transplant Games to claim your own medal which just might be presented to you there by this Olympic medalist transplant recipient, Chris Klug. Such dreams really do come true. Just ask some of those who lived this dream with Chris at the 2004 Games! As one who was there in Minnesota, let me assure you this young man is even better in person than in this book, and that's saying a lot!