

**Mayo Clinic News Network**

**Title: Transplant Saves Last Surviving Brother / Date: April 2015**

Intro: A heart transplant has spared a Michigan man from the fate that took the lives of all of his brothers. It's been a long journey for Ernie Balcueva, but he has a bright future ahead once again. Here's Dennis Douda for the Mayo Clinic News Network.

**Video**

**Audio**

<b>Estimated Total running time [5:00]</b>	<b>/// NATS</b>
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>“I will miss this place. I’ve got a lot of friends here now.”</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Ernie Balcueva’s packing up, ready to say good-bye to what’s been his home-away-from-home for 10-months. The Gift of Life Transplant House offers a quiet sanctuary to Mayo Clinic patients going through a variety of organ, stem cell or bone marrow transplants, often life-saving procedures, which was definitely the case for Ernie.
<b>Dr. Brooks Edwards Director, Mayo Clinic Transplant Center</b>	<b>“The reality is that Ernie is quite sick. He needs medication to support his heart and to support his overall circulation.”</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Ernie’s extended stay at Mayo Clinic was actually his second trip to Minnesota to undergo life-saving heart transplants.
<b>Dr. Brooks Edwrads speaking</b>	<b>“So, Ernie underwent a transplant here at Mayo Clinic 15 years ago.”</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Cardiologist Dr. Brooks Edwards is director of Mayo Clinic’s Transplant Program. He says Ernie’s first transplant allowed him to defy a rare congenital heart condition... a condition that had claimed the lives of all 4 of his brothers. Abnormally developed heart muscle caused brothers Eddie and Brad to die as children, less than 2-years apart. Brothers Randy and Rick died as young men. Then, when Ernie’s replacement heart started to fail, his father feared he could lose his last son, a near certainty if Ernie could not get another transplant in time.
<b>Eddie Balcueva Ernie’s Father</b>	<b>“Pretty hard to think that they gave us only 17% chance of getting a match.”</b>
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>“That’s not too bad then (laughs)”</b>

<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	In spite of his optimistic demeanor and the comical collection of boxer shorts friends sent to decorate his hospital room and keep his spirits up, Ernie's situation was becoming more serious each passing day. With his heart now beating at less than half its normal strength and severe disease in his heart arteries, Ernie was admitted to the hospital to stay.
<b>C.G. Dr. Richard Daly Mayo Clinic Transplant Surgeon</b>	<b>"And unfortunately, with the lack of donors, we always have patients waiting in the hospital, and nowadays, almost all of them wait at least many weeks and very often many months."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	When Ernie's turn finally came, he had been hospitalized for seven months. No wonder there was a celebration in the middle of the night, when news arrived that a suitable match had been found and a donor heart was indeed on the way. By now, Ernie says, he'd grown very close to Mayo Clinic's transplant team, who were just as thrilled about his opportunity as he was.
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"It really helped that I was here. That I have the nurses that I had, and I've had the same doctors, for 15-16 years now."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	So, with a full contingent of supporters cheering him on, Ernie crossed the finish line of his marathon wait.
<b>Medical staff speaking</b>	<b>"Go Ernie! Practice for your marathon."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Now it was time for a sprint. Although it was clear, everyone back on Ernie's floor at the transplant wing would breathe a sigh of relief once they got word that all went well.
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"Good luck. See you in a couple days. See you tomorrow."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	After a final blessing from his mother...
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"See you in a couple hours. Go get some rest."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	... and one more reassuring word from a father to his last surviving son...
<b>/// NATS Kiss/hug from Dennis Douda speaking</b>	<b>/// NATS dad pats arm &amp; kisses him</b> Ernie headed back into the operating room, where Transplant Surgeon Richard Daly would remove the now worn-out heart that Dr. Daly himself had placed in Ernie's chest 15 years earlier. The timing of each step of the operation has to be carefully orchestrated; tracking

	<p>the exact location of the donor heart in transit, waiting until the last possible moment to reroute the blood flowing through Ernie's body to a heart-lung bypass machine, and finally removing the heart that had served Ernie for as long as it was physically able.</p> <p>When the donor heart arrives, anticipation soars for Dr. Daly and the team. It's their first chance to assess the size and condition of this gift, which they hope will restore Ernie's health.</p>
<b>Dr. Richard Daly speaking</b>	<b>"Oh, it's a good heart."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	A gift in the deepest sense of the word, Ernie would later recall, knowing that his family's gain that night, came at the expense of another family's loss.
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"It would be very nice to meet somebody from that family to let them know that I really appreciate what they did during a difficult time."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Six weeks later Ernie's gratitude continued to grow, right along with his strength. He's determined to fulfill his part of the bargain and condition his new heart to its fullest potential.
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"It's a lot of work, basically to get as much of a cardio workout as possible. And keep the heart working and make everything fit together and get my muscles back."</b>
<b>Dr. Brooks Edwards speaking</b>	<b>"Ernie's case is indeed dramatic, with 5 boys and all 5 of them affected by heart disease."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Because of their complicated conditions, 4 of the Balcueva brothers could not be saved. But, thanks to his transplant, one of Eddie's sons is going home.
<b>Eddie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"I'm just so happy about it. And I'm sure those four boys had something to do with it. (laughs) I tell you."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	Ernie has a couple of sons of his own, that he can now fully look forward to catching up with.
<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>"Getting back together with the boys is probably the most important thing."</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	That's what getting well is about. Just as good medical care may come in many forms, healing may touch many lives. And Ernie's not the only one going home with a renewed heart.

<b>Ernie Balcueva speaking</b>	<b>“It’ll be nice to get back and feel somewhat normal, but at the same time be thankful for everything and everybody out here that’s helped take care of everything.”</b>
<b>Dennis Douda speaking</b>	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I’m Dennis Douda.

**Anchor tag:** Ernie’s two sons do not seem to have inherited the heart condition, called non-compaction cardiomyopathy. Naturally, Ernie does all he can to raise awareness for the need for more organ donors. Interestingly, he’s been checking that box on his driver’s license since way back at age 16.

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