

## HOW DENISE DARVALL LAUNCHED THE HEART TRANSPLANT ERA

Late on a Saturday afternoon just a year ago — on Dec. 2, 1967 — an ambulance raced with sirens wailing up the hill to Cape Town's huge, sprawling Groote Schuur Hospital.

Inside lay Denise Darvall, a pretty, 25-year-old brunette, with severe head injuries suffered when a car knocked her and her mother down in a nearby street. Mrs. Darvall was dead. Denise was dying.

To the overworked doctors and nurses on duty in "Casualty," it seemed just another tragedy in the endless harvest of fatal weekend accidents.

But the death of Denise Darvall was to launch mankind on one of its greatest medical adventures.

The doctors knew nothing could be done for the dying young woman. They took

her father, Edward Darvall, to a waiting room and put to him a blunt but gentle request:

"There is nothing more than can be done for your daughter," he was told. "You can do us, and humanity, a great favor by allowing us to transplant your daughter's heart into a dying man."

Sobbing, the father agreed and "the year of the heart transplant" was about to begin.

The death-watch on Denise Darvall started. Elsewhere in the hospital Louis Washkansky, 55, was being made ready to become the subject of world's first heart transplant. From the moment a few hours later, when news of the operation was released, the names of Denise Darvall, surgeon Christian Neethling Barnard, and Washkansky

were to dominate the headlines of the world.

Washkansky's wife Ann said, "A miracle has taken place."

Every day brought new reports of Washkansky's progress. Two days after the operation all intravenous tubes had been removed and Washkansky was breathing without assistance and taking his first solid food. The first-X-ray pictures of his new heart were made and Barnard, said, "indications are that it is functioning properly."

Washkansky was still in an oxygen tent but this, Barnard explained, was to help to protect him against infection.

Washkansky's leg swelling — the result of his heart condition — went down considerably, and a diabetic sore on his heel was healing. He laughed and joked with the doctors and nurses attending him, and sent his love to his wife, who like all outsiders was still barred from seeing him to reduce the danger of infection.

The surgeon was still worried about rejection of the new heart, but by Dec. 6, when Denise Darvall was cremated, Barnard was confident enough to say, "if Washkansky maintains his present improvement I would be prepared to let him go home in three weeks and then treat him as a home patient."

On Dec. 7 Washkansky was wheeled out of his ward and taken to the hospital's radio therapy section. From behind the clear plastic walls of the oxygen tent, he waved cheerfully at passing nurses and doctors.

That night Washkansky coined a phrase that was to become famous. Dr. Bertie Bosman of the heart team took a sterilized microphone into the ward and asked Washkansky: "how do you feel about being such a famous man now?"

"I'm not famous," Washkansky replied not his usual cocky self for once. "It's the doctor that's famous — the man with the golden hands."

In the next few days Washkansky had his first face-to-

face press conference with a French doctor who was writing for the Paris newspaper *France-soir*, was visited several times by his wife (who said: "he's looking better than I've seen him look for two years") and was doing arm and leg exercises in bed.

On Dec. 9 he showed slight rejection signs — a small rise in his white blood corpuscle count. The doctors were concerned but not worried, saying this was to be expected and was, in fact, later and far milder than they had feared.

Dec. 14 saw Washkansky taking his first walk — slowly he made his way from his bed to an armchair on the verandah of his ward, where he sat down and enjoyed the warm summer sun. Doctors reported his diabetic

ulcer had healed completely, and there were no further signs of rejection.

Washkansky spent much of Dec. 16 sleeping quietly, ostensibly because he had been tired out by the previous day's activities. His wife happily outlined her plans for him when he was discharged from the hospital.

That evening, Barnard released some shocking news: Washkansky was ill. He had developed pneumonia in both lungs.

Washkansky lived for only 18 days but he became famous, not only because of his courage in volunteering to be a guinea-pig, but also because of the fighting spirit he showed. (*UPI Cape Town, South Africa*) — MC: 21-XII-68.