



KARIE HAMILTON/The Associated Press

Larry Levinson of Gig Harbor received a heart five years ago from Kris Kime, who died after being beaten in the Mardi Gras riots in Seattle. "I had a few days left," Levinson said. "My heart rate was running at about 15 to 20 percent." He's invited to the Saturday wedding of Kirsten Kime, Kris' sister.

In death, he gave them all life

A man killed in the 2001 Seattle Mardi Gras riots had his organs donated to those in need. Now his sister invites the recipients to her wedding.

BY ELIZABETH M. GILLESPIE
The Associated Press

As Larry Levinson watched news footage of the Mardi Gras riots in Seattle five years ago from his hospital bed, he got so mad that a nurse unplugged his television.

With a heart as weak as his, the Gig Harbor man didn't need the added stress. Little did he know that a 20-year-old man who died in the mayhem would end up saving his life.

If he hadn't gotten a transplanted heart from that young man, he probably wouldn't have lived to tell the story about the wedding he's going to this weekend.

On Saturday, Levinson will don a new suit and see Kris Kime's younger sister get married. All the other recipients of Kime's

organs that the family knows about are invited, too.

"There was no decision," said Kirsten Kime, 22. "To me ... it was just like inviting my brother."

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SCOTT COHEN/The Associated Press

Kirsten Kime shows a photo of her late brother, Kris, as she sits with her fiancé, Erin Gregg, and dogs at their Bellevue home.

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Levinson, 67, had been on the transplant list for years with cardiomyopathy, an illness that weakens the muscles of the heart. He was near death Feb. 27, 2001, as thousands of Mardi Gras celebrants packed into Seattle's Pioneer Square.

"I had a few days left," Levinson said from his home in Gig Harbor. "My heart rate was running at about 15 to 20 percent and I was having heart attacks, angina attacks."

As the party raged into the early hours of the next day, things got out of hand. Roving groups of young men beat people at random. Some wielded brass knuckles. Others swung skateboards like baseball bats.

Kris Kime was caught in the melee while trying to help a woman who'd been shoved to the ground, witnesses said. He fell, bashing his head after getting punched three times. He suffered massive head injuries and was declared brain dead less than a

day later.

The story was big enough that Levinson and others in line to get transplants put two and two together after doctors told them their new organs came from a 20-year-old man who had died of head trauma.

As Jessie Bettes was being prepped for her kidney transplant, her nurse said she had to go get the other kidney ready. Bettes later asked to meet the recipient of Kime's other kidney.

"That's when I met Ray," said Bettes, a 51-year-old technical specialist who works on Boeing Co. planes and spent a year on dialysis because of scleroderma, a tissue disease that can harden internal organs.

Ray Page, 63, has polycystic kidney disease, an incurable genetic disorder that can lead to kidney failure. He was on dialysis for about a month before he got his transplant.

He and Bettes sent the Kime family thank-you cards through the Living Legacy Foundation, a branch of LifeCenter Northwest Donor Network, a group based in Bellevue.

But Levinson and Kris Kime's mother "started having conversations with each other long before we even processed the paperwork," said Jill Steinhaus, executive director of the Living Legacy Foundation.

Page, Bettes, Levinson and two other members of the Kime's newly extended family - Ray Allison (who got Kris' lungs) and Martha French (who got Kris' pancreas) - have met for a handful of reunions during the past five years.

Though he can't make it to the wedding, Page, a Savemart salesman from East Wenatchee, sent Kirsten and her fiancé, Erin Gregg, some margarita money to spend on their honeymoon in Mexico.

Bettes hopes to go if she can fight off a bout of laryngitis. Levinson says he'll be there, for sure wearing his new suit - the first one he's bought in years.

"You need to understand: We're family. So it didn't surprise me at all that I got invited," Levinson said.