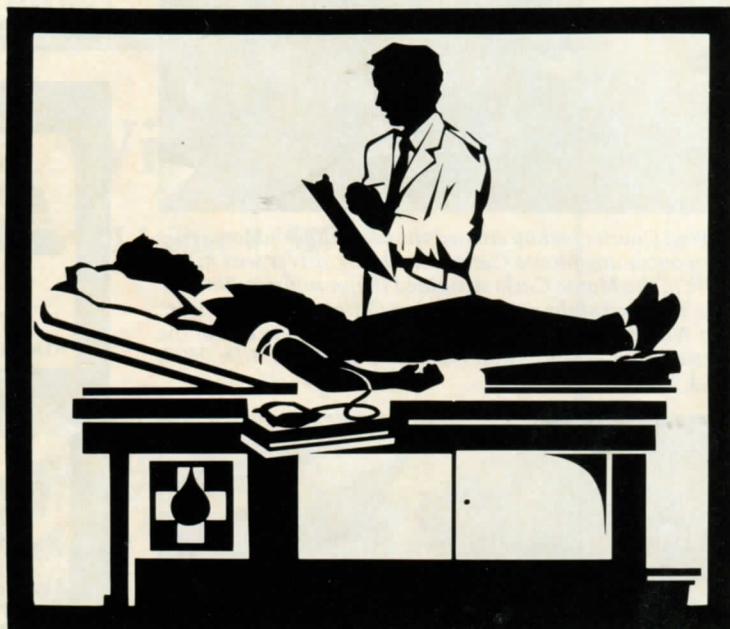


Giving the Gift



Only You Can Give

by Officer Phil Konstantin, I.D. 11643

Through one simple act, you can save somebody's life without risking your own, help victims of natural disasters and violent crimes, provide a form of insurance for yourself and your family, get an amazing number of services for absolutely no cost, and be treated like royalty the whole time. You can do all of this just by donating blood.

Giving blood is rewarding, risk-free and very simple. Following is the course the average blood donor travels. I've traveled it many times.

It was a Thursday morning when I walked into the offices of the San Diego Blood Bank. I was here three months ago, although a person can donate a pint of blood as often as every eight weeks.

I checked in at the front desk and filled out the standard medical history questionnaire which asked basic questions about my recent health. Have I used any drugs recently? Have I ever had any diseases such as AIDS, malaria, hepatitis or venereal diseases? Any of these problems are reasons to be disqualified as a blood donor, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently.

When my turn came, I sat down with a nurse who reviewed the questionnaire with me. She pricked my finger to check my iron level and then took my blood pressure and temperature. Since everything was within acceptable limits, I went over to the next station.

The next step was to consult

with the Records Department. Here they checked my "blood assurance" plan status. When one person donates blood, his/her immediate family is covered for blood transfusions for an entire year (some blood banks offer different plans).

Having donated 23 times before (today's pint would give me a total of 3 gallons donated), I qualified for a special program that allowed me to establish a blood assurance program for anyone that I wanted. So, with this donation, I established a program for a friend that is unable to donate blood. Other plans allow you to "replace" blood given to someone not covered by an assurance plan.

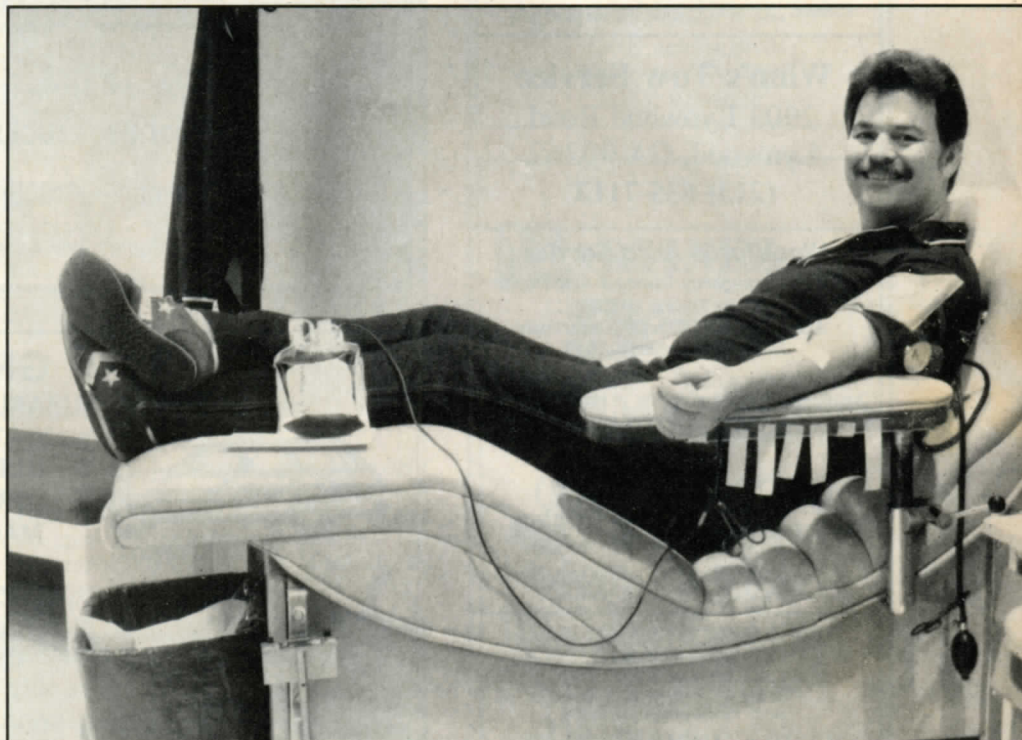
After finishing the paperwork, it was time to get down to the

actual donation. A nurse cleaned my arm thoroughly and attached me to a one-pint bag. In a little over 10 minutes the bag was full. To be absolutely honest, the sensation is slightly uncomfortable, but considering the results, it is well worth the minor discomfort. My one pint was then typed (O positive) and tested for various bloodborne diseases. If you do not know your blood type, this is an excellent way to find out what it is. In an emergency situation where seconds can mean the difference between life and death knowing your blood type (and carrying the card with you) could save your life.

When I was done, I then rested for 15 minutes in the lounge, where I was treated to juice and snacks and advised not to do any strenuous work for the next few hours (what a great excuse not to wash the car or mow the lawn). And that was all it took.

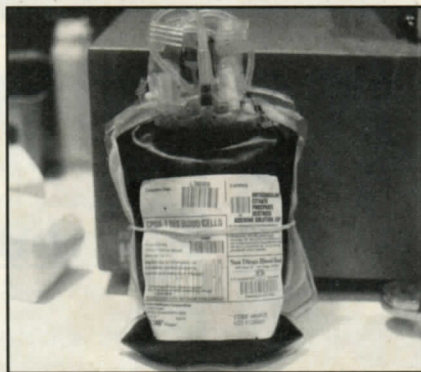
Though I was finished, my blood now had many places to go. It was first broken down into its basic component parts: red blood cells, plasma, white blood cells, platelets and cryoprecipitates.

The red blood cells might have gone to treat a little girl suffering from a life-threatening case of anemia. Red cells are also used to help victims of major trauma, such as gunshot wounds or traffic collisions. The plasma could have gone to help treat a person who needed improved blood clotting capabilities or who had lost a great deal of blood. A mother may have received my platelets to help her control bleeding caused by leukemia. The cryoprecipitates may have been used to help treat a young hemophiliac while the white blood cells are used to help fight some forms of infections. And, of course, whole blood is used in many medical procedures.



Officer Konstantin doesn't look too uncomfortable.

Nationally, 5 to 9 percent of the population has donated blood. One major reason that a regular supply of donors is needed is that blood (being organic) has a limited shelf life. Another reason for maintaining a supply of blood (as the pictures and stories in *The California Highway Patrolman* so graphically



depict) is the unpredictable nature of traumatic injuries due to collisions, criminal violence and other accidents and natural disasters.

Some needs for blood can be predicted, however, as in the area of elective surgery (you can even

donate blood to yourself in advance). Hip replacement surgery (usually in senior citizens) is the single largest user of donated blood, although approximately 5 percent of all hospitalized persons receive some blood products.

Currently, human donors are the only real suppliers of blood. Some advances have been made recently in the development of synthetic blood, but for now synthetic blood remains only in the experimental stages.

One of the major concerns voiced by potential donors is the fear that they might contract AIDS while donating blood. Nothing could be further from the truth! Every piece of equipment that comes in contact with the donor is disposed of after its one-time use. It is virtually impossible to get AIDS from donating blood.

If you have never given blood, try it one time. Take a friend with you and it may seem a little easier. Most of all, remember that only people can give other people this special gift. 