Why did you need a transplant?  
At the age of 18, I was diagnosed with a rare liver disease for which there is no cure. It is a disease which has long periods of remission, and after the initial flare-up at 18 I didn’t suffer any difficulties until I was 32 years old. Then, suddenly, it struck again. At the time, the doctors gave me only three or four months to live.

This must have been a horrible moment.  
This was painful to hear. He was less than 20 years old. The surgeon, who had operated on me during the night and was continuing with his normal day of work, immediately came to confirm that the operation was successful. This was a huge relief!

Did you think of your donor at that time?  
No, not really at that specific moment. I was in intensive care with some pain and discomfort. At such moments, you only think of yourself—you’re not very philosophical.

What was it like to leave the hospital?  
It was surprisingly a difficult transition. After one month in hospital, you end up getting used to the constant and reassuring medical supervision. Once at home, you may feel disoriented and vulnerable. It also takes time to recover psychologically. I quickly realised though that the remote supervision was just as attentive. My doctor even called late on a Saturday evening to suggest a slight modification to the immunosuppressive treatment!

Did you later begin to think about your donor?  
Definitely. A few months after the operation, I learnt that he was less than 20 years old. That was painful to hear. He didn’t have enough time to live a full life. I asked myself how it made sense that such a young person had to die. During several months, I really wanted to know who he was, and be able to express my gratitude to his family. I discussed it with a doctor who took the time to listen to me and told me something I have not forgotten: “Sometimes it is better to leave certain questions unanswered.” What I know for sure, is that my donor was a generous person, raised in a generous family, and that’s probably the most important thing there is to know.

What kind of sports did you do?  
Mountain climbing and cycling. Such sporting events included the Gran-Paradiso which is 4,000 metres high, or cycling from Brussels to Lisbon with a joint team of transplant patients, transplant coordinators, doctors, physiotherapists, and members of staff from Eurotransplant. Sport events are a wonderful way to convey a positive message about transplantation, and also to demonstrate the full rehabilitation of transplant recipients. A lot of people believe that after a transplantation there are not a lot of possibilities in your life anymore. But no! After a transplantation, you can lead again a normal, healthy life. There is even an Olympic snowboard champion who has had a liver transplant.

How do you feel when you look back at that time?  
I remain incredibly grateful for everyone involved in the long chain of solidarity that made my transplantation possible: the donor and his family, the doctors, the nurses, the transplant coordinators. You cannot call it a miracle because it techni- cally possible, but it feels like a miracle to me!

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Luxembourg-based liver transplant patient Étienne Bischops received a new liver 20 years ago; but he remembers it as if it were yesterday.