



# Rare Double Arm Transplant

*Will Lautzenheiser is reminded how great a hug can feel* for Former COM Lecturer

WILL LAUTZENHEISER, a former lecturer at the College of Communication who lost all four limbs following an infection three years ago, has been given two new arms by surgeons at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. In a 9-hour operation that involved 48 people, including 13 surgeons, doctors attached a left arm above the elbow and a right forearm.

Speaking at a news conference on November 25, Lautzenheiser (CAS'96, COM'07), whose arms came through the New England Organ Bank, said he wanted to honor the man "whose arms I have so gratefully received."

He said that while he had no feeling in his arms, he could sometimes move his right wrist and thumb. "To be able to hold my love in my arms is really the best," he said of his partner, Angel Gonzalez.

Lautzenheiser, a lecturer at COM from

fall 2007 to spring 2011, was stricken with a group A streptococcal infection and then developed a rare disease called necrotizing fasciitis just days after leaving Boston University for a teaching job at Montana State University.

He was treated at hospitals in Montana and Utah, where his necrotic arms and legs were amputated to save his life. He later spent four months in therapy at Boston Medical Center, followed by two months at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital.

Lautzenheiser is one of a few people in the United States to receive a double arm transplant. His surgeons, including Simon Talbot, director of upper extremity transplantation, Bohdan Pomahac, director of plastic surgery transplantation, and Matthew Carty, head of Brigham's lower extremity transplant program, have previously performed

Will Lautzenheiser is one of the few people in the United States to receive a bilateral arm transplant. The operation required 13 surgeons and took 9 hours.

**WEB EXTRA**  
Watch a video and an animation about Will Lautzenheiser's bilateral arm transplant at [bu.edu/bostonia](http://bu.edu/bostonia).



three bilateral hand transplants.

Talbot said the team considers Lautzenheiser a candidate for a bilateral leg transplant, although such an operation could not be performed in the next year.

"It will be at least a year, and maybe two, before I start thinking about another major surgery and another two years in rehab," said Lautzenheiser. "But it doesn't hurt to explore the possibility."

For the next two years, Lautzenheiser's days will involve hours of therapy to encourage blood flow and muscle growth. Carty said Lautzenheiser should begin to feel things with his hands in the coming months, and should gain movement over the next two years.

"This is not like turning on a switch," he said. "The nerves have to literally grow into the limb."

Also, like all transplant recipients, Lautzenheiser will take

powerful immunosuppressants for the rest of his life to keep his body from rejecting the new limbs. Talbot said there had already been one rejection, which was immediately halted with immunosuppressants. He said such episodes of rejection are common, and they are expected in every transplantation.

Lautzenheiser said he is elated with the results of the surgery. "I always felt that this was the right thing to do," he said.

"Despite potential drawbacks, like a lifetime on immunosuppressants, I've never felt that this is the wrong thing to do. This is the best way for me to regain functionality. The other thing I will gain is sensation. I will be able to feel. How enormous is that?"

"There is another reason this was the right thing to do," he said. "This is how medicine moves ahead. I believe in this stuff. This is how science works." AJ