



The Wonder Springs Chronicle

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Reflections: *Good Health*

Personally, in this period of reflection of these last nine years of writing the Chronicle, there is by far and away one thing that separates these writings into two episodes. That has been the improvement in my health since I had my aortic heart valve replaced in 2003. Essentially someone this old should not feel this good and have so few natural problems.

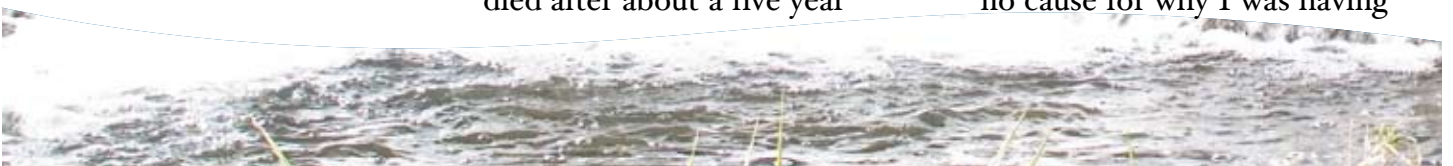
To set the stage, I have been physically active all my life and have felt really good all that time. While this was only church league softball as I got older, I was active in competitive athletics until I was into my late 40s and had completed various recreational runs after that time. I also trained and ran a marathon in 1988 and was working in the strenuous construction field of laying and sanding hardwood floors regularly until 2003. I used to say that I was physically stronger, than I was at 25.

On May 29, 2002, my mother died after about a five year

experience with Alzheimer's, so I spent most of the summer and fall traveling between Seattle and eastern Washington doing work on her estate. One Friday afternoon in early January 2003, it was almost a spring day in Seattle, so I decided to go to the park and shoot some baskets. My first strenuous exercise after the Christmas and New Year's holidays and I felt great.

Shortly after midnight of Saturday morning, I awoke with a shortness of breath. That had never happened before. I began to wonder if I was having a heart attack. Having this excellent health record I had never seriously considered what were the symptoms of a heart attack, so I got on the Internet to see just what those symptoms might be.

As I read the symptoms and checked them with what was happening in my own body it appeared that I was not having a heart attack, but I could find no cause for why I was having



trouble getting enough oxygen. Not having a heart attack, what was going on? I began to seriously worry. Finally about 2AM I called 911.

The fire truck and the aid car arrived and the paramedics hooked me up to their machines, gave me oxygen and checked and rechecked my vital signs. After about an hour, which seemed like eternity, they gave me the diagnosis. I was not having a heart attack, as far as they could tell there was absolutely nothing wrong with me.

Thus, not reassured about anything, they told me I should go to my doctor on Monday. There was no need to panic, things were fine.

Sure, don't panic, don't worry, be happy. That all sounds good, but I still had questions and absolutely no answers.

Monday I went to the doctor. Dr. Lee is a Japanese American from New England who likes to go fly fishing. He also likes family practice and working with people who really need help, so the local clinic is not in the most upscale neighborhood. After running some more tests, and taking an x ray he returned to tell me that the test were fine and the x ray was good. They were going to send some of the tests out to see if they turned up something, they would call me if need be. Just go home and resume a normal life.

More of the details of what happened to get me a new aortic valve are found in the Archive of early 2003. But at the time when Dr. Lee said the x ray was good, it left a question in my mind. What he meant by good was the x ray showed an enlarged aorta and they were sending it out to verify that preliminary reading. In late February 2003 I had my enlarged aorta replaced with a piece of Dacron tubing and my congenital defective aortic valve replace with what is known commonly by the term pig valve.

The enlarged aorta had been caused by very slow leakage of a defective heart valve that I had been born with and was not detected by any of the test I was given until the cardiologist discovered it while he was giving me my angiogram just before surgery.

Such birth defects, even in these days of advanced medicine, are normally discovered on

the autopsy table post mortem. But my life had been spared.

A couple of nights in the last week I have had dreams about playing football, American football. These are not general dreams but I am a defensive back for the University of Washington. Last night I made two interceptions, one on a ball tipped into the air and juggled, before making an amazing catch.

This morning I remembered something I had not thought about in a very long time. In church camp when I was in grade school, one of the counselors had us write on a post card what we wanted to do when we grew up. They would mail us that card later to remind us to follow that dream. I wrote down I wanted to be a professional football player.

In recollection I still remember receiving that card in the mail and thinking what an odd request, really what a stupid request.

I didn't have an illustrious football career in high school. Actually I didn't have really a football career at all. Just as I was beginning to really understand and play the game, I blew out a knee, with a broken cartilage. Back then that was pretty much a career ending injury.

When this happened I was playing offensive end and defensive back. In practice I caught a look in pass and was stopped by Terry Baxter, who left his feet, so his tackle only stood me up for our all star fullback and linebacker John Ball to hit me from the side, twisting my knee severely and ending my football career. What I had learned and really enjoyed about playing American football is it is much more fun to be a hitter, rather than the hittee.

Playing only flag and touch football after that, I really was a pretty good defensive back. It is cool to be able to watch the whole field and move to where the action is. It is also much more fun to be the inflictor of pain, rather than to be on the receiving end of said unpleasantry. In hindsight, the road to a football scholarship in college from a small high school is also much easier, especially in those days, playing in a winning program, rather than a losing basketball program.

In that previous football dream earlier this week, as a sophomore at the UW, I had just become the starting strong safety. But what I really remember

about the dream was that people thought of me more as a nice guy rather than a football star.

What all this rambling is about is the incredible life gift it is in serving the God who created the universe. In high school my choice of college was to go to the University of Washington to study fisheries. I really have not told anyone that, because the only way I would have been able to go to the University of Washington financially would have been on scholarship.

Furthermore, just saying that being this starting strong safety was in my potential, born with a defective heart valve, chances are pretty good that I would be dead now, rather than writing this article. So that poor tackle by Terry Baxter could have saved my life, for some better plan God had for me. I shall never know in this life, but one day I shall.

It is one thing to be involved in athletics and physical activity as a hobby and good exercise throughout your life. It is entirely different to do that as a job, especially if you attempt to do that job with a defective ticker valve.

I have never had my knee operated upon. As I recovered from that football injury, I really did not want to have an operation. In those days it was a real ordeal, not some arthroscopic thing they do routinely today. In those days you really might never recover completely, and you could be out of action for months. The doctor back then told me that these things never heal, that is impossible. I remember at the time telling God that He made it my knee, He should be able to fix it.

When I took my physical to go into the Army I told them about my bum right knee, they thought I was lying because they said my right knee seemed better and stronger than my left.

To finish up on the heart operation, when my mother died I was able to purchase health insurance for the first time since I had left corporate life. That operation cost just about eighty thousand dollars all covered by insurance. My portion, paid by cash I received from my mother's estate was about thirteen thousand.

The success rate for these types of operations is about ninety five percent. But if you are part of that five percent they don't patch you up and say go home. When you lay on that stainless steel gurney and the anesthesiologist tells you to count back from one hundred, your future lies entirely with the ability of the doctor and with God. In my case, through another one of those coincidences, I had one, if not the best cardiac surgeons in the world to do my operation. As for my God, He is the only one and for some reason He chose me to be His adopted son.

What an awesome gift, and what an awesome opportunity.

After my operation, I became a different person physically, even with a pig valve. Open heart surgery is not fun, but considering the alternative it is a definite positive learning experience, especially when you know that there really are only two different results, success or eternity. Only for the Christian is eternity something not to fear, but to look forward to, when the great questions of your life will receive answers.

Yesterday on my short walk to the highway Jim Bannon, my cousin, just happened to be driving by. When you calculate the odds of that happening by any means it approaches infinity. Furthermore that is the second time that has happened since I have been up here. Jim lives in Arden about 30 miles away, but the only reason to drive along this highway is to go to a timber cruising job in Okanogan county. At that very time I have to be just approaching the highway off our dirt road.

Jim is a few years older than I am, but he said he spent most of the winter laid up with a bad knee and that he would eventually have to have it replaced with an artificial one. I have no problem with my knee, never have, virtually since the time I told the Lord that He made it He can fix it.

He also fixed my heart valve, by more conventional means. He could have done that miraculously also, but then I would have known that I was not well put together at the beginning and pointedly realized that this is a fallen world in which we live. Someday soon it will be replaced with one where congenital birth defects and aging do not exist. How I long for that time.

In the meantime, my bragging before my surgery about feeling as good as I did when I was twenty five, has become completely undefined. In the early 1980s I bought a leather belt. At that time I used it varying between the last two tightest notches. Early this week I again reached that tightest notch.

After my surgery my whole body changed, and I also became more sedentary, just because of the nature of life. For a period of time I grew out to the largest hole in the belt, but now I am down again to what I have weighed for the period of my life since I have filled out physically.

So reflecting on the way forward, God programs into our bodies a governor that slows us down as we age, I suppose that is so we don't needlessly break something that cannot be fixed in this world, but also to take the time to enjoy more the journey, instead of being in such a rush to get somewhere that really in the big picture doesn't mean all that much.

The future is in God's hands, He has prepared me for such a time as this. This period of reflection will give a context to what I assume He will soon reveal.