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# And now they call me Lazarus



Dedicated to Doctor Lossing and his team of Humble Healers:

*“This may be the finest group of its kind in the universe.”*

Around mid-October 2007, I showed up at St. Mike’s under Dr. Lossing’s direction, specifically to amputate my left leg (below the knee). The initial amputation was not successful, and before I could get my bearings, I was signing papers giving permission to cut above the knee. When I came to after the operation, I was devastated to learn the leg was gone half way between the knee and the hip. In consultation with the doctors, I soon learned that also meant a prosthesis was not possible, due to the heavy strain it would place on the heart.

But let’s back up a bit. Dr. Lossing had sent me to Dr.

Wayne Evans at Toronto General Hospital and the head of the Hyperbaric Clinic. After several extended interviews with Dr. Evans, I was declared an ideal candidate for hyperbaric treatment (total oxygen immersion in five two-hour treatments over 6 weeks), but he wanted a heart test called an echogram before he would proceed with the treatment. I had that test at Toronto General Hospital on a Tuesday. The following Friday I showed up at the Hyperbaric Clinic, and Dr. Evans was there waiting for me. I looked him square in the eye and I said, “You’re not putting me in the chamber.” He said, “How did you know?” and I said “I read it in your face.” He then sent me to a custom shoe builder, “Ismail,” at 909 Danforth Ave., who built me a

rocker shoe to take the pressure off the toes where two ulcers were thriving. It seemed to help for a while but then stopped. Meanwhile, a large shin ulcer completely healed (with 3-a week nursing care).

But back to St. Mike’s. There were many highs and lows during my St. Mike’s stay, as my own moods swung between mild depression and deep despondency. Once, after a 15-minute snooze on full oxygen, I woke up gasping for air. Bertha compared the condition to a sump pump trying to handle gushes of water, and the small motor in my heart couldn’t handle the fluids. I was then convinced my life was over and I spoke individually with each family member, who all seemed to understand, without undue emotion. I told the medics to

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leave me alone and not try anything fancy. They suspected I may have had heart attacks on consecutive days. Then the family convinced me to let them try one last “concoction” (a mixture of the drugs spiroholactone, digoxin, captopril and lasix) to deal with the heart problem. It worked overnight. Then the kidneys showed signs of ceasing to function. I was talked into a “one-shot” dialysis treatment to kick-start the kidneys. This was to occur overnight. I awoke at 8 a.m. wondering if they could have done the dialysis without my knowing. I could see fluids in the bag and wondered out loud what was happening. The nurse assured me the kidneys were working – for some still-unexplained reason, no dialysis was ever necessary. Later that morning, Dr. Lossing (who is also a professor at the University of Toronto) showed up by himself, without his usual “entourage”. He later said to me, “There you were – sitting straight up in the bed and two thumbs up. That’s what I always tell my students: do your work to the very best of your ability and then you have to be humble. I cite your case as a classic example. You know my people had all said their goodbyes to you. One nurse even shed a tear or two. We thought you were gone for

sure!” It was the next morning that Tommy started to call me “Lazarus”. On my last visit to Dr. Lossing he said that no further appointments are required unless my “good” leg acts up.

I’ve just completed 7 weeks of rehab at Providence Health Centre, where I learned to manipulate a power wheelchair and strengthen my upper body muscles, which facilitates the transfer from the chair to bed, chair to toilet, chair to La-Z-Boy, etc. So I’m reasonably self-sufficient indoors, and to go downtown I can negotiate in and out of Tom’s Echo with relative ease.

On January 30th we went to St. Mike’s to a heart clinic and everything went right on schedule. ECG, blood work, doctor’s examination. We had time to spare and decided to go to the Cardiovascular Unit on Bond Street where I had spent many weeks watching the birds at the Metropolitan United Church Towers. As we entered the long hallway, we spotted Blossom, Bertha, and a couple of others from Dr. Lossing’s team. Soon the numbers swelled to about 12 and we completely blocked the hallway. I think all the people that had participated in my recovery struggle showed up. It was like Old Home Week happening spontaneously. It couldn’t have

been better if they had planned it for weeks. I regaled them for about 15 minutes with some of the humorous incidents of my recovery. It was a magical moment!

*Note: I would be remiss if I didn’t make a special mention and thanks to Doctor Graham, the great Irish surgeon who performed the operation and monitored my progress diligently every day. And a special thanks to Bertha, the Nurse practitioner, who made sure I received the best of care and always kept the family and myself up to date on all developments. And of course, to the social worker, Blossom, who encouraged me to do this write-up in the first place.*

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