

## **My Heart is not in Heaven – Thank God**

On Monday, March 31, 2003, I was out hauling large bags of leaves to the curb for the first pickup of yard waste for the season. I started having some chest pains in my entire chest, from my shoulder down through my stomach. The discomfort was quite extensive but not real painful. After I finished hauling about six bags to the curb and going inside the house the pain went away. The next day I was out raking leaves, cleaning out the bushes in the front of the house, and had similar pain but mostly in the center of my chest. I took some breaks and continued to work in the back yard cleaning leaves from under the porch, deck and periwinkle. Mary Anne said the pain could be a sign of a heart attack and when I said I had some in my arm she said we should go to have it checked out. I left the rake in the back yard and checked out the signs of a heart attack on the internet. I then decided it would be a good idea to go to the emergency room. We left for the hospital about 1:30. Mary Anne drove.

Once in the Unity hospital, they checked me in very quickly. They soon had me in a bed and were running tests on me. They took an EKG, a chest x-ray and several blood tests. Around 5:00 PM they said all of the tests were good, that I did not have a heart attack, that I should go home and contact my doctor for a stress test. Mary Anne and Cathy said ‘Wait a minute. Something caused this and we think while he is here we should find out what the problem is.’ We were supposed to leave town for Phoenix on Monday morning April 7 and would not be back for 10 days. The doctor then suggested that he should arrange for an EKG stress test right away. That test started about 6:30 PM.

I was to get my heart rate up to 133 beats per minute and they would watch the EKG and my pulse and blood pressure. The test started easy, much easier than my treadmill work three times a week. As they raised the speed and elevation it got harder but not too bad. I reached the goal of 133 beats but my blood pressure was 242 over 105, way too high, and they also noticed a number of PVC’s, early beats from the lower part of the heart. They called the result marginal. I was very surprised at the blood pressure, almost blown away you could say. The decision was made that I would stay in the hospital overnight and have an angiogram the next day. They prepped me by shaving my groin on both sides for the catheter. I have lost all of my modesty.



I did not sleep much that night. I spent most of the night with the TV on and may have slept two hours. Mary Anne went home planning to come back early on Wednesday morning.

The next day, April 2, we spent the morning checking out the doctors that were going to do the procedures. The plan was to have Dr. Rahmatullah do the angiogram, and if blockage was found (which was expected) I would be sent by ambulance to Mercy Hospital and Dr. Chambers would install the needed stents. Brian and Cathy checked with people at Medtronics, and came back with a good report on Dr. Chambers. Dr. Chambers was written up in the February issue of Twin City magazine as one of the best cardiologists in the Twin Cities. One of the nurses on the floor that I talked to said if she had to have an angiogram, she would want Dr. Rahmatullah to do it. I agreed and signed the consent forms. Now all we had to do was wait until 1:00 PM for the procedure to start.

While we waited, we requested a cholesterol check as suggested by Dr. Jensen. I had an ultrasound of my carotid arteries as suggested by the emergency room physician, Dr. Thorsen who did the stress EKG test.

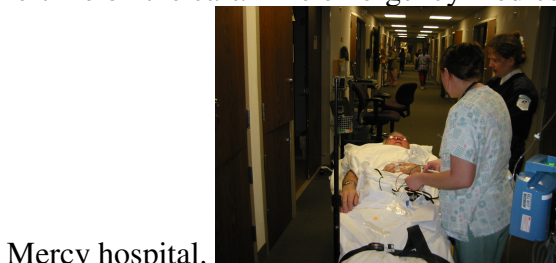


### My Support Staff

Just before 1:00 PM they wheeled me out of my room, armed with my digital camera, I was able to take pictures of Mary Anne, Sue, John (my brother) and what was going on as they set me up for the angiogram. The doctor said they were going to give me something to relax me.



Fifteen minutes later, the doctor is showing me pictures of a 90% blockage in the lower part of the LCA (left center artery??). He also said I had 40% blockage on the RCA and that they would not do anything about it. (I did not get his picture.) They don't do anything unless they are 70% blocked. He also said I had two co-dominant arteries where most people have only one dominant artery. They now wheel me back to my room but left me on the cart. The emergency medics then wheel me away to the ambulance for the long slow ride to



Mercy hospital.

I got a picture of the one that rode with me in the back. Mary Anne got to ride in the front seat, John, Sue and Cathy had to drive themselves.

At Mercy, they took me directly to the Cardiac operating room. I took further pictures there but also missed Dr. Chambers. After another short nap, I woke up to Dr. Chambers telling me it is all over and everything is fine. (It is like having an engine overhaul) They wheel a groggy Tom up to his room with a new shiny stent in my heart. That evening Mary and Kendra came and brought a beautiful plant. Jeff was in Florida on business.

I had to lie flat for another 4 to 8 hours after being on my back since 12:30, keep my right leg straight and not raise my head. The nurse came in to check the catheter site and set up to remove the catheter. After removal I had to have a pressure balloon strapped around my butt to hold pressure on the artery for about an hour. After removal, they kept checking the area to look for hardening which could cause a clot. Finally the nurse said I had re-bleed so she reapplied the pressure balloon and worked the area to become soft again. However, I think she had the pressure on the wrong area and it hit a nerve. My system started to shut down as if I had a bad

wound. Blood pressure dropped and heart rate went down. While all this is happening, I am laying there like a bump on a log, not doing anything but somewhat awake. I hear all that is going on but ..... Mary Anne said that they were going to give me a shot to stimulate my heart, and dropped the first one. They backed off on the pressure, upped the liquids and cut down on the blood thinner. I started to come back (I wasn't gone anywhere.) This extends the time on my back so they gave me something for the backache. (This whole thing creates another problem. Anything as ugly as a purple groin?) Mary Anne stayed all night in a reclining chair and I slept fairly well.



**My all night support**

The next morning April 3, I felt much better. We were able to check out of the hospital before 9:00 AM.

### **End of First Part**

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## **Part Two The Homecoming**

On the way home we stopped to get some of the prescriptions filled. (By the way my weekly pill package seems to be too small to hold all the pills I have to take now. I now realize how Mom must have felt with all those pills to take.) After we were home for a while I started to get some more pain in the center of my chest. I was not sure about it and felt it may be my stomach. This minor pain would come for about 10 minutes, leave for 15 to 30 minutes and then return. Thursday night I slept well but the pains began again on Friday and continued the same way all day. In the late afternoon, I called the Cardiologists office and talked to the triage nurse and we also talked to the emergency room. They both recommended that I take the 911 special to the emergency room. Mary Anne drove me there.

It took longer to get into Mercy than it did at Unity. The chest pain stopped as soon as I got in the car but the stomach pains did not. The emergency room physician said that there was a low chance that I would get out that night. He even said he had a heart attack and several stents. He called the cardiologist on duty. We were in the ER for about 5 hours.

We waited for Dr. Evans. I was expecting to go back for another angiogram and possible more extensive work. Boy was I down. (Note I did not take as many pictures) He came and listened to my story and said he thought it was a stretching of the artery causing spasms. (No angiogram – Hurrah) He said I should stay the night, have an exercise test in the morning and if all was ok I would go home.



The Mercy emergency room nurse

That night Mary Anne got to go home late again with slippery roads. I stayed the night and slept from about 12:30 to 5:00. In the morning, I was up walking the halls in practice for the exercise test.

**I passed.**

He gave me some pointers on how I should do the tread mill.

Mary Anne came late and we went home after picking up more pills. I feel great and thankful.

Some observations

1. Mary Anne is the real trooper in this incident. She took control of the situation and with the help of our children is responsible for the good outcome. I can not thank her enough.  
(When she got home she sure crashed)
2. I was very please to see everyone come to support me, not so much for myself but for Mary Anne.
3. Pills, pills, pills – have to reduce them.
4. Cholesterol is a problem. This blockage must have been building for many years.
5. Very little plaque in my carotid arteries. Perhaps I won't die such a horrible death as Dad did.
6. Not a good way to keep from loosing your hair. I lost a lot for all the patched they glued on to me.
7. I asked 2 doctors and each said I can do any of the things I did before such as yard work and lake work.  
(After 7 days of course.)

Lucky Me

Dad, Tom, Uncle Tom