

~~ Bob Lincoln's Mended Hearts Cardiac Journey ~~

Bob Lincoln, at age 63, underwent open-heart quadruple bypass surgery in May, 2000 (the whole CABG).

His surgery was performed at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in West Haven, Connecticut by consulting surgeons (Dr. Tilman, et al) from the Yale-New Haven Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut. This surgery was of a preventative nature (the necessity detected **before** there was a cardiac event.) At that time, the procedure required that the surgeon, strip a vein from his left leg (from ankle to groin) to complete the bypasses. **NOTE:** Today's procedures have been refined, and veins are now usually taken from the arm or the chest. In Bob's case, the necessity to heal the leg, was the hardest part of the recovery.

Bob had complained of a slight tremor in his hand. He was sent for a stress test, which he struggled through. Bob weighed close to 280 pounds at that time. Upon completion of the stress test, the VA cardiologist told Bob that he was concerned about the results, and scheduled Cath Lab procedures for the following day, at the VA in West Haven. Upon completion of the Cath Lab, a cardiologist informed Bob that he was a candidate for a triple bypass surgery, which they wanted to schedule for **the next day (no pressure!!)**.

Bob's wife (Joan Gervais) had to attend a National Conference for her professional organization during the next week, so the surgery was scheduled after her return. Bob went to the VA Hospital and the surgery was performed with no complications. Eventually, Bob was informed by the surgeon, that a quadruple bypass had been performed, and as a result, he could almost guarantee a projected life-span of another twenty years. **(YEA!!!)** During this surgery, there were no MENDED HEARTS Visitors at the VA Hospital. Because insurance paid for it, and the visiting nurses highly recommended it, Bob attended Cardiac Rehabilitation sessions at Hartford Hospital, in Connecticut, for the 12 week (36 sessions) program. After successful completion of the program, he continued attending the cardiac rehab center for another year and a half at his own expense, to be properly monitored and to get the proper exercise, and guidance for nutrition, and diabetes control. He took advantage of all that was offered.

The surgery necessity was prompted by an early life-style of...

"I'll eat what I want, when I want, the quantity I want, and what's exercise?...Who cares!"

In 20/20 Hindsight —

"Males in my family generally never lived much beyond age 65...with this surgery...I got a new lease on life — for another 20+ years...**IF**, I care enough to do things **RIGHT** from this time forward. This includes, but is not restricted to: proper diet, proper exercise, proper rest and proper medications for whatever else ails me."

He should have cared **THEN**...as he does **NOW!!**

[BOTTOM LINE: All's well that ends well!!!] . . . ALMOST . . .

At age 73, Bob underwent a second open-heart surgery (this time an aortic valve replacement) in March of 2010.

This surgery was brought on by Bob's failure to adhere to the lessons learned during his first surgical experience described above. This one was performed successfully at Hartford Hospital and Medical Center by thoracic surgeon Jonathan Hammond, Jr., M.D., et al, with no complications.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES:

Let me add a little history at this point...in 2005, Bob developed a murmur (with the aortic valve) which was being closely monitored. Nothing severe was apparent, but, doctors continued to monitor it at each exam.

In late December, 2009, Bob and his wife flew to Los Angeles, California (on vacation) primarily to view the Pasadena Rose Parade, followed by a cruise around the Mexican Riviera (Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, and Cabo San Lucas).

During the flight (at 35,000+ feet altitude, in a pressurized cabin) Bob drank 4 cans of **"Mr & Mrs T's Bloody Mary Mix"** (sans alcohol). It must be noted that each can contained **1,000 mg of sodium** (salt, which Bob was NOT aware of). After six hours of flying time, under pressure, he unknowingly developed aortic stenosis, pleural pulmonary edema (liquid in the lung), and shortness of breath (**I wonder why?**) **BTW - Bob NOW reads the labels!!!**

After several days of sight-seeing in Los Angeles, primarily on a bus, where there was no excessive movement, they left for San Diego via bus, to continue on the cruise portion of their trip. It must be noted that the symptoms did not manifest

themselves (other than the shortness of breath), immediately. But, once aboard ship, and 250+ miles out in the Pacific Ocean, and a restless night's sleep, followed by a breakfast...Bob turned himself in to the ship's infirmary, to be checked out.

The ship's doctor (who was a vacationing female teaching professor from the University of California) checked his vital signs, placed a nitroglycerin strip on his chest, gave him a nitroglycerin injection, administered a dose of antibiotics, administers lasik and other medications and then headed for the ship's Captain (She **SAVED** my life!!!).

"Get him off the ship immediately," she said, "get a helicopter, or the Coast Guard, or get to the nearest port."

The Captain checked: Out of range for a helicopter; no Coast Guard ships in close proximity; and the closest port was (Cabo San Lucas, Mexico) another 350+ miles and 26 hours sailing distance away. He gave orders to "Full Speed Ahead!!" and made a public announcement over the PA system that the ship would be making an unscheduled stop at Cabo San Lucas for a medical evacuation in the next morning. [A fourth alternative — over the side in a dinghy!!]

NOTE: It was at this approximate location in the Pacific Ocean, that the Carnival cruise ship, "MS Splendor", caught fire in the engine room, in November, 2010, lost all it's power, air conditioning, refrigeration, and toilet facilities, and had to be rescued by the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier U.S.S. Ronald Reagan (which flew in food and other essential supplies by helicopter), and a U.S. Coast Guard cutter (which provided escort duty), and from which it was towed back to San Diego by tugboats, with gruelling conditions for the 4,500+ passengers and crew.

Treatment and testing continued. The lasik treatment kicked in. Fluid was leaving the body at a phenomenal rate (475mg/hour).

In the morning, the luggage was packed up, Bob (in a wheelchair) and his wife were escorted to, and loaded aboard a lifeboat (in record time). They were taken to a waiting ambulance on the dock and to an American Hospital in Cabo San Lucas. Looking back, it was as though the ship would capsize...there were most of the 3,500+ passengers and 1,200+ crew members...on the siderail, with cameras and binoculars in hand, straining to see **WHO** was being evacuated. Once the lifeboat returned, the ship continued on it's trip to Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, and then, back to Cabo San Lucas. When going through the lifeboat drill before sailing, Joan made a comment, looking up..."I wonder how long it would take to lower one of these lifeboats?" Today, she found out.

In the American Hospital's ICU, a multitude of testing continued, including: x-rays, EKGs, Echocardiograms, and they also performed a radial artery cardiac catheterization (through the wrist) to check out the previous bypasses. Testing and treatment continued for three days. Only the primary attending physician spoke any English.

DIAGNOSIS:

Severe aortic stenosis; severe congestive heart failure; plueral pulmonary edema.

PROGNOSIS:

Recommend immediate aortic valve replacement surgery.

PATIENT'S QUESTION:

"How long will I live without this surgery?"

DOCTOR'S ANSWER: (in a broken Spanish accent)

"Anywhere from 10 minutes to 10 years, depending on the circumstances."

PATIENT'S RESPONSE:

"I'll take the ten years."

DOCTOR'S RESPONSE:

A muffled snicker...accent and answer undiscernable."

After three days of testing and probing, Bob and his wife were loaded aboard an ambulance, after leaving another \$10,000+ with the hospital, and transported to the airport in the nearby town of San Jose del Cabo, and was able to see the cruise ship they had just left, returning into the port of Cabo San Lucas, from the window of the ambulance. They were then Med-Evac'd via LearJet to San Diego for the fastest the pair had ever been through U.S. Customs and Immigration (5 minutes), into a waiting ambulance, and on to Sharp Memorial Hospital (a leading U.S. cardiac facility, where the first Jarvik procedure was performed), and from there, after several days of intensive testing (where they also wanted to perform the surgery)...returned home, via wheelchair and medical assistance at each stop.

NOTE: Altogether the cost (paid by credit card, up front in each case): to leave the ship (**\$2,500**); the quarter mile ambulance ride to the hospital (**\$750**); for the American Hospital - 3 days (**\$23,000+**); the 2-hour LearJet flight to San Diego (**\$18,000**); the ambulance ride to Sharp Memorial and all expenses at that hospital were covered by MEDICARE; **TOTAL COST = \$44,250+**. Alternative transportation out of Mexico — a **16 hour** trip by ambulance for the entire length of the Baja Peninsula, from Cabo San Lucas to San Diego, over Baja roads.

TRAVEL TIP: Make sure you have travel / trip insurance!! It should also be noted that MEDICARE (if your primary insurance coverage)...might **NOT** cover your expenses (depending on where you are traveling in the world at the time of your medical emergency!!!)

A LITTLE HUMOR: "If I ever have another one of these...I hope they put in a **zipper** or **velcro** next time...it would make things a lot easier for the next surgeon!!!"

PAY IT FORWARD:

Bob and his wife were visited by cardiac visitors from the "Mended Hearts" while he was recuperating at Hartford Hospital. After a discussion about the organization, they decided to get involved. They joined the local chapter as a family, in June, 2010, and he and his wife went through the Cardiac Visitor's training, then Volunteer Training at Hartford Hospital, and became Accredited Visitors. In June of 2011, Bob was elected and installed as the Secretary of Chapter 9 - Greater Hartford, CT. In this capacity, he has implemented several changes in printed material distributed by the Chapter, and developed several databases to provide mailing labels for usage with the Newsletter and/or form letters to the new members, and he acts as the Chapter's Official Photographer. He also had the opportunity to attend "The Mended Hearts 59th Annual Convention" in New Orleans, where he met, talked to and mingled with members and officers from all over the country. At the convention he learned the latest about cardiovascular heart disease, and its treatments. He also learned about the associated organization, "**The Mended Little Hearts**" which deals primarily with children and their families and congenital heart disease. The Mended Hearts, Inc. is a national organization, which consists primarily of ex-cardiac patients and/or their support families (either bypass, valve replacement, L-VAD or R-VAD, and/or angioplasty procedures), and some of whom have been trained to become "Visitors" for both pre-op and post-op patients on the cardiology wards or Cath Labs at the hospital where their latest surgery or procedure was performed, and to pass on hope, support, encouragement and rehabilitation information to the cardiac patient and/or the patient's support family. Bob and Joan said, "In this capacity, we have jointly participated in some of our best "**visits**" recently, which have been both beneficial and educational for all the parties involved, and have been most gratifying and satisfying for us, personally." Now, Bob was concerned about his health, and the fact that at his weight, and his other medical conditions (sleep apnea, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol), he was a candidate for future cardiac procedures and/or surgeries. He and his wife got involved with "Nutrisystem" and he lost 65 pounds, then switched to "Jenny Craig" and lost another 25 pounds (total 90 pounds in about a year's time), while going to the gym to work out (his wife got down to a weight she had seen since high school!!! and is maintaining that weight. Bob still has to lose a bit more.)

PAY IT FORWARD ADDENDA:

On January 11th, 2012, Bob made his first visit to the CATH LAB recovery area at Hartford, Hospital. He went on his own to determine how visits there should be conducted and to find out what visiting procedures needed to be implemented. While there, he was recognized by an unidentified doctor, as being a member of Mended Hearts, and that he should be provided with whatever he needed, to assist him with visiting any of the recovering patients, that the organization provided excellent assistance, hope and support to cardiac patients. The head nurse arranged for the receptionist to provide a list of recovering patients, and their room numbers. He ended up talking to a 40'ish male and a 39 year old female, both of who had just gone through the cath lab and were informed that they would be going to have triple bypass surgery. Both were depressed, both were anxious, and both were unaware of what was actually in front of them. Bob talked to them about his own experiences with some of HIS other medical issues (which also pertained to them) - smoking cessation, over-weight issues, diabetes, sleep apnea, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, improper exercise, diet and nutrition. He spent about 20 minutes with each, and at the end of each visit, both were now WELL informed as to their prospects, were smiling and happy to learn that there was LIFE after cardiac surgery. Both appeared to be very calm about their upcoming surgeries and thanked him for allaying their fears and for spending the time to comfort with them.

Hopefully!!! These are the end of Bob's personal cardiac events. He said, "I'm grateful for those procedures which have prolonged my life, and for the surgical and nursing staffs which have made my survival and extended life possible, but must admit that I'm starting to get a bit old for these and could use a break for a while."

"Let me take my hat off to all those in the medical and associated professions, the doctors, nurses, technicians, assistants, aides, dieticians, clergy, researchers and administrators who work so diligently to prolong our lives and make us feel better with a nod, a touch, a word of encouragement, and/or a simple smile. **God Bless them all!!!**"

FOOTNOTE:

Bob was interviewed in February, 2011, and was accepted in March, 2011, and has since served as a **(Lay) Community** (non-scientific) **Member** of the **Hartford Hospital's Institutional Review Board** (which monitors hospital policies & procedures, clinical trials, and various types treatments, which may/or may not be required by the FDA) at Hartford Hospital, in effect replacing Ben Goldfarb (another Mended Hearts, Chapter 9 Member) who served on that board, in that capacity for over 16 years.

BTW - At the first submission of claims for the medical bills accumulated to Medicare and/or the supplemental insurance company, one or the other paid all claims except the Med-Evac flight (\$18,000). We were told in Mexico that Medicare would NOT pay for the flight, but that our secondary insurance would pay for it. All associated claims were all submitted in January, 2010. One by one, each of the claims were paid, except the flight. We recieved notice from Medicare that the claim was denied, and was submitted to the secondary insurance company. Many months later, we received notice from the insurance company that the claim was denied. **REASON:** The insurance investigator (a licensed physician) denied the claim becuase he said the flight was **NOT** Necessary. There was an appeal process available. We took advantage of that and appealed his finding to the State of Connecticut Healthcare Advocate's Office. We faxed all the documents to the advocate. Later on, in the middle of 2011, we needed to obtain more documentation from the cruise line, the American Hospital in Mexico, the Med-Evac company, and from the attending physicians and Sharp Memorial Hospital. Once more, in November, 2011, we faxed all this information to the advocate, and were told we would be informed if more information was required. Finally, in January of 2012, we received a letter form the insurance company, stating that based on the appeal from the advocate, the case was re-opened, and after re-investigation of all the documents, and a complete review of the diagnosis and recommendations of the physicians, and the fact that a 16-hour ambulance ride for a patient with congestive heart failure was not a viable solution, the claim **would be allowed** for the services provided.

It took over 2 years to get satisfaction with the capable assistance of the State Healthcare Advocate's Office!!!

Bottom line: If you don't persue every option available to you...you might lose out...BIG TIME!!!