

A HEART ATTACK -- THE INSIDE STORY

I am quite sure that everyone will say they know what a heart attack is. After all, it's such a common thing, isn't it. I was one of those people until I had my heart attack, and now I know better. My name is Bill Zmaeff and I live in Revelstoke. This is what happened to me as I saw it.

The morning started as usual, up around 7:00, put the coffee and porridge on. After my wife Judy and I had breakfast, our day turned into anything but the usual. I felt a chest pain, not unlike indigestion, but it kept gradually increasing. I said to Judy that we had to go to the hospital. As it is only a couple of blocks away from our house, we drove. As Judy took care of things at the front desk, I managed to get to emergency. My pain was now growing more intense by the minute, and I was getting alarmed.

Suddenly, there were a lot of medical people around my bed; blood work, ECG wires stuck to me, intravenous needles, and monitors for heart beat, blood pressure etc. Time became meaningless to me. They kept asking me how my pain was on a scale of one to ten. I tried to think of something half ways intelligent to say, thinking if I knew what ten felt like then I could compare my pain to that scale. Instead, I think I managed to say I have never felt pain this intense and that it hurt like hell. It became so bad, I vomited. My comfort was to see Judy there with me.

The activity in the room got frantic as my blood pressure failed. I heard Doctor Molder give instructions to prepare the paddles. From the bits of talk that I recall, I believe they were trying to balance the meds that would slow my heart rate and also reduce the pain. I felt like I was in a cloud, neither conscious nor unconscious. I concluded that it wasn't looking good for me as my pain became unbearable and the efforts of Doctor Molder and the nurses weren't helping. I believe in God, so I remember praying a little prayer; "God, if it is your will, I am ready." I could see Doctor Molder's hand squeezing the drip bag hard, and soon as one was empty, they put another one on, and he squeezed again. At some point, I heard Doctor Molder say they better order the chopper.

I felt a hand take my hand and realized it was my daughter Debbie. Emergency Nurse Gina had called Debbie at work to get up here fast. Doctor Molder and the ER nurses continued to work on stabilizing me. I don't know how much later, people with different uniforms came into the room. I recognized two as ambulance Paramedics and later learned the other four were two Pilots and two Doctors from the medical helicopter. The ambulance took us to the Revelstoke airport where I was transferred to the helicopter. Forty five minutes later, we landed on the roof of the Kelowna General Hospital where the cardiac people were waiting for us.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Doctor Molder in Revelstoke, the Cardiologists at Kelowna, the very capable nursing staff at both places, and the Doctors and Pilots of the air ambulance service. Thank you very much, because of your service, I can say that I feel pretty good now.

I call her my guardian angel, because Nurse Gina in the Queen Victoria Emergency room, just before they took me away, took my head in her hands, and eyes just inches from mine, told me that I was going to be fine. Her voice and the hard look in her eyes told me she wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

That is the story of my heart attack. I'm not sure how it would have turned out for me if any of the chapters were removed. The ambulance could have been at a vehicle accident or someone hurt on the job or injured skiing or snowmobiling, and was delayed transporting me to the airport. The other possibility is that the ambulance was taking me to the airport and not available to respond to other urgent calls. What about the instance of someone seriously injured and flown into Revelstoke by helicopter and having to land at the airport with all the ambulances out at the accident scene. It would be a long wait for an ambulance to arrive from Sicamous to take you from the airport to the Revelstoke hospital. Fortunately my story is one where everything worked out in a best case scenario.

Regarding the proposed heli pad construction at Queen Victoria Hospital. I see this as a life saving project. If you oppose this project, because the helicopters are too noisy, please be careful what you wish for. Like me when I was putting the coffee on for breakfast, I sure wasn't thinking about any heart attack. That is why these things are called emergencies; one minute you don't need the service, next minute you're desperate for it. Those noisy, big rotors thumping through the sky will be the sweetest music you ever heard if they are coming to help you in your time of need. I had my hour of need, who is next?