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HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO

Honourary Campaign Chair for 1997 Betty Allen

by Melissa Batchilder
The Chesterville Record

You've got to have heart...and that's something Betty Allen isn't lacking.

Although she tends quietly to the every-day chores of life, at one time Betty's name was synonymous with the Heart and Stroke Foundation in Dundas County. Undoubtedly, there isn't a role she didn't play in the structure, organization and movement of the chapter and when she looks back on those years, she beams with pride.

But the smile she wears isn't because of what she gave to the organization, rather the humble mother of five and former school bus driver delights in the hundreds of people she met and good fortune she had to be able to be a member.

"They were really marvellous. It was a really special time for me when I was with Heart and Stroke," she says of the 20 years she spent in the wings of the local chapter.

It was 30 years ago this coming fall that Betty attended the first meeting of the Dundas chapter in Williamsburg.

"What happened was ironic," she says, as she begins to tell the story of her involvement. "I was selling bond tickets here in Kemptville for the hospital and there was a demonstration by what was then known as the Heart Fund, going on."

The Heart Fund's provincial coordinator just happened to be there that night, Betty explains and she was introduced.

"It sort of began there. When it was decided a chapter would be formed in Dundas County, they called me. And I was elected as a captain for Hallville where I was living then."

For the next 20 years, Betty led a battle against the disease which claims the lives of thousands of Canadians each year. "In those 20 years I got to know a lot of nice people along with such names as Dr. Wilbert Keon and Dr. Lyall Higganson. "Both are well known and well respected heart specialists."

Along with others in her chapter, Betty canvassed, organized meetings, attended many meetings, she chuckles and did what they could to raise funds for Heart and Stroke disease.

"I was a captain for a number of years and then I went on and was president for a long time, " she remembers.

Although at the time Betty joined in the late 1960s, she was still quite naive about heart and stroke disease, as years wore on, her awareness of the deadly conditions grew. Family members and friends would gradually succumb to heart disease and stroke.

"We had to be educated. As president of the organization, I had to act in different capacities and always ensure we had speakers to provide deeper understanding and education for us."

And learning a tremendous amount is something she credits the local chapter for. Perhaps, the most vital lesson she absorbed was, "No matter how much money you raise one year, there is still more needed the next."

It's the number one killer in Canada, she says and, "We never know how quickly or soon it can be on our doorsteps."

The research already conducted is so valuable, she adds, but there is still a lot more to be done. "So many people have benefited from it, but there are still people dying."

Despite her retirement from the local chapter 10 years ago, Betty still continues to support the cause. She encourages people to examine how their own lives are affected by the disease.

She remembers only too well how quickly it affected her own when her husband succumbed to a heart attack in 1987. Remembering that, not so much what she has given of herself, is what keeps her believing in the extreme value of finding a cure.



Betty Allen is always a willing volunteer

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Strokes harder to cope with than heart surgery

by Catherine Thompson
Leader Staff

Morrisburg- Area resident, Danny Bilmer was somewhat surprised to see his 25th anniversary last year and didn't really expect to live to his 49th birthday.

"I gave my wife Nancy her diamond because I didn't think I would make it. When I was in the Ottawa Civic last year, I was of that mind," he said.

Yet in January 1997, he is alive and while not in robust health, he is living life to his best capabilities.

"I'm not here to tell you my troubles," he said pleasantly. "I'm alive and walking around. But if anyone wants to know about stroke and heart surgery, I can tell them about it."

Danny first became aware of serious health problems around 1975, when he was having trouble pulling a lawnmower, and became nauseated. At the time, he thought it was nerves, but the problem was diagnosed as a leaking aortic valve. In 1979, he had surgery to replace the valve with a mechanical valve made of calf tissue, the material used at that time.

Years later in 1991, he had surgery to replace the valve, which was leaking again, with a valve made of stainless steel. According to medical opinion of the time, it was the best replacement, "a Cadillac" of valves. Danny said he was lucky he never had a heart attack, because his doctors were so vigilant in monitoring his condition. In both cases, Dr. Pierre Bedard, a cardio-surgeon at the Heart Institute did the surgery, under advisement of cardiologist Dr. Michael Baird.

Although heart surgery is invasive, with painful after affects, Danny said, "It's not like having a stroke. If you have to cough after the heart surgery, it hurts. But, after the stroke, I lost things I will never get back, because I can't remember people. I know who they are, but can't call them by name."

Danny took a couple of months off work at Fetterly's Garage in Iroquois after his first heart surgery and a few months after the second, but in each returned to work with a fair recovery.

Back in August 1987, Danny had had an episode in which his "face, hand and arm went bad. They called it a mini-stroke at the time."

According to one medical opinion, this was a stroke caused by a clot on the valve, although this was never definitely proved. Doctors did a further investigation, including a biopsy of the kidneys and arrived at a diagnosis of systemic lupus. This is an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks itself. It is a life-long disorder in which the sufferer experiences great fatigue and may also have strokes.

Danny was treated with Coumadin, a blood thinner to prevent strokes and told to walk three miles a day in an hour's time. Walking is also recommended by the Ottawa Heart Institute for heart disease.

In March 1994, he said, "Something happened at work. I don't know what it was, but I came home and went to Ottawa to see my lupus doctor (Doctor Susan Lavoie at the Ottawa Civic Hospital). They thought it was my speech."

Lavoie told him he had to work at 10 miles an hour, not 90 miles an hour. I told her I had to work at 120 miles an hour, so she said, "You can't work."

Danny's general practitioner, Doctor Wayne Domanko was of the opinion that he had a stroke at the time, but this was never proved. In any case, Danny stopped his regular employment at Fetterly's Garage.

Last February, Danny had another incident, experiencing a bad headache, confused speech and inability to speak. In the Ottawa Civic Hospital, a catscan showed scar tissue and a clot which had lodged in a vein in the brain, affecting the speech area. Because the clot blocked off the blood flow, an area of the brain died, leaving some permanent damage.

A transesphageal showed another clot sitting on the aortic nerve. This time, doctors determined definitely the clots had caused the stroke.

They sent him home with increased Coumadin with added aspirin. On a return visit two weeks later, a transesphageal revealed the clot had dissolved from the aortic valve.

At that time doctors thought he was on the right treatment, but Danny soon started suffering from headaches again, and another stroke occurred in May.

At the time, he and his brother-in-law Dalton were planning to go to Lancaster to obtain chickens and turkeys. "This is something I do to keep myself sane and I had a hard time, " Danny said.

Dalton had to help Danny get dressed and later Danny's son, Matthew helped with the chickens and turkeys. Danny stayed at home that night because his own doctor was unavailable, and the next day, his daughter Amanda drove him to Winchester Hospital. Later he was taken to Ottawa Civic, where he remained eight days. Tests showed a clot on the opposite side of the brain, where the second stroke occurred.

Doctors thought the second stroke should never have happened, because their blood thinner treatment should have prevented it. He was then placed on prednisone, a steroid treatment which helps to kick in a lowered immune system, also a treatment for lupus.

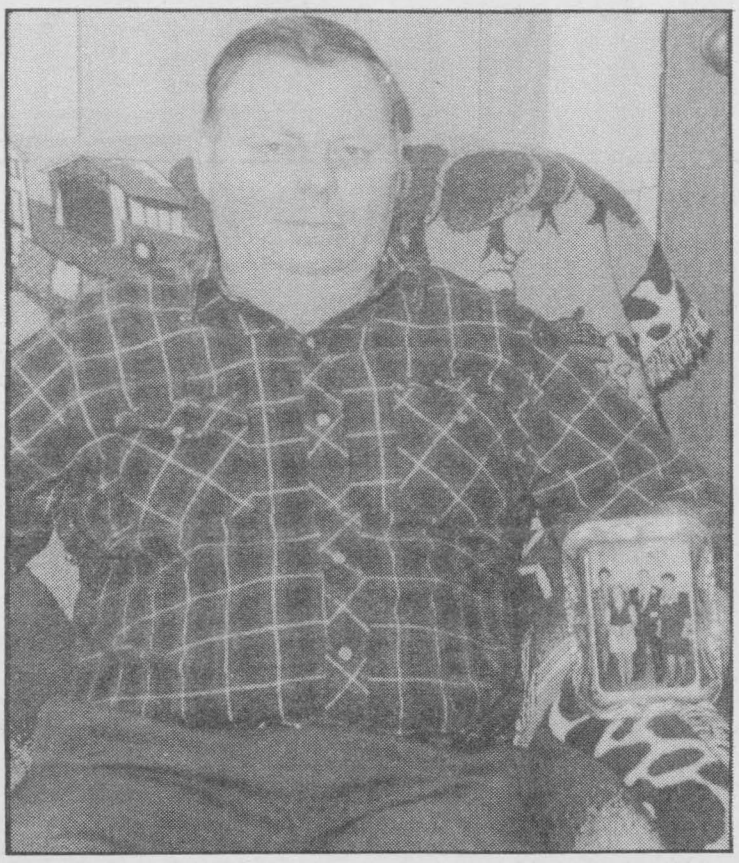
But, one harmful side effect is bone deterioration, and doctors gradually decreased his dosage from 50 milligrams daily to a maintenance dose of five milligrams. Since then he has had no further strokes, and the doctors are pleased with the improvement.

His dosage has been reduced from 33 pills for all conditions to 12-14 daily, but the medication makes him tired and sometimes he has to nap following the morning dosage.

Despite the multiple problems, Danny is not complaining. He is proud of the fact that he worked for 30 years, 19 of which were spent at Fetterly's Garage.

And although he is not working now, he received his driver's license again at Christmas, which

Please turn to page 4



25th anniversary

Danny Bilmer is pictured at home, with a photograph of the 25th wedding anniversary he and Nancy celebrated August, 1996 at the Morrisburg Legion. The couple's children, Amanda and Matthew had been planning the occasion since last January.

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Exercise the key for better health

by Sandra Lee Johnston
Chieftain Staff Reporter

Meeting this reporter at the door, there is nothing to demonstrate to a stranger that Lorne Bouck underwent heart surgery less than two years ago.

The broad smile on his face and the ease with which he glides through the interview certainly gives hope to others who may find themselves in a similar position.

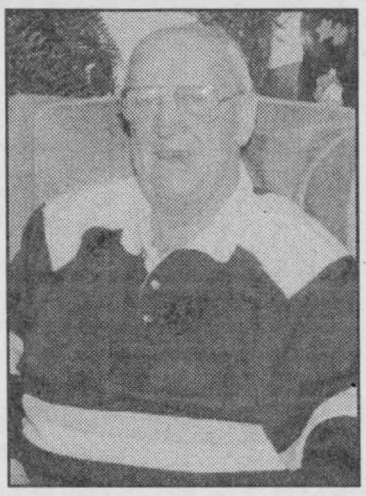
Born on September 29, 1921, Lorne is 75 years of age, and is looking forward to many more years in the village he calls home.

His introduction to the fact that something was amiss as far as his health was concerned began early in 1995. He started to show signs of being extremely tired all the time, even when he was not exerting himself. "Daily chores became too much, I had no ambition to do the routine items that I enjoyed each day; I just seemed to have no energy," says Lorne.

He adds, "I never had any pain and my blood pressure was never high, none of the signs that would point to heart trouble."

As time passed things were not improving. Lorne found that he was even more tired and less energetic than ever, so they (his wife, Helen and himself) decided to have a doctor check things out. A cardiogram later (St. Lawrence Medical Clinic) and Lorne was on his way to have an Echo-Cardiogram done at the Ottawa General Hospital. Meeting Doctor Wielgosz who would guide him along the rocky road that lay ahead was a bonus for Lorne. "He informed me that the Echo showed there was a problem with my aortic valve." This is the one between the left ventricle and the (ascending) aorta, composed of three segments (semilunar cusps). The function of this valve is to prevent the regurgitation of blood at the entrance of the aorta to the heart.

Things were not urgent at this time and so Lorne was put on a six month waiting list. This was in March. Helen continued to notice how Lorne seemed to be declining even further..."We spent Father's Day (June 18) at the cottage,"she explains,"Lorne did not seem like himself, he not only stayed inside all day but slept a good part of it away." Always an active man, this behaviour was not normal. He seemed distant, according to Helen and was not interested in the grandchildren...and he always wanted to spend time with the kids! The following day was terrifically hot and he remained in the basement, tinkering and such; again unlike him to do this on such a wonderful summer day at the lake. She worried but did not



Lorne at home

have long to dwell on the matter. The next Monday he got a call to go to Ottawa, and since he was getting weaker, the medical decision was made to operate. He was then bumped a few days back again due to emergency cases that took priority, but on June 29, at 6am, Helen wished him luck, and watched as he was rolled away to the operating room.

Helen recalls, (her diary is up to date and packed full of every detail), that this was a tough day for her and the family as they waited to hear from the OR team. The operation was to start at 7am, with Doctor Bedard of the Heart Institute heading the team who would replace the defective valve. The operation lasted a very long five hours. "The valve was embedded and so the procedure was more difficult than had been anticipated," explains Helen. Lorne had opted for an Xenograft, which means a porcine valve (pig valve) would be replacing his own. He explains that the doctor told him that the normal method of deciding which type will be used is that anyone over 70 years of age gets a porcine valve while those under 70 usually get a mechanical valve. The porcine valve is expected to last 7 to 10 years but necessitates some anticoagulation therapy, while the mechanical valve is more durable and thus lasts longer than the porcine but requires long term anticoagulation medication (eg. Warfarin: Coumadin). It is noteworthy here as well to mention that human donors can donate valves, upon death that are preserved and utilized when the need arises if a match (fit) is possible. These are rare, even in the 90s; proposed life span is 10 to 15 years and they bear long term anticoagulation therapy.

As Helen reads her diary, Lorne rocks in his favourite chair listening intently. "He was taken off the respirator that very evening, things were going so well after the operation," she continues, pleased even now with this development. She tells how family were allowed in to visit for two minutes at a time. "He was moved to ICU (Intensive Care Unit) after receiving two pints of blood, and the next day he returned to his room. This was July 1. It is marvellous what they accomplish, you know they had him up three times that very day."

Helen keeps recounting the exceptional progress that Lorne made, "He was up walking the very next day again, this was July 2, and as we had been warned, since most patients develop pneumonia, fluid had developed on his left lung; walking helps this condition to dissipate, and so he had to walk." The next day according to Helen was a tough one for her husband and then on the 4th of July when she arrived to stay with him, he was going through a tough day, really feeling badly. "Nonetheless, they had him up and walking down the hall and up and down the stairs. On July 5, she attended a discharge meeting along with her daughter where she learned what was expected when he returned home, both from him and those who would be there to care for him.

"We picked Lorne up from the Heart Institute on July 6 and brought him home...eight days after the valve replacement and a double by-pass operation!"

Once home and settled in, watching the ships ply the St. Lawrence, Lorne's recovery continued in familiar surroundings. He began his exercise program on the 8th with a twenty-minute walk; by the 13th he was up to thirty minutes per day, twice a day. The 18th of July saw him walking 40 minutes each day; (twice a day) wonderful progress for sure!

Lorne interjects at this point, suggesting that he has never looked back, "I still keep up with my exercise program every day...-when the weather is inclement or too cold, I walk indoors. I am up to 1.2 miles a day now and I exercise twice a day inside for 10 minutes, morning and evening. I never miss my workout or my banana, I eat one every day."

When questioned about how this experience changed their lives, they both smile. Helen laughs as she tells that she does not bake cakes and pies like she used to. (Coming from a farm, she was most proficient in the baking department), "I make muffins from the health cookbook, you know, things like that, I never use butter any more, and we watch the fat intake closely and avoid salt," she adds.

Lorne says he makes certain that he eats his All-Bran for breakfast, they have their supper at noon (big meal) and then go lightly on the dinner meal at night. "I try to maintain my weight in the 165 pound area."

They both agree they have slowed, the garden is smaller, "Just some cucumbers and tomatoes now,and we hire the lawn mowing out and the snow removal in the driveway; but we play bridge three to four times a week, that is our recreation now."

Lorne is not on any prescription drugs, "I take a baby aspirin every day, that is about it," he says, "When I go to the dentist, I have to take numerous penicillin tablets before and after my visit to guard against infection; that is something very important when a valve has been replaced."

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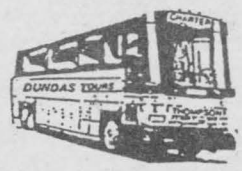
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Family suffers heart troubles

by Stephanie Wolfe
Press Staff

Morrisburg- It's been a long haul for the Levere family, six of whom suffer from heart complications.

Former Winchester resident, Jim Levere underwent two operations in the past 10 years to replace a leaking aorta valve. After his first operation in 1986, his doctor predicted he would only live another five years.

Yet, according to his daughter Barbara, today he is feeling great and currently is enjoying a vacation in Vancouver.

When Jim underwent his second surgery last January to replace the calf's valve with a pig's calve, his brother Gordon had similar surgery-his aortic valve was replaced with a calf's valve.

His wife, Edna, a former operating room nurse at the Winchester District Memorial Hospital, has surgery to treat tachycardia (an abnormally rapid heart rate).

"Like my dad, she originally refused an operation and just about died three times," Barbara said. "Last May, we asked her local doctor to pursue the surgery (despite Edna's objections)."

Barbara, who lives in Morrisburg, was diagnosed six years ago with cardiomyopathy, a condition which stems from a viral flu. She was unaware of any problems before she had a routine chest x-ray.

"I was put on the heart transplant list immediately and told if I didn't receive a heart or if medication didn't work, I would be dead in a year's time," she explained.

"I was in my late 30s and that's quite a sentence when you have an only son."

Despite the gloomy forecast, Barbara fully recovered without a heart transplant by religiously following her doctor's advice which included a salt-restricted diet consisting primarily of fresh vegetables, fruits, fish and chicken.

"I was bedridden for six months and told not to lift anything heavier than two pounds, " Barbara said. "I wasn't even to clear dishes off the table. I had to have a year of letting my heart completely rest."

Barbara's two brothers also have heart complications-one brother has a congenital heart murmur and the other has yet to be diagnosed.

"It's been a heart-filled 10 years," Barbara said. "People have to understand that with heart problems, both physical and mental aspects are involved. Our family has been through great stress during the past years, but we learned to support each other and became a strong unit."

"I've had more of a problem dealing with my condition mentally than physically. I never gave up when I was told I could die."

Barbara encourages people who are diagnosed with heart problems to do everything they can to get better.

"Just because you are told something is wrong with your heart, doesn't mean it is the end of the road for you, " she said. "You must never give up. Once you get fixed, it doesn't mean you are fixed. It's a life sentence."

Barbara believes staying healthy is key to preventing heart problems.

"Because we know heart disease is hereditary, you have to start prevention at an early age. You have to become heart smart. My dad, mom and I stopped smoking and are working to lose weight and keep it off. My eleven year old son has never tasted regular peanut butter, eats non-salted margarine and is active in hockey and baseball."

For more information on heart disease and stroke contact the Dundas Chapter of the Heart and Stroke Foundation at 613-933-8933.



Surviving heart problems

Barbara Levere, her father, Jim and mother, Edna as well as three other family members suffer from heart complications. Most of the family have undergone operations and are on the road to recovery.

CONTINUED

Stroke

Continued from page 2

he had lost after the stroke last year. Doctors advised the Ministry of Transportation of his medical problems, but neurologist tests in September showed he could again drive.

"That was my Christmas present," he said. He can now get to appointments and visit his brother Larry on Avonmore Road, who has a team of mules he likes to drive.

Danny continues to walk and plans on keeping turkeys and chickens again in the spring. He helps out where he can, whether it is housework or helping as team captain in the Heart and Stroke canvass. Before his stroke last year, Danny's team collected $590 from his area for the Dundas Chapter.

Danny also spent a year and a half volunteering at Winchester Hospital giving out drinks, talking and reading to patients. "I met a lot of people and I felt better because even if it was only one person, I helped someone," he said.

His hale appearance belies his ongoing medical problems, a fact noted by Doctor Roberto Giaccone. "When a man looks as good as you, and I read your health history, I'm amazed," Nancy quoted the neurologist as saying.

"I give a lot of credit to the people in Morrisburg and Doctor Domanko, who would call every day about my blood, even on the weekends," Danny said.

"I have to thank Nancy and the kids. They have to keep talking to you so you won't go crazy. A lot of nights I'd go to bed feeling very good. And I have to give them full credit."

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