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HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO

Jacques Asselin knows the right direction for recovery

by Sandra Lee Johnston
Chieftain Staff

Jacques Asselin is adamant that the road from heart surgery to full recovery is indeed 30% physical but more importantly 70% mental. "They told us this when we went to the discharge class and they were right on!" says Jacques.

As this interview takes place it is almost exactly one year since he underwent open heart surgery at the Ottawa Heart Institute.

He explains that he goes back for six month checkups, ECG (an echocardiogram-anatomy and physiology of the heart) and an electrocardiogram (an ultra sound of the heart which actually shows the valves) and has recently completed his half year visit to his cardiologist coming home with a clean report. "Everything is 100% fine!" a smiling gentleman tells this reporter.

We talk about how his life style changed once he was aware that he was a candidate for open heart surgery. He seems to stare, searching his memory and then says, "Reflecting back, I had some things that would make you wonder about...it was 1.5 years before I underwent the surgery, while I had always been able to work physically hard for long periods of time, suddenly I found my body just refusing to take it. Like everyone, I blamed the signs to over doing things, but when I look back now, I realize I had a real problem but just didn't realize it."

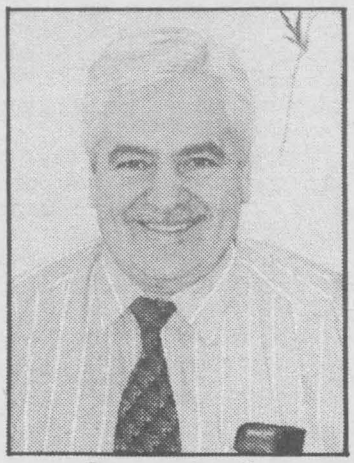
When the diagnosis was made, Jacques was told there was no blockage but that the heart valve had to be replaced ASAP. This was the most difficult time for him, the waiting was tough. "When you are told that unless you have an operation within a year, you will be dead, it causes you a lot of anxiety and I could actually feel my health deteriorate rapidly as I waited."

To add to his worry, Jacques had to endure the worst natural disaster of the century, Ice Storm '98 struck to add even more strain to his life.

This true life story has a happy ending though.The operation was successful and Jacques and his partner in life, wife Liz were part of the Heart and Stroke Telethon (They had allowed Jacques entire ordeal, including the operation to be taped and played back on the fund raising show as their way of giving something back) in February 1998.

Now, a year later he sits calmly behind his desk in his office at Asselin Real Estate in Iroquois, the picture of health.

He admits that he cleans snow this year, and that he also walks regularly to keep things working efficiently and effectively, weather allowing. "I was on an aspirin a day to check high blood pressure, but presently am down to one tablet a day, and that is coumedin (a blood thinner) and I monitor my blood pressure (at home, myself) so I am actually in control."

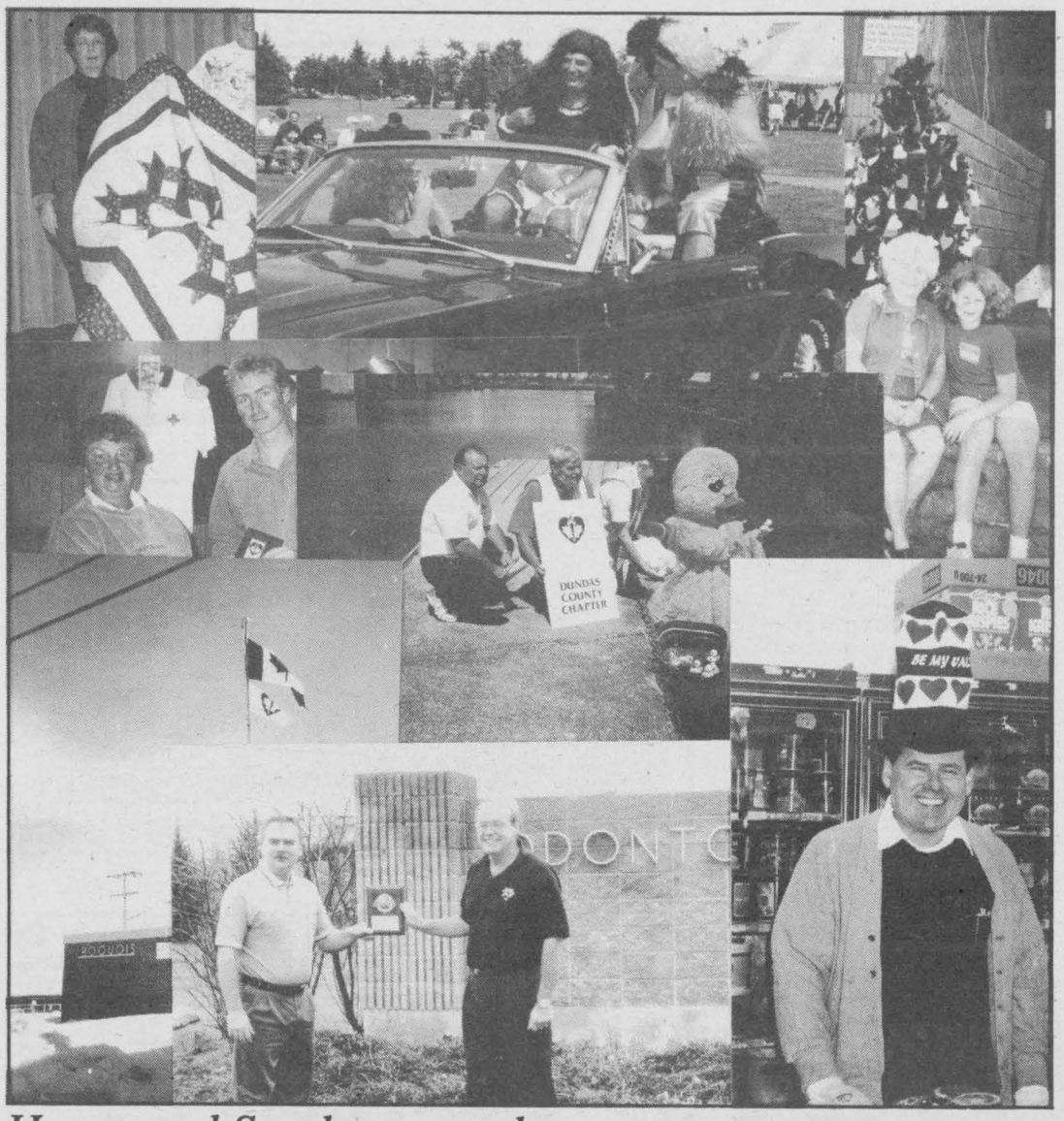


Jacques Asselin
Everything is 100%

When asked about soreness in the chest where the incision remains a testimony to what he has been through, he pounds on it and remarks that "The soreness is gone and the only reminder is when I dress and see it in the mirror or twist and the two stitches at the bottom (which were not removed) cause a brief shot of pain."

"One thing for sure, I feel real good! I can do anything pretty well that I want to now. When I recall that I was restricted somewhat as to what I could do, I could not even carry out my own garbage, a while back, it is hard to believe that now I can work hard physically and still feel very good."

Please turn to page 4



Heart and Stroke at work

South Dundas folks are a busy bunch. They throw their support behind a cause and go for it. The efforts that are put into events to help raise funds for Heart and Stroke are awesome. From Duck races to Quilt Raffles, from Big Bike Rides to Mother/Daughter Walks, from Dress Red Day to Parade Antics (In red convertibles no less!) we work together for the common good. The Heart and Stroke flag flies to remind us we have to improve the odds.

Morewood couple have both been through a lot in two years

by Sandy Bierworth
Chesterville Record Staff

Mac and Marjorie Thompson take each new day to heart.

The Morewood couple has been through a lot in the past two years as both have dealt with very different, but equally scary, heart problems.

For Mac, problems began only a year ago when chest pains brought him to Winchester District Memorial Hospital. He wasn't having, nor has he ever had, a heart attack. But even still, something was wrong.

He underwent some tests before having an angiogram later that year. During an angiogram, the groin is opened and a long plastic tube is inserted into a main artery toward the heart where a dye is released to help doctors identify any problems. Doctors couldn't even get the tube to the heart from one side because of a blockage, Thompson said, so they had to repeat the process on his other side.

It was then he was told there were a couple of blockages in the major arteries at his heart.

"At first, they tried to make me think it wasn't that bad," he said.

He was told he would have to have open-heart surgery and was put on the priority list at the Ottawa Heart Institute. After a few delays and setbacks, he was admitted on September 23 for what turned out to be triple bypass surgery.

Thompson spent eight days in the hospital following the operation and has since been walking for half an hour twice a day.

"I was told the operation should keep me okay for about a year," he said. "I thought I was doing pretty good, but now I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure I'm what I should be. Every now and then, I feel like passing out, but I don't think it has anything to do with the operation. There haven't been any major problems or anything due to the surgery. When they monitor my heart, everything looks good."

"The only problem I have with our health system is the waiting list for the operations," he said. "That's one thing I still have a beef about. They drag it out. So long as you're still alive, they keep you waiting. Now don't get me wrong, the care you get in the hospital is perfect. They took very good care of me. It's the waiting to get in there that gets me. The anxiety of waiting is harder to deal with than any of the pain."

In fact, it's because of that pain that Thompson went into surgery when he did. He visited WDMH again in September with chest pains, thinking he would be out the same day with some new medication. Instead, he was kept there and sent to the Ottawa Heart Institute shortly afterward.

Now, with all that behind them, the couple offers this piece of advice to anyone undergoing a similar experience.

"If you have an angiogram and the doctors tell you to stay at the hospital, stay. Don't go home," said Marjorie. "When Mac went in for his angiogram, we stayed in an old nurses' residence close to the hospital and he was told to lie down and not move a muscle for four hours so his leg wouldn't bleed. But when he finally got up, he came into the room where I was and said "I'm bleeding." Well, the blood was just gushing out so we rushed him off to the hospital and they were able to stop it. But if we'd gone home where it's a 10 minute drive to the hospital, he wouldn't have made it."

Marjorie, meanwhile, has been through the exact opposite of her husband's problems.

In March of 1997, she suffered a minor heart attack and after undergoing a few tests, was told she had congestive heart failure.

"Where his heart rate is low, mine is the opposite. I have a very high heart rate," she said.

It's so high, in fact, that last year she had three shock treatments in eight days to try to bring it down. And it worked, but only for a few days, she said. Now, she's on medication to help lower her heart rate, but it does nothing to relieve the continuous shortness of breath she suffers because of the speeding, irregular heartbeat.

Marjorie said she has been through nearly every kind of test available, including angiograms and an eccardiogram thallium stress test.

"They do every test they can to try to find out what is wrong," she said. "They're very thorough. But unlike Mac, surgery won't help me. I can only take medication for now. I wish I could trade this for what Mac has. At least he has some relief from it. I'm always short of breath and I get tired quickly."

While Mac isn't sure if there is any history of heart troubles in his family, Marjorie said both her mother and brother have suffered heart problems.

And when your heart isn't working properly, she said, there is only one thing to do.

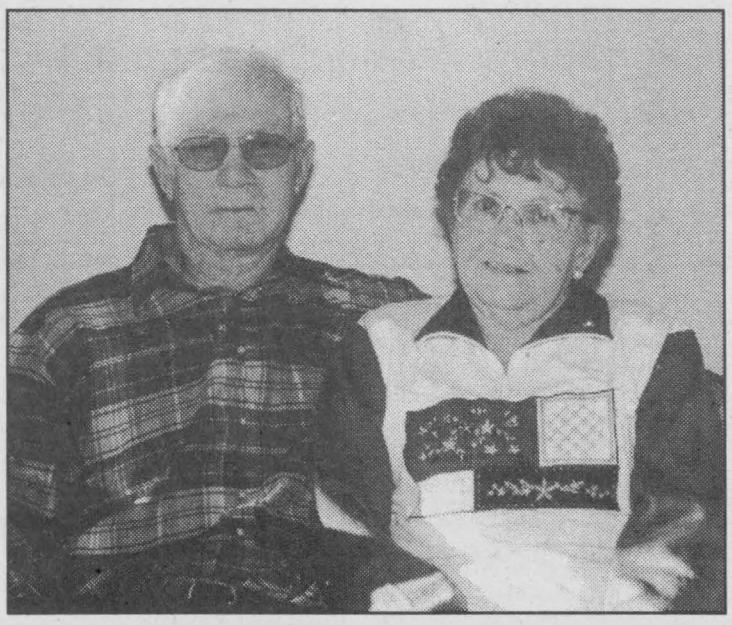
"Stay at home," she said. "Home is the place to be when you've got heart trouble. You can't go on vacation or anything because you might have a heart attack, so all you can do is stay at home where you've got friends and family watching out for you."

And her advice to heart patients is not to underestimate what your body might be telling you when you are having chest pains.

"The first thing to do if you're in pain is to get to the hospital. Even if it's at night. Don't wait until morning because morning might be too late. "It's easy to not realize that something might be seriously wrong".

And developing heart trouble can be hard to handle, Mac adds.

"When you're young, you don't think you'll ever get sick. But when you do, the frustration is as bad as anything," he said. "When you work all your life and all of a sudden you can't, it's hard to take."



Mac and Marjorie Thompson

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Local man has a first hand appreciation for heart specialists

by Chris Chase
Winchester Press Staff

When doctors at the Heart Institute in Ottawa showed Winchester's Roy Campbell a film explaining the bypass surgery he was about to undergo, he said he would rather not have known what the procedure involved.

Four years ago, when his doctor first discovered that Campbell had partial blockages in a couple of blood vessels, the damage was minimal enough that it could be treated without surgery. But when he was re-examined last year, it was discovered that the blockage had passed the point where it could be treated with medication. A third blood vessel was clogged. He needed a triple bypass operation and he needed it as quickly as possible.

"I didn't have a lot of choice in the matter," said Campbell. "The doctor did an angiogram to see where the block was and found three different veins that were blocked."

Campbell said that he was nervous about the operation but when he found that he needed it, he "just wanted to get it over with."

"They have to actually stop your heart for the length of the operation," he explained, "and the fact that you know that before you go in the operating room is a cause for concern. They explained the whole thing to me beforehand but I would have been quite happy not knowing. As long as the doctor knows what he's doing, that's all I need to know. When you wake up after it's done, you're not a happy camper."



Dawn and Roy Campbell and Amber

Campbell's father died of a heart attack in 1947, Campbell recalled, and he thinks that if the bypass procedure had existed in his father's time, he may have lived another 20 years. "He died when he was much younger than I am now and many others have too," he said. "He could have lived much longer."

The bypass operation is named for exactly what it is: the surgeon takes a section of blood vessel from the middle of the person's thigh and uses it to divert blood around the blockage. The blocked piece remains where it is.

"I always thought that the bad part was taken out and replaced with the new section, but that's not it at all," Campbell said. "The operation does as its name says -- it bypasses the blockage like a road around a city."

He added that the section of blood vessel that is used is attached to a nerve ending in the thigh. Part of Campbell's left high, where the blood vessel was taken from, is still numb.

The bypass operation is a potential life save for people with blocked blood vessels because even if the blockage is not total, there is a chance that a piece of the blockage could break free and cause damage elsewhere. And if that travels as far as the heart itself, it could prove fatal.

"It is a very common procedure -- it's been done thousands of times now. It's incredible the number of people that have had it done," said Campbell.

Campbell feels that the operation gave him a new lease on life. His main feeling now is one of being fortunate to have had the problem fixed. He also cannot give enough praise to the staff at Winchester District Memorial Hospital, the Queensway Carleton Hospital in Ottawa and the Ottawa Heart Institute. He is not a member of the Heart Institute but he is a Heart Institute alumnus.

"Those people are very good at what they do. In this day of criticism of the health industry, I couldn't have asked for better care," he said. "And the Heart Institute is comparable to any car facility in the world."

After Campbell recovered from his operation, he helped a friend of his to get ready for the same procedure.

"I only told him the good things about the operation," he said, chuckling. "It's a serious operation but we helped each other get through it. We still talk about it, compare notes almost."

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Jacques Asselin

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He explains that there is no fear harboured about a recurrence. "I think that was it, a mechanical valve which I have is apparently good for a lifetime. We watch our diet and my blood balance is right on as it was previous to the entire ordeal. I take vitamins and an anti-oxidant."

He continues explaining that lifting is no problem and he is able to do anything he wants to. He smiles as he tells about an elderly lady who Liz met just prior to the holiday season in December, in Cornwall. She too had undergone a valve replacement, only two months ago and was telling about a Christmas party she was planning to attend and all that worried her was the low cut dress she planned to wear and how she would need a scarf! The thing that astonished Liz was that this lady had the same doctor as Jacques, Doctor Gill who has since been lost to this country as he moved to the U.S.A. Small world after all!

While we talk, Jacques grows very serious and tells me that he very adamantly recommends that anyone who has a problem, no matter how insignificant they think it is, to have it checked out immediately, no sense at all in postponing it, when time is of the essence. "We are very fortunate here. We are certainly in good hands. When I was in the Heart Institute, I met people who had come all the way from Newfoundland for treatment. It was even more scary for them than me, being away from those they know and all that is familiar to them."

Jacques says he went into the operation with a positive attitude and is certain that this is one reason he did so well. "I kept thinking (even when the anaesthetic was being administered) positively...I'll be fine, I'm going to be great, and that is what I did!"

He also suggests that anyone going through open heart surgery should definitely attend the discharge classes before leaving the hospital. "They explain the do's and don'ts. You learn, as do those who live with you not to baby you. Afterall your body has had a shock, when you wake up and realize you have had your chest opened up completely, and then spend eight weeks recuperating, where you cannot do anything too physical you need to have encouragement and accomplish those things you should be doing in order to recover fully, these classes ensure you understand. When you want a cup of tea or coffee you are quite capable of getting your own. I encourage everyone to attend this class before heading home. It is always best to know."

His results are certainly an encouragement to everyone who has to undergo a similar operation. He looks great, works full days and has more energy than he has realized in years. His attitude is wonderful and he lives life to the fullest, a true testimony to the miracle performed. Perhaps the most awesome thing is that hundreds are accomplished every week in Ottawa by doctors who have the ability and knowledge to give people a second chance at life.

Upcoming Heart and Stroke events

* 'Roses for Hearts' Blitzes, Jan. 28-29 in Morrisburg, Winchester, Chesterville, Williamsburg, and the South Mountain area. Proceeds will support cardiovascular research in Ontario. The roses are sold by local youth groups and last year more than $1,000 was raised.
* Venturer Company canvassing, Feb. 4-5, 3:30 - 5:30 p.m. in the Iroquois Plaza.
* School-based activities are in two groups. The first is 'Skip Rope for Heart' events. The schools holding them are: Timothy Christian School, Feb. 12; Morewood Public School, May; Winchester Public School, May; Iroquois Public School, May; St. Mary's School, Morrisburg, May; St. Mary's School, Chesterville, May. Nationview School held theirs on October 28, 1998, and raised $3,500.

The second set is 'Hoops for Heart,' with the following schedule: North Dundas District High School, May 7; Seaway District High School, May 15; St. Cecilia's Senior School, Iroquois, May 15; Iroquois Public School, May.

For further information, please contact Barbara Wells at 535-2170.

Message from the President

As we approach February, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of the Dundas County volunteers much success in the upcoming Person-to-Person campaign, and the other Heart and Stroke Month activities.

The dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of the donors of Dundas County enabled us to surpass again last year the donations of the previous year. These donations and the funds raised from our activities throughout the year provide the resources to enable the Foundation to support research, health promotion and public education. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario had been successful in increasing public awareness of and decreasing the risks of heart disease and stroke.

The partnership of volunteers, donors, and the community have made this success possible. I thank you all for your continued support. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is a volunteer-driven organization and could not survive without its loyal and dedicated volunteers. If you are interested, please contact me at 543-2047.

Dorothy Houze
President
Dundas County Chapter
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario

Dress red for Heart and Stroke

A 'Dress Red for Heart and Stroke' campaign. Businesses and organizations invite employees to wear RED on Feb. 12 this year, and to donate a $2 minimum for heart and stroke research. Companies are encouraged to match their employees' donations and to adapt the program to suit their needs. Almost $2,400 was raised last year. If your group is not registered, please contact Pat Tryon at 652-2250.

'Darts for Hearts' will be held on Feb. 13 at the Iroquois Legion. Please contact Pat Tryon for details.

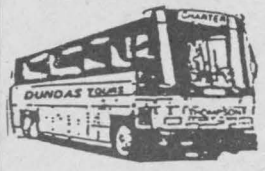
A golf tournament is planned for June 5 at the Cedar Glenn Golf Club. Details to be announced.

A Christmas Dance is planned again this year at the Morrisburg Legion. There will be raffles at the event, one of which will be for a quilt. Details to follow.

The Duck Race will be on again this year. Details to be announced.

A 'Heart and Stroke' breakfast at the McIntosh Country Inn in Morrisburg. Dr. Danielle Leddy is the guest speaker, and her topic will be 'Women, Heart Disease and Stroke.' Dr. Leddy is a cardiologist who works at the Ottawa Hospital and the Ottawa Heart Institute. The breakfast will be at 9 a.m. and will cost $6. Tickets will be available from Barb Sheridan at 543-2349.

A 'Volunteer Appreciation Evening' is scheduled for April. Details will be announced and an invitation extended to all volunteers.



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