

## Chapter 32

### *The Long Valley of Weakness*

I have always had good health though not of a strong constitution. September of 2003 however, was to be the start of a long period of weakness brought about by my having a simple operation for a hiatus hernia. My doctor had recommended this as a solution to the pained throat I would experience after singing. I entered Victoria Royal Jubilee Hospital for the straightforward arthroscopic operation, was released after two days and anticipated a full and quick recovery. However, Anne had recently fallen and fractured her ankle, so I prepared my own lunch the first day home. I was told to eat only soft food for a while so I made a meal of Chinese noodles, 'the worst thing possible' according to my surgeon later. Apparently, noodles expand in the esophagus, as these did, causing me to have a blockage in swallowing, something I would experience many times in the next few months. I became quite anxious so called the surgeon later that evening. He told me to go back to emergency where he would meet me to remove the blockage. This he did, using an endoscopy tube to push the food to my stomach from where it could be pumped out. That was quite an ordeal and it was with relief that I finally got to sleep that night in the hospital. Whether some damage was done to my esophagus at that time I do not know, but for the next several weeks I had much difficulty in swallowing at almost every meal, though the surgeon kept telling me that it would soon pass.

In December I went to see my doctor again as I was feeling so weak. He took one look at me, put me on the weighing scales and then told me to go immediately to the hospital emergency, where a bed would be waiting for me. I had lost over twenty pound in weight, from 160 to 139 lb., so was put on an intravenous drip of a saline solution for three days. Now the surgeon was concerned so he arranged for me to have further tests. Over the next few months I regularly visited the hospital to have blood tests, barium tests, X-rays, CanScans and MRIs, even being anaesthetized for endoscopy tests, but with no solution being found for my blockages and weakness.

I was having yet another barium test in April of 2004 when I took a teaspoonful of liquid in which were two small marshmallows. As I swallowed it, I blocked. At last the technicians had found the problem. Evidently, the esophagus was twisted as it entered the stomach, something an endoscopy tube could not see, and my food was catching in this kink. Further surgery was decided upon so in May I re-entered the Royal Jubilee hospital. The surgery was deemed a success, though 'it was very difficult as there was so much scar tissue from the previous surgery' according to the surgeon's assistant.

Now further complications began as I developed blood clots in my lungs, necessitating a course of blood thinners for the rest of the year. I was at the hospital daily for a few weeks while they worked out my Coumadin (blood thinner) requirements, taking and assessing my blood samples. Then I had to attend every week for a few months, and then just once a month until December when I was allowed to stop the treatment. At the same time I was complaining of pain in my lungs and side, thinking this was the effect of the blood clots, only to be told by my doctor that I had developed pleurisy and gall stones!

I have always believed that the atoning work of the cross includes health for our mortal (living) bodies as well as salvation for the soul. However, I also believe that the Lord can permit us to go into valleys where He can discipline and teach us even more of His own wonderful nature. It would be amiss of me to tell about my prolonged sickness if I did not also tell of a thrilling event at the time of the surgery. The doctor was giving me a pre-operation examination, taking my blood pressure and pulse and using his stethoscope extensively over my chest and back. As he was taking quite a long time I said "You are probably hearing my prolapse gurgling," to which he replied, "No! That's just the problem. I cannot hear any prolapse though your chart says I should!" When I was pastor at Victoria Alliance Church it had been my custom to play racketball each week with the youth worker. One evening, while playing, I was suddenly overtaken with extreme weakness and lack of breath. The next morning my doctor sent me to a cardiac specialist at whose office I watched an ultra-sonic monitor, upon which my prolapse could be clearly seen. My mother had died in 1952 after a prolonged sickness brought

on by her prolapsed heart valve, so I became very sensitive about my own condition, taking care not to strain my heart through excessive sports or activities. Now, over twenty years later, apparently the prolapse had been healed! I remembered going forward for prayer for my condition at a Pastor's District Conference several years before, but had never realised I been healed until now.

During 2004 I had to cancel some meetings, especially those requiring much travel, though we did take the opportunity of cheap airfares to visit our friends in Ontario in Toronto and Kitchener. I knew I was ill but that I would recover if I took care of myself, so I spent much time in my study, reading and writing poetry. My prayer life became more meaningful and I felt no guilt about not doing anything else!

I was past all these complications as 2005 started, but still had not regained my weight and was therefore still quite weak. At the end of August a friend built a small veranda for us outside our bedroom and leading down to the garden. I sat and held the screws and tools for him as he completed the job, and then he said words that really set me back. "It's going to rain on Saturday so you must stain this deck tomorrow to give it a water seal." Such a task was surely beyond me. The next day I bought a gallon of stain and, sitting on the floor, began to stain the deck. It took me several hours but finally I could sit back and say, "I've done it! I've done it!" This was the first major thing I had achieved in two years!

It would be September of 2005, two years since my initial surgery, that I began to see an improvement in my general feeling of well being. A good friend recommended I take BioK, a potent yogurt product which would replace the healthy bacteria I had lost due to the anesthesia of my surgeries and endoscopy tests. I will not say that is what cured me, but the correlation between taking it daily and my improvement was quite remarkable. At the end of the year, we took our regular trip to Australia. There I relaxed in the sun, traveled across the Great Western Desert, cycled almost every day and swam in my daughter's swimming pool. My energy was returning, and I was regaining my sense of well-being.

The three-week journey across the Great Western Desert was a very refreshing time. I was in the company of a Canberra schoolteacher friend, John Coman, and several of his colleagues and students, who were going to spend a week at an Aboriginal community with a program for the children there. This included dirt motorbike riding, many games and Bible teaching. We tented out under the brilliant night sky where the 'emu' – a section of dark sky extending over a large area in the shape of an emu, could clearly be seen. I went for long walks in the sun. On the journey we stopped at several Aboriginal villages where I was introduced as 'guda Ron' indicating I was a friend of Ron Williams, the Aboriginal pastor from Canberra. This made me an immediate friend. Our friends took us on a safari to find the many waterholes upon which they used to depend, and looking for kangaroo and emu for our dinner. Unfortunately they were not to be found but we did find, cook and eat an iguana, a large lizard. It tasted like chicken but was more 'chewy'. This was at a site 'probably never before seen by a white man' as it contained cave paintings made by our guides' ancestors many years ago. I knew how privileged we were to be so accepted by these wonderful people. Our journey ended at Ayers Rock in the centre of this vast land, from where I caught a plane back to Brisbane and my daughter's new home.

On returning to Canada in the spring of 2006 I knew that my health was once again good, as I felt a renewed energy and was eating well.