

Chapter 12. Medical Handicap

1. Stage I

My hearing started to become a worry when I was about fifteen (15). Although my Uncle Alex (Dad's brother) was Hearing Challenged, I was led to believe that his issues were caused by a medical Doctor during a routine tonsil operation. Nobody in the family really understood what took place but soon after his operation, his hearing started to fail. He wore hearing aids until he died but essentially could only read and write to communicate in the end.

I started to concern myself about that issue as the time to enter University approached in the summer of 1958. By coincidence, L. W. Verigin Construction had an ongoing construction contract with a Dr. Wilmes from Spokane, at his summer home along Syringa Creek Highway near about where the public parking lot is at the current Syringa Creek Park. He was a friendly sort whose family had originated in Trail, and, in fact, Wilmes Lane in Trail is named after the family.

Somehow the subject of my handicap came into conversation and Dr. Wilmes informed us that he was an Ear, Nose and Throat Physician / Surgeon in Spokane. So, he invited me to visit his offices in Spokane which resulted in Lawrence and Mable taking me there. His assessment was that I had a birth defect or Otosclerosis. As quoted from the internet:

*"..... **Otosclerosis** is **caused** by an abnormal growth of bone in the ears, which **causes** hearing loss. In most cases, a surgical operation will restore the hearing. **Otosclerosis** has to do with the three small bones in the middle ear, more specifically the stapes....."*

The corrective operation would be very expensive in the USA for a Canadian and recovery could take up to one month. He recommended that I make an appointment with an Ear, Nose and Throat professional in Canada and go from there.

A discussion with Lawrence and Mable on the way back to Trail included:

1. Expense, that I could little afford so yes Canada and Saskatchewan, where I was already on medical insurance made sense.
2. But I would need to be referred to a professional by a doctor.
3. The one-month recovery was scary as how do I afford the time and still attend University as taking time off work in advance was also not affordable?

So, we left the discussion with "when I get to Saskatoon, I could go and see such a professional." Great conclusion but challenging for me with my limited resources.

So, after I completed registration at the University and settled down at 2518 Ewart Avenue, I decided to give this a whirl and at least establish some parameters and then go from there.

So let us find a professional....., I looked in the Saskatoon phone directory and saw a list of Ear Nose and Throat Professionals. "Which one?" I asked myself and so I let Quantum Physics assist me and I pointed my finger at the list, closed my eyes and poked it at one of the names and that is how I got Dr. Stark.

I decided to go downtown and just walk into his office and take it from there. The Receptionist got my name and then the question "who referred you to this office?" I was quick then and responded with "Dr. Wilmes from Spokane, Washington!"

"I will see what I can do" and to this day I have no idea how she was able to get me in right away as Dr. Stark was actually the Head of the Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists at the University of Saskatchewan Hospital but I did not know that then.

Dr. Stark was not a talkative person as he went through the entire process including the Hearing Tests. So far, I was fine as all this was apparently covered by Saskatchewan Medical which I had in place.

"I want you at the University Hospital next week on Wednesday at 4:00 P.M. for check in", as he completed his file notes and essentially excused me.

"So, what are you going to do?" I stammered.

"Operate on your ear", he answered. "Isn't that what you came here for?"

I stumbled out of the office and started to rehash all this in my mind to make sense of it all. Then I settled down with "what did I have to lose since I cannot hear, and this is an opportunity to fix that!"

With a great deal of uncertainty, I called in to the University Hospital and later that Wednesday evening I was told to report to an office in the hospital and I saw the name on the door as well as that Dr. Stark was the Head of the Ear, Nose and Throat Department. I experienced his usual non-communicative self and he dismissed me again with me not knowing any more about what his procedure would be.

I was prepared by the Nurses and had no breakfast but placed on a gurney and lined up in the hall to the Operating Room. Soon I was rolled into the brightly lit Operating Room. A Doctor and a Nurse were in attendance and the only questions were:

1. Elmer Verigin?
2. Left ear?

Then there was a drilling and suddenly I could hear the hair rustling on his arm. Whispering, he asked me if I could hear and my surprised answer "yes!"

That is all I remember until I awoke in my hospital bed. I felt like I needed to urinate and so started getting up from my bed when I realized that the entire room, bed, and neighboring patient were all moving in different directions. I steadied myself on the bed edge, trying to get my bearings and

focused on the door to the bathroom, then I made a lunge for the door and for the first time I realized that what looked like up, could also be down and beside. I made it!

It was a challenge in using the toilet as the room spun around. Then it was another huge effort to get back into bed. Just as the room finished spinning, a Nurse came in to ask me how I was doing. I explained my recent trek to which she said "oh, I was to provide a pan for you as you were not supposed to navigate on your own."

"Oh, thank you!" I said in under my breath.

So, I stayed close to my bed the rest of the day until the next morning Dr. Stark came in with a group of white-coated medical students (I believe) and as he talked, he took off my bandages and everyone had to have a peak at what was there. Then I got a command from Dr. Stark "get up!"

I slowly slid off my bed and stood there very unstable. "Okay, walk toward me," he commanded. As I staggered toward him, he moved away and so we proceeded to the wide hospital hallway. I stopped to let the hallway stop moving side to side while he summoned me with his hands.

"This is how they are after the operation," he spoke to his class. Then to me, he said "you can go home now, and I will see you in my downtown office in seven (7) days as he turned around and walked away with his class.

Well, the process of getting my clothes on and navigating out of the hospital is a story unto itself but that I did and decided I needed to take a bus. The trip to 2518 Ewart Avenue was more a story about survival but somehow, I did as there was no one to support me at that time.

I crashed into my room and worked on resting and using the bathroom and finally I was called to dinner. Sitting at a table was a sequence of careful moves which I was learning to do. I realized much later that my Inner Ear balance fluid was partially compromised which is what was causing my imbalance.

Next day it was off to university and classes again and I cautiously got back into the system.

Yes, I staggered around the Engineering Building with enquiring looks by my classmates, thinking that I was "high" on booze or drugs. This started to diminish over a few weeks and yes, my hearing was substantially improved.

2. Stage 2

After a year, I noticed that my hearing deteriorated almost to the original level. At the beginning of my third year in Chemical Engineering, I made an appointment with Dr. Stark, and he went through a similar inspection with another session at the hospital with about as much information as the first time.

"What will happen now?" I asked with a bit more confidence.

The tubing, I installed to connect your Stapes (Ear Drum) to the Inner Ear has collapsed so I will use a more recent technology and attach a Platinum wire to the Stapes that replace the artificial conduit.

About the same process including the Interns took place at the hospital. This time Marilyn visited me just as my mother was able to come to be with me. This chance meeting, unbeknown to me, resulted in Mother going home to Benito (she had sold the farm and moved to stay with sister Mary and her husband John) and confided to Mary "I sure wish Elmer stays with this girl friend of his. She is very nice!" I did not know about this until years later.

This time the procedure worked much better, and my left ear is my best functioning ear. I had to go through a similar after effect with the Balance Fluid in the ear.

3. Stage 3

Several years later, I decided that I should get Dr. Stark to operate on my right ear as that was getting handicapped. I travelled to Saskatoon, and I was not received too enthusiastically by Dr. Stark. He did not recommend this operation as the procedure is at best a 50% success rating and the chance of losing the hearing altogether in that ear was possible.

I insisted!

Today I have less than 10% hearing in my right ear and less than 30% in my left. This procedure was usual in men over 50 years of age, but I had it done at age 18 and 20 so, I had substantial success.

4. Stage 4

Today, I wear Hearing Aids with an external controller. I have Blue Tooth Technology that interconnects my cell phone to my hearing aids. When the phone rings, I am automatically aware, and I can answer without making contact with phone nor controller. When the call is completed, I touch my "Phontak", and the cell phone is disconnected.

I can advance this to my TV as well as my car, but I just have not got around to it.

I also have a separate microphone that receives sound and is very helpful at meetings but picks up background noise and interferes with what I want to hear.

5. Stage 5

Review of what this may mean to my descendant's is this:

1. The Verigin family has a "faulty gene" that may affect some of the Verigin's
2. I am aware of
 - a. My uncle Alex Verigin
 - b. Brother Russel
 - c. Sister Mary

- d. Granddaughter Kayla
 - e. Grandson Malcolm
- 3. Follow the professional advice and only do the operation with their recommendations.
- 4. Hearing devices are being improved everyday so do not be afraid to wear them as some can be totally hidden.

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