

**Preface for the The Simplified Handbook For Living With Heart Disease
By Warren Selkow**

When I first started to write this, I had no plans as to what the final use of this book would be. In fact it wasn't even a book. It was, at best, a short monograph. In the initial version, I was just going to report, as factually as I could, what I would have wanted to know and was afraid to ask when I first got sick. I had thought then it would not be necessary to tell my story, and would not be appreciated on the part of the reader. I am not a doctor of medicine. Why should anyone listen to me? As you read this, you will decide if what I say has any worth.

As it turns out, it is very necessary for me to tell my story, but not all at once. That is boring and is just one old sick guy blowing off hot air. Instead, I will relate my experiences and what I remember. Someday we can all get together and swap tales of daring do about our shared experiences. Not! I have talked with so many surviving open-heart patients. What is more important, is helping you prepare for, accept your condition and living with the disease. Put that way it kind of sounds like living next door to overly loud neighbors. Not pleasant, but tolerable.

I gave that initial paper to my cardiologist with the only hope that he would find it worthwhile and give it to his patients. Things don't work out that way. He came back and told me this was really about living with almost all chronic diseases and he named the big four: Coronary Artery Disease, Diabetes, Renal Failure and Pulmonary Disease. I don't know squat about the last three of those diseases. However, the doctors do and they say that the advice I give in this book works for all the diseases. Who am I to argue?

I have first hand experience in living with Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) and, fortunately, none of the others. What the cardiologist told me is there are millions of people who suffer from both diabetes and Coronary Artery Disease. This work could and would lessen the deleterious effects of those twin killers and allow the sufferers to live not only more comfortable and easier lives but longer lives as well. Shucks, Skippy, could I actually help others? It now seems so.

The conversation with my cardiologist, Dr. Joseph Caplan, CEO of Cardiac Solutions in Peoria, Arizona, started me to think about not only the day-to-day disciplines of CAD but also what the patient goes through from first being diagnosed and then all the catastrophic events that can ensue. I use the term "catastrophic" although if you are diagnosed early on in the life cycle of serious cardiac disease, the term "life changing" might be more appropriate.

Actually, the conversation was with a registered nurse at Cardiac Solutions, who educates and treats patients with Congestive Heart Failure and Hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol). She specializes in education and follow-up regarding diet and the other life adjustments

necessary attendant with living with chronic heart disease. I do not recall exactly what was said but something in that comment triggered all this work.

This book is divided into two primary sections. The first section will deal with preparing for and surviving open-heart surgery and the aftermath, getting through the first six weeks after the surgery. The second section will deal with living with chronic heart disease for the long term. If you have already had and survived open-heart surgery, then you may skip this first part and go right to either the aftermath section, or the section dealing with living with cardiac disease for the long haul.

In my case the long haul, that first heart attack turned out to be a blessing in disguise. If not for that heart attack, my condition would have gone undiagnosed, and in a few months my heart would have literally exploded. It would be a common wish to not ever have a heart attack. This might actually fall into the category of “Be careful of what you wish for.” The following story illustrates that point:

A man was born with a golden screw in his belly button. All his life he obsessed about that screw and all his life he tried to have that screw removed; all to no avail. That is until he met the acetic guru from Nepal. He told this wise man of his problem and the wise man promised his wish would be granted if he followed the “way”.

The man with the golden screw promised to follow whatever way was necessary if it would get rid of the golden screw. (Oh how often we make promises without understanding the circumstances.) The guru laid out the plan to the man with the screw and off he went to follow the “way”. The man with the screw went to the mountains of Nepal where he entered a Buddhist seminary and began a life of quiet contemplation and meditation.

For two years he exactly followed the way until the day the guru came to him and said, “You are now ready”. The guru directed the man with golden screw in his belly button to a high mountain and a cave at the summit. It took two days to climb that mountain and get to the cave. Inside the cave was a chest. Inside the chest was a note that read, “Fast for two days and then look back inside this chest.”

The man with the golden screw in his belly button, having come this far, spent the next two days fasting. After the two days, he opened the chest and found another note that read, “Now spend one more day wishing as hard as you can for the screw to be gone and then look back inside this chest.” Well, in for a penny, in for a dollar, as the saying goes, so the man with the golden screw in his belly button spent the next twenty-four hours wishing, as hard as he could for the screw to be gone.

After the twenty-four hours he looked in the chest and inside he found an envelope that read, “The answer for your quest lies within”. Inside the envelope was a little gold

screwdriver. The head of the gold screwdriver perfectly fit the slot of the gold screw in his belly button. It was the only screwdriver that ever perfectly fit the head of the gold screw in his belly button. With great happiness he turned the screwdriver and finally after all the years of obsessing over that gold screw, the screw backed right out. Then his ass fell off.

Be careful of what you wish for.

Caregiver Notes: From time to time it will be necessary to give some helpful advice and guidance to those providing care to the cardiac patient. Those paragraphs will be printed in italics, just like this.

All the caregiver notes come from my wife, Donna.

The Caregiver should read the whole book, if for no other reason, to better understand what the patient will be living through. My wife, Donna, assisted me in writing the sections on the caregiver. And who better. She was with me through both open-heart surgeries and frankly, I would not be alive today if not for her.

You will also notice much of the book is written in first person plural, we, a strange twist given there was only one sick person; without my wife there would be no first person, I. We had to get through the serious sick times together. My wife, my primary caregiver, was with me step by agonizing step. It was my wife who understood the grave nature of my illness, better than me. I was living in Egypt on De Nile. Sorry for the horrible pun. Denial is a common side dish accompanying the diagnosis of serious cardiac disease.

When we first learned the seriousness of the diagnosis I said, "Can't be". We are sure that many others have the exact same response. We sincerely hope you find some comfort in this book from learning you (the both of you) are not alone and you can both persevere and move on.

One last thought: Knowledge provides power, assurance and survival. We are eight years post op for the first open heart surgery and six years post op for the second. We are also in better physical shape now than we were as far back as five years before the first surgery. What we say in this book works for us and will work for you. Honest.

Special Authors' note: The entire first section, that dealing with open heart surgery, can scare the living bejibbers out of you. It was recommended we either make the surgery section Part II or toned down the language. We carefully listened to the advice, considered how the information would fall on people and then decided: Nah! We are not authors of scary movies and books. We do want to inform and help prepare. If I (as the patient) had known exactly what to expect

and when to expect it, the first surgery would not have been so traumatic or fear laden. The second surgery was not the least bit traumatic in terms of fear. It hurt like hell, nonetheless.

And one last disclaimer: We are not “medical people”. We are just two average people, who at the age of 58 found our lives turned upside down and inside out. All the medical information we have had vetted by professional medical people for accuracy. Everything else we lived through.

Caregivers note: Little thought has been given or written about that addresses what the caregiver must live through. It is a physical and emotional gut wrenching experience to get a loved one through open-heart surgery and then assist with in dealing and living with the disease. The long-term caregiver has to learn to live with the patients' disease as well as the patient does. The price of freedom is vigilance and to stay well will require you to stay vigilant. In the main text of the book some statistics are given as to life expectancy after heart surgery. They are enlightening. More importantly those statistics demonstrate your importance, as the caregiver, to the long-term welfare and continuing good health of your patient. Please take those statistics to your heart.

It takes a team effort to stay well with serious heart disease. The team consists of your patient (the object of all the attention), the cardiologist for the regular monitoring of the disease, the cardiologists' medical staff for the maintenance of the disease, your general care physician and other assorted folks that will come through on a regular basis. As the caregiver you are the Captain of the team. It will fall to you to ensure the proper advice is given and the patient follows instructions.

**Warren and Donna Selkow's book, is now available through
www.Amazon.com and www.simplehand.org**