



Diagnosis

His bedside manner quite simply beguiles.

"Oh yes, those are the symptoms," (and he smiles),

"of some blockage of mid-severity,

which plugs your coronary artery...

it's heart disease. (Now scribbles as he speaks)

Take one of these, two of those daily please,

the third may harm, but we'll test in a month

and adjust, if needed, the prescribed amount."

He pauses. Should he talk now of prognosis?

Instead, he just rechecks his diagnosis,

then nods, handing to me his curt scribble.

(My color's good, my risk of death yet little,

and should, per chance, something happen to me -

just a statistical anomaly,

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

one in a thousand - insignificant,
there'd be no blame, no need for an account.)

He moves on, smiling, burden self-absolved -
no need to look that my face's now dissolved.

He knows I know he offered no real help
left me to deal with the disease myself.

My choice is now to take or not to take,
to trade heart pains for permanent headache.

Symptoms return: there is the nauseous sweat,
heart-stopping pain...(No, not the final yet!)

I still have time to think what lies in wait,
and be head-held-high-ready for my fate.

I seek to blame no genes, Fortuna, lifestyle --
not even him:. I'll survive a while now,
like in the past, like others - everyone -

To come to terms alive with death as one.

Just have to wait a while... Inside my chest
my heart still wildly beats - (life's fear of death.)

My fear's like wings of bird flap in the hand,
subside slowly, yet tremble till the end,

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

waiting and hoping the grip will release

and be set free or returned to its cage. (Summer, 1996)

Stress test

Cold metal fingertips attached to wire arms,

sensitive to pulse but unfeeling of emotions

await to probe my heart.

I am here because I could not walk without gasping,

afraid of the iron grip that reached through my ribs -

scared to death of dying.

The nurse is finished and steps back, turning a knob,

and the doctor sits by the monitor-machine, expectant,

waiting to get on with it.

In the brochure I read and my own doctor told me

to avoid exertion and stress, for in my condition

either one can kill me.

The treadmill awaits - offering me both those things at once.

I am not stupid The treadmill can kill me but it can't help.

"I have a question," I stall.

Nurse and doctor alike are annoyed, but try to stay polite.

They have to do six this morning and are running late.

"Yes?" They look me over.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

"Is this for diagnosis?" A stupid question. I know the answer.

"This is to confirm the diagnosis," the doctor says, "this is more accurate."

"Can't this induce a heart attack?"

The nurse steps in to reassure me. "Oh yes, it can, but if it does, you'd have one anyway - sooner or later. Better have it here."

And smiles at the doctor.

I wish I had her confidence. But I know if I don't risk my life now,

I will lose my place in the six-month line - all waiting for help.

I step on the treadmill.

I am here because I could not walk without gasping,

afraid of the iron grip that now begins to reach through my ribs,
scared to death of dying.

Cold metal fingertips attached to wire arms are holding me up,

(sensitive to pulse, but unfeeling like the nurse and the doctor)

start probing my heart.

F. V. (01. 17. 97.)

Angiogram

I did not know what to expect only to expect it.

A catheter with a dye is maneuvered into the beating heart.

When the dye squirts in you can feel the warmth.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

(Meanwhile, your heart is removed from your chest,
and sits, pulsing, on a television screen -
a most vivid vision: an underwater scream.)

And you can see why. Four vessels are pinched
as if by death's fingernails. Of those two pinched so well,
no blood can get through that one can tell.

But look again, see? Look real closely... closer still!

See that vessel that now seems to burst?

There pressure is building, then there is a squirt.

The picture's so graphic, it gets etched in the mind.

Then you hear figures: ninety-eight percent, ninety-five...

But they have seen worse. "Looks stable for a while."

With that I am told to lie still for six hours on my back.

"We will do a bypass, using your arteries. We'll need four.

There is a waiting list of four months or more."

F. V. (01. 17.97.)

Now I lay me down to sleep

As now I lay me down to sleep,

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

oh Lord I only want to weep --

for all the deeds I could have done,

for all that I have not begun,

for all the things that haven't been,

for all the sights I have not seen,

for all the things I could have said,

for all the fights I should have led,

for all the joys I did not share,

for all the times I did not care,

for all the paths I have not tried,

for all the times that I have lied,

for all the promises betrayed,

for all the times that I have strayed,

for all to whom I did not give,

for all the dreams I did not live,

for all the time I let slip by,

for all the tears I did not cry,

for all the times I would not bend,

or did not lend a helping hand,

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

for all the times I stood aloof,
from those with whom I shared a roof,
for all my frequent selfish bent,
tonight, my Lord, let me repent.

So if, perchance, I should not wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take
back to the start - the womb, the pain -
so I may start my life again!
F. V. (01. 18.97.)

Why me?

Why me? (Why me? Why me? Why me?)
There must be millions less deserving,
and millions more yet - undeserving,
who all enjoy full healthy lives:
the lives that now my heart denies.

Why now? (Why now? Why now? Why now? -)
My virtues, talents are not spent:
there's much to say, do, and repent.
I still must write another line -

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

Lord give me time! Lord give me time!

Why not? (Why not? Why not! Why not...)

There must be others more deserving,
and millions more who are still serving,
and yet all those who have not song -
who died so young... who died so young!

Take me! (Take me. Take me! Take me!)

How many times did I beseech Thee?

And yet from thousand deaths you saved me,
and made me live when I'd have died -
I never cried, went on and tried.

"Thy will be done." Thy will be done?

Thou who art not - thy will be done?!

No, not until my job is done!

There's heartbeat still, the breath's in me -

In me I trust, in me, in me!

F. V. (01. 18.97.)

Cardiac arrest

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

At 7:05, surrounded by friends

waiting to commence a game of cards,

during an irrelevant conversation Arnie said: "Excuse me!"

and leaned his head on a shoulder as his body went limp.

At that instant he must have seen the light,

but could not walk towards it, so the light came to him.

As the children watched with deer-like eyes

frantic friends tried to help,

one-two-three-four-five, one-two-three-four-five;

but Arnie did not need any help.

At 7:10 more friends arrived with the firemen.

The forced air, following a path of least resistance,

distended his stomach before it filled his lungs.

Over his prone body the firemen went to work.

One-two- three-four -five, one- two-three- four -five, as the oxygen hissed

until the machine warned "Sta-and back! Sta-and back!"

and Arnie's hand waved goodbye, or perhaps hello?

For just then the first of two ambulance crews arrived (at 7:30 to be precise),

with more air and more machines, and Arnie has been always a nice man, and very polite.

One-two-three-four-five, one-two-three-four-five...

At 7: 35 the third crew arrived.

They made Arnie, now reluctant, to wave again and again.

His heart restarted briefly, but did not want to pump.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

One of the machines stopped working

in sympathy, but another one was brought in.

(No fault was to be found and no blame...)

At 7:40 his doctor was reached on the telephone.

One- two- three- four- five, one- two- three- four- five...

First he did not know who Arnie was, less what medication Arnie was on,

but remembered that an Anderson had diabetes.

One- two- three- four- five, one- two- three- four-five...

At 7:45 Arnie's wife was located,

and friends were dispatched to take her to the hospital to meet Arnie.

One- two- three-four -five, one- two-three- four-five...

(The work went on past good will, and well beyond hope.)

There was a bit of oxygen left in the tank. At 7:55 it ran out.

Three crews packed their gear (and Arnie), with them.

A young girl cried in her father's arms,

but nothing was spilled, and although the room has changed subtly,

it looked warm and civilized, and we who were left behind thought

Death has never been more merciful.

At 8:10 the Ambulance arrived at the hospital for

the final rendezvous.

Arnie was seventy. He was on time.

(March, 1997)

The best and the worst of waiting

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

The best part of waiting is that you are still alive.

You carry on.

A lovely day seems more lovely to you - and cloudy days seem more depressing.

There are a lot of cloudy days when you are waiting, and your symptoms also get worse with the weather.

At first you greet each angina pain holding your breath,
and waiting -

for Death is a Joker forever teasing before it pounces:

you cannot let your guard down.

You must take each pain as a dead-earnest warning,
and with unstable angina these come with or without provocation,
when you least expect it.

Sometimes your heart races or slows.

It is called a different name, but it works the same.

Being reminded of your mortality many times a day is a morbid experience.

You must not let it get you down.

I, sixty years old, completed four university courses while waiting.

Christmas has come and gone.

My doctor has gone on a holiday and came back.

Arnie died.

I now have written several poems for my own therapy,
and have come to terms with my own death while waiting.

This has been the best of the waiting.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

The worst of the waiting is watching those who care about you fret.

Acquaintances have heard the news and want to know more.

Friends ask anxiously how you are and if they don't see you, call to ask.

You receive countless get-well cards.

Relatives phone long distance from many miles away.

Some are on other continents.

Your wife watches your lips always, mindful of color changes,

and nudges you in the morning should you lie still,

to see if you are alive.

Your daughter is afraid to return your wife's call,

expecting the worst.

The worst part of waiting you can never get used to.

It is to see your loved ones suffer, waiting to be relieved.

(F.V. April 15, 97.)

Operation and Operation Recovery

The operation that changes your life is full of convergences and ironies.

I, the tallest man on the ward was operated on by the shortest Surgeon,

but at my bedside he looked like a giant to me. I greeted him like a !Kung.

These wonderful but vanishing primitive people,

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

the kindest and the shortest on Earth, greet each other with:

"I have seen you from afar!"

He was puzzled but unruffled,

and eyed me with benign curiosity.

My greeting stemmed from my own sense of primitive nakedness on the operating table as much as from his stature.

In the operating room one must be cryptic in expressing sentiments

for when one is rolled in

they are all set to go.

There is no time for comfort or conversation,

no way to get to know those in whose hands your existence is placed.

In the logistic scheme of things

there is time only for the many tasks to be done.

Yet in one's heightened state images become everything, and before they put me under

I saw my Surgeon as a Deng-Napoleon, confident, self-assured,

and I felt gratified that in the coming battle of my life

he was to be on my side.

,

When it was over, I also thought it fitting that my life, which had been dedicated to be

the best and most complete I could be in my field -

should be saved by one

who sought the same in his.

The best part of the Operation is that you have no memory of it.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

This is ironic, considering the importance of the event.

Another irony is that the operation that saves your life almost kills you.

When you come to you feel suspended in midair,

and sustained only by the kind encouraging words of those who nurse you,

otherwise you would just drift away.

It is a good thing that there is intensive care at this stage, for without it few would survive.

But the real battle starts at the Recovery Ward.

An army of nurses descend upon you in the morning.

They all have a job to do and they all mean to do it.

They work like professional soldiers on a mission: they give no quarter.

(A good thing, too, for the things they do do keep you alive.)

But they can be brutal, demanding,

often insensitive to your needs of privacy,

current noxious state,

or momentary state of exhaustion.

Part of their duty is to shine a flashlight into your face

every hour of the night.

In this way they can see and record that you are okay, and resting peacefully!

All my night nurses persisted in carrying out their duty of

waking me on the hour every hour with their flashlights, all the time I stayed on the ward.

They are complemented by Special Cavalry Units,

equipped with rolling I. V. towers and machines,

mop-buckets and pumps.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

The machines hum and bleep and bleat and gurgle all through the night.

The day nurses seem to make you do things you don't want to do

at the times you least want to do them.

There is frequent conflict. But you are weak and sick, and they are strong and healthy.

The conflict is of words only, and quite futile.

In the end, they all get their jobs done.

You are pilled and willed into submission with professionalism cheerfully executed.

Some are actually humming while taking your blood like mosquitoes.

Others may sing in or out of tune upon entering the room.

This, of course is for the benefit of ward morale,

intending to counter the annoyed irritation of the patients.

This is the modus operandi at the Recovery Ward.

It is your Boot Camp of Life.

But I remember a Filipino nurse named Little Flower, who was gentle and kind.

And I remember bonding with my fellow sufferers.

We each endured, and appreciated what it took to endure in others.

We each just had our own calamities.

Difficult situations tend to show the true mettle of men,

and I discovered a soul-brother in a Pakistani who said little, complained less,

and was well loved by family and friends. We spent hours discussing

politics and religion, ethics and philosophy -

and valued humor as a survival skill.

Still, leaving the Battle Ward is a happy event.

Of Matters of the Heart

Written by Administrator

The road of recovery at home is a long one, with many ups and downs, twists and turns.

Back home for less than a week,

I have already had some setbacks.

But on the whole I am healing fast

and getting stronger every day.

Some say your recovery never ends. But I am optimistic.

After all, recovery (like life itself) is a journey -

only to be realized as it happens. (Kamloops, June 12, 1997)

Having gone through the foregoing (and watching Arnie die), I now believe that if you have got to go, heart disease is the lucky way to go. Perhaps there should be a queue for having a death so swift and so merciful? During one of my arrhythmia episodes after the surgery my heart stopped beating. In less than ten seconds I was losing consciousness. Frightened, I jumped up and my heart resumed its normal beating. A mild headache followed. No one was around. I could have been gone that easily.

May sharing of my catharsis help those of you who need it.

Frank Veszely