



Rhythms of Life

Restoring Rhythms, Renewing Lives

Summer 1997

Mountain Tranquility

"You cannot control everything that happens to you," says Rachel Smith, age 39, "but you can control how you deal with each situation." Rachel has written a book entitled, "Life After Sudden Death", which tells how she dealt with several major events in her life.

In her early 20s, Rachel required treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. Rachel says this treatment program taught her the skills to get back on the right track when she needed it. Using what she learned about dealing with problems, Rachel made some changes in her lifestyle. She went back to school, obtained a degree in Social Services, and started a rewarding career counseling troubled teens and their families. She also changed her eating and exercise habits. Rachel says she felt as if life could not get any better.

Then one day Rachel collapsed on the floor from cardiac arrest. "Luckily I was at home with my husband, Larry, who performed CPR until paramedics arrived.

Young and healthy, and with no family history of heart disease, Rachel's episode came as a surprise. After a total of 47 days in 3 different hospitals, doctors determined Rachel's heart had an electrical imbalance that caused her heart to go into ventricular tachycardia (VT). VT is a dangerously fast heart rate. To detect and treat the VT, her doctors implanted a defibrillator that delivers

Rachel Smith, Defibrillator Patient



electrical therapies to restore the heart's rhythm.

"Needless to say, this was a very traumatic event in my life. Not only did I have to adapt to an implanted medical device, but the episode also left me legally blind." Rachel recalls going through the stages of denial, anger, depression, and then acceptance. It took time. Among other things, she contributes her adjustment to her supportive family. "We had some difficult times, as my husband will testify, but we are survivors!"

"My family rests better knowing I have the defibrillator. Having my own 'implanted paramedic' even allowed the comfort level for Larry and me to camp our way across the United States," Rachel explains.

Rachel now lives in a remote mountain community where she spends her days gardening and hiking. She has chosen to focus her energy on the positive things in her life. ♡

Laughter is the Best Medicine

"I tell my doctors they implanted my defibrillator wrong because every time I sneeze my garage door goes up and down," jokes Buddy Graf.

Buddy has been entertaining audiences with his own stand-up comedy for over 25 years. "I learned laughter from some of the greatest," says Buddy as he explains how he grew up around vaudeville comedy. As a child, Buddy played behind stage with Sammy Davis, Jr. and Donald O'Connor, while Bob Hope or Jimmy Durante performed out front.

During one of Buddy's performances in 1994, he unexpectedly fainted and fell to the stage floor. He regained

(Continued on back page.)

Buddy Graf, Defibrillator Patient



Growing Up

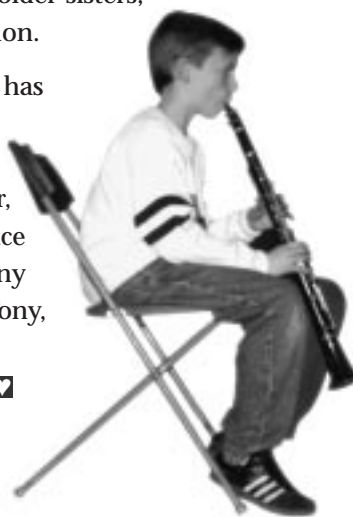
At nine weeks of age, Tony Marx underwent open heart surgery to repair his pulmonary veins. Tony was born with TAPVR (total anomalous pulmonary venous return), a condition in which the pulmonary veins fail to join the left atrium. Two weeks after the surgery, a pacemaker was implanted because Tony's heart rate of 58 beats per minute was too low for an infant.

Tony is now 10 years old. "The pacemaker does not bother me. I do not even think about it," says Tony. He swims, rides his bike, builds forts, and skates with his friends. One friend, Scotty, also has a pacemaker. When they are together, they do not discuss pacemakers because they are too busy trading their baseball and basketball cards. Tony is an avid Chicago Bulls fan. He watches the games with his father, Steve, and recites player facts whenever asked.

Tony is also interested in music. He plays the clarinet in the school band and sings in children chorus groups. To practice his clarinet, Tony engages in musical jam sessions with either his piano-playing grandfather, or, mother, Lil. He looks forward to his upcoming singing performance in the musical *Children of Eden*. To date, singing in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* was among his favorites because his older sisters, Stacey and Sarah, were also involved in that production.

"A pacemaker is a very normal thing for Tony since it has always been a part of his life," says his mother. She remembers once when Tony was younger he raised his shirt to another boy and said, "Here is my pacemaker, where is yours?" As he grows into a teenager he will face different situations, but Tony's mother does not see any reason why Tony would lose his healthy attitude. As Tony, and friend Scotty, grow older, one might guess their conversations may turn to topics other than sports. ❑

Tony Marx, Pacemaker Patient



HEALTHY

With the implant of a pacemaker, defibrillator, or heart valve, comes inevitable change. You are faced with the task of creating a new version of "normal" for yourself and your family. How you react to this change can help your rehabilitation.

The medical device is treating your body's medical needs, but what about your emotional needs? Adjusting to change, even positive change, is stressful because it involves learning to function within new territory.

Therefore, to better understand ways to deal with the change of having an implanted medical device, we have interviewed a leading healthcare psychologist, Wayne Sotile, Ph.D. Dr. Sotile is director of psychological services for the Wake Forest Cardiac Rehabilitation Program and co-director of Sotile Psychological Associates in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Dr Sotile, does everyone react the same to changes in their life?

How a person reacts to change depends upon how they *explain* what they are facing. Some see a situation, such as having an implanted medical device, as a blessing, some as a punishment. Some see it as a beginning, some as an ending. In reacting to stress that is associated with change, we all naturally tend to either ignore the cause (hoping it will go away) or we magnify our distress by thinking about what we are facing in ways that frighten or agitate us. These negative reactions are likely to occur as a normal reflex to stressful situations unless we work consciously to cope positively.

Can we learn to cope positively?

The truth is you can choose how you respond to and manage the stresses of your life. After identifying the stress factors, it is important to outline a step-by-step plan to control those factors. Select goals that are realistic, specific and measurable that include sensible diet, exercise, and relaxation. Begin with small

YOUR REACTIONS TO CHANGE

steps. Imagine how you would like to be. Start “pretending” that you are those ways. Soon, you will begin to behave in these new ways.

Are there other helpful coping strategies when adjusting to an implanted medical device?

Certainly. Having an implanted medical device may be accepted as a positive change with feelings of relief, comfort, and well-being. Yet experiencing feelings of fear, anger, and guilt is natural and inevitable. Therefore, these coping strategies are helpful:

- ✓ Talk about it but do not compare yourself to others.
- ✓ Learn about your medical condition and your medical device from resources such as your doctor, nurse, library, device manufacturer, and computer (Internet).
- ✓ Keep your personal relationships alive—emotional closeness is a universal aid in managing the stress of illness and rehabilitation. Seek out social support from family, friends, support groups, coworkers, church groups, health professionals.
- ✓ Incorporate sensible eating habits, exercise, and relaxation into your daily routine.
- ✓ Participate in educating others— family & friends, other patients, schools, local paramedics.
- ✓ Keep a written journal to better understand which thinking habits need to change because they stir discomfort and stress. Then make a conscious effort to change those thinking habits. For example:

Think: I wish these medical tests would show me to be improving steadily, but stabilizing is better than getting worse. Not: The results of my medical checkup today were not better than three months ago. All this rehab business obviously isn't helping me.

Wayne Sotile, Ph.D.



Think: I had a down day yesterday, but I had good and bad days even before my medical device. Not: My kids visited yesterday and I was too tired to even talk much with them. I must not be getting better.

“You can choose how you respond to and manage the stresses of your life”

What is one common source of stress for patients/families of implanted medical devices?

A common worry pertains to the device performance. Today's medical devices are very reliable and most patients feel that their quality of life improves after the implant because the device can effectively relieve the troubling symptoms. Yet, at times the patient worries about whether the device will work when needed. The best thing patients can do is to keep their medical appointments. These follow-up visits help monitor the performance of the device by checking the lead wires, the device settings, battery status, and

interaction with the heart. With that comes comfort and reassurance, thus reducing the anxiety.

Do the changes due to an implanted medical device affect the family as well?

Few life events get our attention as quickly and as thoroughly as does illness. We do not like to think of ourselves or our cherished family members as being vulnerable to major illnesses. Coping with illness and the ensuing rehabilitation is not a one-person or one-time event, but is a family “process” that does not end. To help you remain a team during this process:

- ♥ remind each other that the stress of illness is affecting each of you
- ♥ encourage the whole family to participate in decision making
- ♥ focus on what you each can still do, rather than upon the losses
- ♥ reassure small children that their behavior did not cause the illness
- ♥ encourage healthy family members to stay involved in their own life
- ♥ speak openly to each other. Voice your frustrations but don't blame yourselves.

What if the coping techniques used so far have not helped?

The signs are usually obvious when one is not coping well with illness or treatment. Failure to follow medical advice, increased irritability and worry, and depression all send clear messages of struggling. If these signs persist, or, if you simply wish to seek input from a specialist, ask your doctor or nurse how to get professional assistance. Taking positive action is a characteristic of strong individuals. ♥

For further information about any of Dr. Sotile's books and audiotapes, phone or write: Sotile Psychological Associates, 1396 Old Mill Circle, Winston-Salem, NC 27103; 910-765-3032.

consciousness, but suffered a broken nose. After numerous tests, doctors concluded Buddy's heart went into ventricular tachycardia (VT). VT is an abnormally fast heart rhythm that can be dangerous if not properly treated. A defibrillator was implanted to detect and treat his fast heart rate.

"The first month after the implant of the defibrillator I felt depressed. I was afraid to even go out to the mailbox. Yet, my cast of performers were waiting to go back to work and we had several performances scheduled," says Buddy. "I knew I had to bounce back." To hasten his adjustment, Buddy enrolled in a cardiac rehab program. This program not only strengthened his heart muscle, but helped him build his confidence. Carol, Buddy's wife and "best friend",

confirms Buddy's change of attitude, diet, and exercise were important.

Buddy says he uses his humor to help others cope with the stress that comes naturally after the implant. Of the 300 comedy shows he did last year, several were at defibrillator patient support group meetings. Buddy and the audience easily relate about having an implanted medical device. "They ask me how I can joke about my condition. I tell them that when we spend too much time worrying, we forget how to live."

Buddy likes to remind others that it takes 87 muscles to frown, and only 17 to smile. "If you keep on smiling, you won't have wrinkles. Laughing is good therapy. He who laughs, lasts!" ❑

Has Your Address, Phone #, or Doctor Changed?

Medical device manufacturers need your assistance to insure their records are accurate and current. If you live in the U.S.A., it is important that you notify your device manufacturer when your address, phone # or doctor changes. Your I.D. card will have the name and phone number of your device manufacturer. For Medtronic devices, our Patient Services phone number is 800-551-5544, x3999.

Surfing the Internet?

You and your family can visit Medtronic, Inc. on the Internet at: www.medtronic.com. You will find:

- other patient personal stories
- information about the heart
- history of Medtronic
- technology developments

UC9702586EN
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Printed in USA

Published by Medtronic, Inc.
Editor: Nancy Sherman

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