



Room for a view

Grace under pressure

When I was 12 years old, I started working in the lumber camps. I worked in the bush, cutting trees. Then, the Second World War started, so I enlisted and served for six and a half years. However, in 1941 I was taken prisoner in China on Christmas day. The British had no planes or ships to support us at the time, and so I remained prisoner in and around Hong Kong for three years. When I was released, I returned to Canada only to discover that I had tuberculosis in my kidney and bladder. The doctors told me that I would have to remain in the hospital for one year. I ended up staying in the hospital for six and a half years.

During those years, I spent my time in a hospital for tuberculosis patients and in a veterans' hospital. I also worked part-time on a farm for a farmer that I knew. I remember that before I found out about the tuberculosis I had a sweetheart, and I had been looking forward to seeing her. When I found out about it, I realized that I would not be able to see her for a long time because tuberculosis patients had to be quarantined. So I told her to go marry someone else, and that was that. After those years in the hospital, I was released and had to come to the hospital for check-ups once a month. However, in 1949 I had to have one kidney removed, and in 1968 only half of my remaining kidney was functioning. Finally, in 1986 my kidney function was reduced to the point where I had to begin dialysis.

Of course, I didn't like the idea of starting dialysis at the beginning, but with the way I was feeling I would have taken any treatment. In the end, it worked out pretty well. I'm still here even after 10 years of dialysis, although I have my on-and-off days. Many times, I wanted to quit dialysis and I almost did. I wanted to go up north into the bush, surround myself with a big pile of trees, make a big fire and cremate myself. Just last year, I told the doctors that I was thinking of quitting.

I have to say that I have improved since then. One thing that keeps me going is all the nice people who are in the dialysis unit. I come here and I talk to the nurses and doctors. I joke around with them all the time. This is the only place where I feel alive. The doctors here are all very good to me, and I like all of them. Also, there is one doctor here who is especially good to me. I have decided that if I ever win the lottery, I will send it all to her.

Actually, I don't really mind coming to dialysis. I like it, and I prefer it to staying home and watching television or staring at four walls. This is especially true in the winter. As for support, I am not too religious, and I don't have much family living nearby. The only family member who

lives close to me is my sister. Yet every summer, my family comes to see me, and many nephews and nieces come for a visit. But personally, I like the outdoors, and I don't like having too many people around. I liked living in the bush, where I could hunt, fish some trout and eat that for lunch. Now I can't do that anymore, because I cannot get around too well. But those were the days ...

I think that compared to being a prisoner in Hong Kong, coming to dialysis doesn't seem so bad, and I appreciate it. When I was a prisoner, it

was only work, work, work and no rest. Also, we often had only rice to eat, and that was difficult at first. Sometimes we received some Chinese cabbage or fish. Due to that, now I never complain about food. But during my life, I have already had 16 operations and now I am at the point where I have had enough. If I need another operation to save my life, I don't want it. I think that I

have had my share of illness. Sometimes I get sick at home, and I become discouraged. So I have signed a D.N.R. (Do Not Resuscitate) form here at the hospital, to specify that I don't want any special resuscitation procedures performed if something should happen to me. I have also had my cremation paid for in advance. I don't like big funerals, and I think that they cost too much money. As long as I feel no pain, I am all right.



This story, told by a 70-year-old man who began dialysis 10 years ago, is reprinted by permission of Grosvenor House Press Inc., Montreal, from Heroes: 100 Stories of Living with Kidney Failure, edited by Devon Phillips, 1998. The author wishes to remain anonymous.

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