

Local musician says heart disease is more than clogged arteries

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Stroke, heart disease, aneurisms and heart attacks don't just happen to people with clogged arteries.

Steve Goldberger, a Niagara-on-the-Lake resident, was not overweight or considered unhealthy when his doctor detected his aortic valve malfunctioning during a routine checkup.

"I was very lucky," said Goldberger. "Had this been 20 or 30 years ago I wouldn't be alive right now," referring to technological advances in medical science and the specialists who took care of him at the Toronto General Hospital five years ago.

"Now it's so routine for these doctors."

The bass player, who performs locally at the Anchorage in NOTL, said his condition was an enlarged aorta, causing an aneurism, which resulted in his aortic valve being replaced with a pig's valve.

"I got a lot of pig gifts," he joked.

The transplanted valve is expected to last 10 to 20

years before Goldberger will need a replacement.

"I wasn't a health fanatic or a sports guy, but I wasn't overweight," he said.

He had no symptoms to warn him, even after the first detection and during the next two years as doctors monitored his progress before his surgery.

"It was like having a balloon in my artery that gets bigger and bigger until it bursts," he said.

Fortunately, Goldberger had time to prepare for his surgery. After meeting with the specialist in Toronto, Dr. Tyron David, he scheduled the surgery to follow in two months.

"He was one of the foremost specialists on valves," Goldberger said.

"It was a life-altering experience."

Goldberger, 49, has been married for almost 28 years. The experience was hard on his wife, he said. "It was pretty freaky for her."

It took him three months to recover after doctors sawed his chest in half for the transplant. "That was the worst part, waiting for my ribs to heal," he said.



Steve Goldberger

After spending about three days in the hospital Goldberger was ready to go home. It was another month and a half before the musician could drive himself around, but now, he says, there are no limitations to what he can do.

During the time of his surgery, his stress level went up, but he has since

learned to deal with stress better.

"It's a life and death situation. You learn to live more for the moment and to take better care of yourself."

He now visits his doctor regularly and tries to exercise more.

One of the things that helped most with his recovery was writing a journal, which he later posted on the internet. Soon he had people who were experiencing the similar situations responding to his journal entries.

The people who responded were grateful for the journal and for Goldberger sharing his experience, so other families could understand what their loved ones were going through and what would happen during surgery, he said.

After seeing the impact his journal had on people

world-wide who e-mailed him, he wrote a book about his experience, and put it on a website he created.

He is in a few bands, his own, The Fringe Locals, which play folksy-blues and roots music and he is a member of the Niagara Rhythm Section, which has featured artists and special guests every Saturday night at the Anchorage in NOTL.

To learn more about Goldberger's experience,

journal entries, information about his book, music and band information, visit www.stevegoldberger.com.

Heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of death and disability in Canada, accounting for 36 per cent of deaths in this country, and heart attacks strike up to 70,000 Canadians every year.

It is estimated that one in four people has some form of heart disease—about eight million Canadians.

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