

AF GATE CRASHED MY LIFE !

It was the morning of the heavy snow fall, 6 January 2010. I tried to drive to work but didn't make it beyond the first hill at which point I returned home and got on with some domestic chores. I placed a pile of papers on the kitchen floor for shredding and went at this task with some vigour so that after about twenty minutes of bending over and stooping the job was finished.

Not long after I completed the task I began to feel unwell. Nothing specific, I just felt unwell, deep inside me. Two hours later I thought my heart was trying to break out of my chest; the thumping and noise from my chest was alarming. I lay down and tried relaxing by controlling my breathing – no change. As I have had blood pressure issues for a few years and have a digital BP monitor at home I took a few random readings over the next hour or so and found the results of some concern. Blood pressure readings were trending downwards and my heart rate increasing eventually peaking at 156 beats per minute. On occasions the BP monitor just could not identify anything that made sense to it and kept giving me Error Messages. Around 5pm I rang my GP with news of my problem and he saw me immediately and within thirty minutes I was driving myself to hospital and the start of a six day stay.

On 12 January 2010 I was discharged from hospital accompanied by my Yellow Oral Anticoagulant Therapy Pack and the diagnosis of Paroxysmal Atrial Fibrillation. I found myself on a new cocktail of medication, Bisoprolol (5mg), and Warfarin (6mg) all of which supplemented my existing blood pressure medication of Ramipril (10mg) and Simvastatin (40mg). I also found myself committed to weekly INR checks to ensure that my blood count stayed within the range of 2 to 3 in order to prepare for an eventual Cardioversion procedure. The INR results in the weeks that followed gave constant results in the range of 2.2 to 2.4 with occasional surges up to 2.6 and 2.7.

I am now 65, turning 66 in Sept 2010. The issue I was facing was as much psychological as physical as I have had a trouble free life – no health issues that haven't been dealt with by my GP and/or the local hospital A & E unit, except for the removal of my right knee cartilage. Blood pressure issues were identified about 3 years ago and medication and exercise has seen that brought under control. I used to smoke, 40 + cigarettes a day, however, following hypnotherapy in 1985 I have not smoked since. Basically, a dream run....to the point I had convinced myself I was so fit, sure, at 65 a little overweight, but still enjoying walking and cycling. I was so convinced of my fitness that I was surprised when some 18 months or so ago when I experienced a few little 'funny turns'.

The best I could describe them as being a severe palpitation followed by an incredible surge of heat to the head, all over the head, but within micro-seconds it was all gone. No sweats, no dizziness, no changes to my vision, no feeling faint, absolutely nothing to indicate I'd had a 'funny turn' except the knowledge that something odd had happened. These events became more frequent over time but were nevertheless random and impossible to predict. I drive buses for a living and have always taken my safety responsibilities seriously. Twice a year I have a check up with my GP who arranges for a range of blood tests and I always get good results; even my cholesterol before being put on statins was 4.6 (it is now 3.3) – so I always felt in great shape.

These 'funny turns' worried me and with safety in mind I went to my GP for a check up, an ECG ensued which showed nothing. Over time I had several ECG's, but nothing showed up. I now realise

that because of my bus driving shift patterns usually over a week elapsed before I could get to have the ECG done, so it was hardly surprising at the result.

So where am I now. My diet of blood pressure medication has been very slightly adjusted, and also supplemented by additional tablets Bisoprolol (Betablocker) and Warfarin. I have had no significant reaction to Warfarin – yes, I've cut myself with a kitchen knife but the wound healed very quickly and I have cut myself shaving, again no problems. However, I have had nosebleeds and although these have stopped within 20 to 30 minutes many have only been a few minutes. The worst nosebleed scenario was five in 24 hours, with three occurring for no identifiable or logical reason. Other nosebleeds have arisen for identifiable reasons such as a 'runny' nose accompanied by constant wiping or blowing my nose. I've also had no other side effects that I'd been warned about, namely, bruising. I have however, at times, had ice cold hands and feet which seems to correlate here to an increase in blood pressure and a drop in heart rate (50 bpm). On other occasions I have experienced hot, sore and stinging eyes followed by periods of deep sleep. I have also experienced a lot of sleeplessness at night, and by this I mean – going to bed between 9 and 10pm, sometimes 11pm (if there has been something 'gripping' on television) then waking up between 1am and 4am. But then as a shift worker for a large part of my life this is nothing new to me. I have learned not to fight it and, rather than lie in bed counting sheep and forgetting where I'd got to and tossing and turning and waking up my partner....I simply get up and move out to the lounge or the kitchen and read or in some way occupy myself and have a cup of tea until I feel drowsy again then I return to bed and sleep for anything up to another 4 hours. The level of fatigue during the day that followed this process was quite unpredictable and varied from a great deal to nothing. During my stay in hospital and for a week or so after discharge my energy levels were awful. However as time has gone on, and with improvements in the weather I have ventured out on short walking trips and have found big improvements in my energy levels. More pleasingly, the breathlessness I had significantly abated and eventually disappeared altogether.

On discharge from hospital I was told I would receive advice of a date for my Cardioversion and in preparation for this my INR (because of the Warfarin) had to be between 2 and 3 and that it had to be monitored weekly for 4 consecutive weeks (meaning 5 actual readings) after the date of discharge and before the cardioversion procedure could be considered. The day of discharge it was 2.0, then came two readings of 2.2, then 2.7, 2.4 and finally 2.3. I eventually received advice that I was to be scheduled for my Cardioversion on 12 February 2010. This necessitated another INR and another blood test at the hospital where I was booked into the day before Cardioversion. On 12th February I reported back to the hospital in question, was checked in and given an ECG. The result was, for me at least, mind blowing...I was discharged and sent home immediately without any Cardioversion procedure taking place....my heart had – at some point – resumed Normal Sinus Rhythm. On discharge I was instructed to continue with my medication for both blood pressure and AF. I was also told that I would receive a letter giving me an appointment with the Consultant for a review. This arrived a few weeks later setting the review date as 30th April 2010.

Now there is a twist to my story. The events of the last few weeks have given me, my partner and friends the time for reflection and analysis. The result of this is that we have strung together a diary of seemingly unrelated events, cause and effect so to speak. About 3 years ago I regularly carried my mobile phone in my shirt pocket, located over my left breast. I can't remember how long this practice continued but it was for a very long time, maybe over a year, maybe closer to two years, then, at some point I read of unproven scientific health warnings – potential, dangers of doing this, effects of radio signals emitted by the mobile phone on the heart, and as a precaution I ceased the practice. Then

about two years ago I had my eyes tested and the Optician queried with me whether I had any coronary problems. I replied, truthfully, no – but I was on medication for blood pressure. No further comment was made. Then, a short while later and quite spookily, my daughter in Sydney, in the course of a telephone conversation mentioned that she had had a strange experience with a psychic who warned her that *'your father has a heart problem – possibly a heart valve issue'*. This caused great mirth. Then, suddenly about 18 months ago, when driving my bus I began having random events. A massive palpitation in the region of the left breast, followed by a massive surge of heat all over my head. The event lasted microseconds. There were no side effects; no sweating, no feeling faint, no passing out, no vision problems, no headaches, no dizziness...absolutely nothing. After the first few events I had an ECG, but, the problem was that because of my shift work, by the time I got a doctors appointment and had the ECG a week or so had elapsed and the results showed no problem. So I carried on working and living a life, al beit with quite a bit of stress in my working life at the time. However, these events continued, totally at random, no set frequency and with no possibility of being able to predict the event onset. I returned to my GP and had another ECG's but again nothing showed up. Then in December 2009 I began to feel very tired, often sleepy with poor concentration levels and also moody at times, yet at other times I felt quite aggressive. Work colleagues have since told me how well I now look, however, many have said that at times in the past my face looked really red and flushed. For inexplicable reasons I began thinking of the Opticians comments and made an appointment to consult an Iridologist and that was arranged for the 25 January 2010. I never made it, my AF event occurred on 6 January 2010.

Since my heart returned to NSR and maintaining my medication regime I have felt better and better. Now some 3 months or so after hospitalisation my energy levels have returned and continue to hold to a pattern – mostly – and with improvements in the weather I continue walking and now cycling, BUT, this has not been without dramas along the way. I have had to battle with intense cold hands and fingers, and to a lesser degree feet and toes, extreme sleepiness, all occurring mostly at weekends. Then there has been random fatigue, runny noses and nosebleeds, the latter striking often without warning or reason. The nosebleeds were sometimes a drip lasting a mere 20 seconds, often a mild flow, perhaps identified with blowing my nose, or constantly wiping my runny nose, others more often than not a full flow for no identifiable reason and lasting some 20 to 30 minutes. This culminated on 30 March 2010 with five nosebleeds within 24 hours., three of which were for no identifiable reason. I saw my GP as an urgent appointment as I felt the Bisoprolol was the cause of all this and I wanted to end the medication which, at the time I was taking as originally prescribed in the morning. My GP said emphatically NO ! to discontinuing Bisoprolol and NO ! to changing the dose...she consulted her book of 'witches magic potions and brews' and said take it at night from now on, there is nothing in here that says you cannot do this. I did her bidding and all the issues I have mentioned in this paragraph have disappeared. The only thing left I have to comment on is slight swelling of the ankles, particularly, the right and unpredictable fatigue, but, even then nowhere near as bad as it was.

I kept my appointment with my Consultant on 30th April 2010 and he reviewed my whole situation. My right Atria was enlarged, and had probably assumed this state as a result of an event prior to my being admitted to hospital although it was almost impossible to say when and what. My AF is such that it seems I'll slip in and out of AF often without even knowing it. This makes me vulnerable to being a risk for a stroke. I am to continue with my existing medication lifelong, both for high blood pressure and for AF. My medication is; for the high blood pressure - Ramipril 10mg, Simvastatin 40mg, and now for AF, Warfarin, Monday to Saturday 6mg per day and Sunday 6.5mg along with Bisoprolol 5mg.

The following is a timeline of events as accurately as I can manage it;

High blood pressure diagnosed	April/May 2007.
Mobile phone carried in my shirt breast pocket	May 2007 for over one year, possibly up to 18 months.
Unpredictable and random palpitations and heat surges	Regular intervals from November 2008 up to November/December 2009.
Stress	Irregular periods of stress up to September 2009, then fairly constant stress up to December 2009.
Fatigue, moody, sleepy, tired, lack of concentration	Christmas 2009.
Bending and stooping	6 January 2010.
AF diagnosed	6 January 2010.

In summary, I believe that carrying my mobile phone in my shirt pocket has in a way, or ways that I do not understand, affected the performance of my heart. This impacted on my heart by causing unpredictable and random palpitations and heat surges at intervals to November 2009. I believe that workplace stresses up to and continuing until December 2009 my heart was already malfunctioning but it did not come to a head until 6 January 2010.