

# *A Scary Situation*

*by Frederick Wickert*

Have you ever wondered if you really knew what was going on in your life? Do you really know what is going on with your health? You should. My story is a great example.

I have seen a doctor regularly for years. I quit smoking about twenty-five years ago. I quit the use of alcohol forty years ago. My doctor had been on me about cholesterol and being overweight for a long time. I was taking medication for the cholesterol and made a great effort to reduce my weight. For a guy in his seventies, I was in pretty good shape – or so it seemed.

On April 10th, 2007 something very strange happened. I was coming out the door of a delicatessen carrying a cake box full of pastry. On top of it was balanced two hot beverages. A man seeing I had my hands full, opened the door for me.

As I stepped over the threshold, I suddenly had the sensation of the sides of a box squeezing the sides of my head. The area between my temples and the top of my cheekbones felt like they were going to go numb. I lost all of my peripheral vision and all I could see was as if I were looking through a ten-foot length of water pipe and what I could see on the other end was fuzzy. I was a bit frightened.

I could see my truck and I headed for it. When I got to it, I got in and sat for a few minutes. The right side of my face returned to normal right away and my peripheral vision in that side returned to normal. In a couple of minutes, the left side also returned to normal except for the strange feeling of impending numbness, but it never actually became numb.

My doctor's office was only two blocks away and I went there. I went inside and explained what happened. An RPA ushered me into an examining room. She checked me over for a couple of minutes, turned to the nurse and told her to get an ambulance. I was sent to the emergency room at Fox Hospital in Oneonta, New York.

They kept me there for seven hours and performed a number of tests. They were unable to find anything but suspected I had had a mini stroke. It was late in the week. They instructed me to see my doctor the first thing Monday morning.

When I went to the doctor on Monday, he listened to my carotid arteries in my neck. He said he could hear some Brule's in there, indicating some blockage. He ordered me back to Fox Hospital immediately for ultrasound tests on my carotid arteries. The tests indicated some blockage. He then ordered an MRI and MRA to be done. They confirmed the blockage.

I was then sent to see a vascular surgeon and also to see a neurologist. Both told me my case was puzzling. What happened to me did not fit anything they knew about. They told me I did not have a stroke and there was nothing wrong with my brain. After two weeks of studying the situation and discussing it with other specialists, they told me the blockage that I had did not indicate surgery. They decided to do another Doppler test every six months just to insure the blockage was not getting any worse. I was also put on a drug called Plavix, which is supposed to reduce plaque in the arteries and improve blood flow. Each Doppler test required a visit after it with the vascular surgeon and my regular doctor continued to see me about every six to eight weeks and cholesterol blood tests at the same frequency. My blood pressure was good and my cholesterol was down, though not quite as low as they wanted it. I led a busy and active life without any problems.

At 1:00 A.M. on the 29th of April, 2008 I was at my computer. I had been checking my e-mail, and then reading the new posts on Ourecho. Following that I was checking my stories on Ourecho to see how many new hits there had been on my stories posted there. It is my habit to keep track of them and to see what stories are doing better than others.

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of being much too hot. The skin on my forehead and along the tops of my shoulders suddenly became prickly feeling and I broke in to a heavy sweat. My arms suddenly felt weak and I felt dizzy and light headed. In the past, I have had similar symptoms when coming down with a flu like virus. I believed that was what must be happening then. My first thought was to go to bed and I could wake up in the morning feeling better.

A few years ago I might have, but twice I felt like I was going to pass out. I knew that wasn't right. I thought about my age and about what had happened in April of last year. I decided to play it safe. I shut off the computer. I planned to go upstairs and wake up Tae, my wife, and tell her what was going on and then call 911.

When I got to my feet, I had no balance. I staggered like a drunk. I had to cling to furniture and the walls to make it to the stairs. I went upstairs. By the time I arrived there, I felt the need for a bowel movement. I woke up Tae, told her what was going on and told her to call 911. I then went to the bathroom.

When I finished in the bathroom, my heat sensation was gone and the sweating had stopped. I decided to go back down stairs and lay on the futon near the door to make it easier for the ambulance crew when they came. By the time they arrived, I felt okay and was beginning to have second thoughts. They wanted me to sit up so they could at least get my vital signs. As soon as I sat up the dizziness returned. My blood pressure was running high and my pulse was fast. They put me in the ambulance and hooked up monitors. Then they transported me to the Fox Hospital emergency room.

For the remainder of the night, the emergency room asked many questions, gave me an EKG, took chest X-rays and a number of blood tests. They found nothing and by the time I got to the emergency room I was feeling normal. At 5:30 in the morning, they told me they couldn't detect anything but were going to keep me for a couple of days of observation.

On Thursday afternoon, after having a monitor hooked to my chest for the entire time, plus some additional tests, a doctor came to see me. He asked if at my age I had ever had a complete cardiology work up, complete with stress test. I answered that I had not. He told me he was letting me go home, but that I should be at Fox care Center on Monday morning to see the cardiologist and have that work up. He told me to bring someone with me to drive me home because at the end of the testing I was going to be too exhausted to drive home myself.

The doctor was not available Monday morning for the tests, but could do it in the afternoon. Tae and I went. I was not on the treadmill very long before the doctor stopped the test. He told me I needed to go to Albany Medical Center for a heart catheterization ASAP. He was 90% certain I had some blockage in the arteries going in to my heart. Arrangements were made for Friday. The doctor explained they were probably going to have to insert from one to three stents. If so, I could come home on Saturday. If I didn't need any, I could go home on Friday.

I got a friend to drive me to Albany and then wait for the results. The catheterization was done. They informed me that I was way beyond stents. All the arteries going into my heart were blocked and I needed bypass surgery and the sooner the better. I was told I was a walking time bomb and subject to a fatal heart attack at any time.

Because I was on the drug called Plavix, it was necessary to delay the surgery for at least five days after being taken off the Plavix, as it is a blood thinner that could cause problems with the surgery from excessive bleeding.

Every doctor I saw, asked over and over about my chest pain and were surprised to learn that I had not had any. They asked about nausea and about deadening of my arm or numbness at any time. I had not had any. These were classic signs of a heart attack, I knew, but I had not had them.

It has since been explained to me that I was one of those with the most dangerous circumstances. There were no usual symptoms. People like me are the most dangerous type because the symptoms of heart trouble never showed up. I could have been driving down a crowded highway at sixty miles an hour and killed who knows how many other people in the process.

That ladies and gentlemen, is a scary situation! Because I know that it happened to me, I know that it can happen, and does happen, to many other people as well. How many of you are walking time bombs like I was? You could be, and like me, not even know anything is wrong.

I urge you all, get a complete check up, including a stress test. EKG's and Ultra sounds never picked it up with me. It was only with a heart monitor hooked to my chest while on a treadmill that it showed up. Don't take any chances. Get checked out every couple of years. It is one thing to drop dead. Taking out a number of other innocent people with you is an entirely different matter.

I was lucky. I was discovered and treated in time to prevent calamity. Many are not. Please don't take the chance. Don't let your doctor talk you out of it. Insist of getting tested. Remember, the life or lives you take may be those you love.