



## Speaking from Experience *Heart Surgery in Later Years*

### Transcript for chapter 2 of 7: Post surgery – early days

**Raymond (75 years old, 15 years since heart attack, 1 year since bypass surgery) -**

Immediately you wake from the anaesthetic, you are immediately administered medications to relieve pain.

**Shirley (59 years old. 2 years since bypass and corrective surgery for a defective heartbeat) and Brian -** When Shirley first came out of the operation, and we went down to meet... to see her, I got a bit of a shock because I didn't expect so many tubes coming out of her at that time.

**Larry (63 years old. 4 years since angioplasty, 2 years since bypass surgery) and Beryl -** After the surgery, I really didn't have much pain or discomfort at all.

**Shirley and Brian -** It took probably two months before I was absolutely out of pain altogether.

**John (61 years old, diagnosed with angina and had bypass 5 years ago) and**

**Margaret -** I was very uncomfortable for quite a few days. I can remember quite vividly in hospital when I would move I would have this terrible crackling noise in my sternum. And I mentioned that to the doctors and they said, "Well, after a while when you go home you'll forget about that and you'll realise one morning - hey, I haven't had those crackling noises." And I haven't. But certainly no pain, just a bit of discomfort.

**Brian (70 years old, 18 and 7 years since bypass surgery) -** The most painful part of the first operation was the knee where you take the vein completely out of your leg from ankle to groin. And then your knee area, which was hard to keep still, you've got to wear those terrible white stockings to keep it all together. But after a time the pain slowly does go away and you just have to put up with it. The pain in the chest is not too bad. But coughing is gruesome, with the physio patting you on the back and telling you to turn over and you can hear the grinding going on. Some people don't like that sort of thing. It didn't worry me too much.

**Joan (78 years old, heart condition at birth, 49 years since surgery to aorta, 1 year since bypass) -** No pain, no discomfort. Only with my leg where they removed two veins, which was a very long scar.

**Raymond -** The pain seemed to come from the incisions. And the arm too, where the artery was taken.

**Brian -** I was amazed when I found out that they had a tube into my neck which goes right down into your heart. And they're measuring your pressures inside your heart and everything, every second of the day. And adjusting your morphine and things so that you feel really good - you feel quite high. The second operation, you really hardly knew you'd had anything. It was much more advanced and much better than the first.



**John and Margaret** - The healing process in the legs seemed to be a lot slower than the healing process for the sternum.

**Raymond** - Pain was evident most of the time. And your body was stiff.

**Larry and Beryl** - After the surgery I did have a sense of numbness on the left shoulder and arm, but I believe that would have been caused by the mammary artery being used in the procedure.

**Joan** - I did have concentration problems. If I'd pick up the paper I'd want to keep up with the news but I'd look at about three headlines and then put it down. It just didn't work. It was a couple of weeks that I was like that and then I was fine again.

**John and Margaret** - You'd start to read a book and then you'd put it down. Then the next day you'd go back to pick it up and carry on and you would have to start again. Just could not concentrate on a book or even a newspaper.

**Larry and Beryl** - With short-term memory loss, I didn't experience that at all. However, concentration - I did suffer with lack of concentration.

**Raymond** - You found you were very vague. I remember taking books. I thought, "Oh, I'll finish off these books. They'd be very handy while I'm recuperating." But I found that I couldn't concentrate.

**Larry and Beryl** - I broke into a fit of crying and I just couldn't stop crying. There was only two of us in the room so it wasn't very noticeable to the other person. But when the nurse came in and I asked, you know, "I'm crying but I don't feel any reason for me to be crying. I'm not really sad or depressed or anything." And he said, "Look, that's pretty normal, as you would've been told." He drew a curtain around me and I was like that for the rest of the day. But it went in fits and starts. I wasn't crying all of the time. And when Beryl and our daughter came in to visit, I started to cry again. And it just seemed to go on for the rest of that day. Once it was over, and I think it was probably late that day, it never came back.

**John and Margaret** - For a very small reason, I could become very emotional and it was last for quite a while. And even to this day I'm still the same, although not as bad as what I was. But I still have emotional outbursts. And although sometimes early in the picture I felt that it was embarrassing, it certainly doesn't worry me now. I wish it didn't happen, but it doesn't embarrass me.

**Joan** - They did warn us at talks at the hospital that there is a possibility of nightmares, and yes, I had quite a few that were very frightening. So I spoke to my doctor. I thought, "Oh, the easiest thing is to..." because it was worrying me. And he said, "Don't worry. That's just getting rid of the rubbish." So every time after a nightmare I woke up and I thought, "Yes, there's a bit more rubbish gone."

**Brian** - If I lay on my left hand side for too long in bed, I would get a strange thumping going on down in there. But I'd turn over, on my back, and then I'd snore and my right and it's gone. I don't have the problem.

**Raymond** - In hospital you did get nights where you just did not sleep.



**John and Margaret** - After surgery, I certainly had, like, palpitations of the heart. I was very aware of my heart thumping, especially at night. It seemed as if it was really thumping away there. But after a while, that just quietened down and became less aware of it.

**Joan** - Particularly when I went to bed at night I had palpitations, which concerned me at first. But after talking to doctors and that, there was nothing of concern, and it was only a matter of time.

**Larry and Beryl** - Coming out from ICU, obviously it was then about seven or eight days afterwards before I was discharged.

**Brian** - I was in hospital for about... oh, eight days exactly, both times. And I think one of the reasons for that is they got me up pretty soon, about a day and a half after the operation, and got you walking around. And you're walking around these modern hospitals with a radio in your pocket and wires all over you, and they're watching you from the main section on the video or television.

**John and Margaret** - I was in a hospital for eight days.

**Raymond** - I was discharged after eight days. But there were two days taken up prior to that for the angiogram procedure.

**Joan** - Nine days I was in hospital.

**Shirley and Brian** - That year I spent ten weeks in hospital with the heart condition. And it was really quite endless. I felt I was never going to get home. I kept saying to the surgeons, could I please go home for a weekend and they said, no, they wouldn't let me home because they were afraid I may have a major heart attack.

**John and Margaret** - After having stents inserted, it's a lot shorter recuperation - a couple of days in Melbourne where you've got to hang around the hospital. But after a couple of weeks at home and I was back doing practically what I was doing before I had the heart attack.