

A View from the Rear Pew #103

Feelings.

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I have always had the belief that feelings should be suppressed and stuffed down deep where nobody can find them. This is, of course, part of our Anglo-Saxon and Presbyterian heritage. Centuries of experience have taught the British that a stiff upper lip is the correct approach when facing adversity. The British have learned that a bit of raw emotion can have serious and negative consequences such as the Wars of the Roses, the Charge of the Light Brigade or too much vinegar on your chips. Lots of people seem to agree with this philosophy. A popular phrase on coffee mugs and sweatshirts is the wartime sentiment of 'Keep calm and carry on'.

Now don't get me wrong. I know that many psychologists and behavioral therapists will disagree and argue that suppressing emotions such as fear or anger is unhealthy. Still, this philosophical approach has worked for me for most of my life and kept me continuously employed for 40 years, safely married for 42 years and out of prison for 65.

Imagine my dismay when a recent close call on the health front dredged up a whole bunch of emotions that I am having a difficult time suppressing. Someone once said that there is nothing like the prospect of being hanged in the morning to focus the mind. In my case, a close brush with the grim reaper has generated a confusing potpourri of feelings.

Gratitude. I am so grateful that we Canadians have such ready access to an advanced health care system staffed by well trained and caring physicians, nurses and other health professionals. Thanks to the ER team who defibrillated my heart with the admonition that I should call an ambulance the next time I have a heart attack. Appreciation to the cardiologists who replaced my pacemaker with a combination pacemaker/defibrillator that probably cost the taxpayer more than a brand new minivan. Special thanks even to the hospital housekeeping attendant who showed my 4 year old grandson how to use the controls on my electric bed so that I could have a slow motion trip without leaving my bed.

Betrayal. I have been kind to my body. I have let it spend a lot of time sitting around. I have gorged it with a high fat, high salt and high sugar diet. I have kept it warm, clean and out of danger. How dare it get sick!

Dependence. I am banned from driving a car for at least 6 months. As a result, I need my lovely wife, Audrey, to drive me most places. I feel like a 14 year old again. Audrey is not a morning person but is driving me to my early morning cardiac rehabilitation appointments anyway. She is also spending a lot of time describing the virtues of the Edmonton Transit system, walking and fresh air.

Flashbacks. A health incident is traumatic and scary. I find myself looking for opportunities to describe my cardiac incident with all and sundry. Most people are mightily bored by my story and end up desperately looking for opportunities to either change the topic or leave the room. The exception is my grandson Henry who never tires of looking at my incision scar and the lump in my shoulder containing the 'batteries' for my heart.

Apprehension. My internal defibrillator is designed to give me a massive jolt should my heart go into arrhythmia. The technician at the heart device clinic described it as like being kicked by a mule. Never having been kicked by a mule before, I am not looking forward to the experience. I hope that I don't get zapped at an inconvenient time or end up making a spectacle of myself – like the time I did a somersault to the front of our tour bus in the Vosges Mountains.

Appreciation. Life is finite and so I find myself admiring the small things in life, such as the autumn colors of our back yard trees, the yummy taste of my low fat, low salt vegetarian chili, and the friendly faces of the early morning dog walkers as I puff around Ramsay Park.

I will end with an old Arabian proverb – ' He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything'.