

Merv & Helena Binns
1 Plymouth St
Bentleigh East 3165
VIC Australia

postal address:
PO Box 315
Carnegie 3163
VIC Australia

Phone:
(03) 8503 7728

email: mandhbinns@optusnet.com.au

MERV BINNS

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Dear Friends,

I said in my last missive, around Christmas time, that 2006 had been a bad year. Well, the disasters continued. The first, relatively minor disaster, was my knocking over the brick letterbox and part of the front fence of our newly rented home with my trailer. The rebuilding of the fence is going to cost at least \$400 and the stingy owner refuses to use the property insurance to pay for it. However, the worst was yet to come.

A few times over the last year I had brief periods of what my old Dad used to call "palpitation", but I later found out these fast heart moments were called arrhythmia. These episodes were only brief and a few deep breaths took the feeling away. However, in February my doctor sent me for an echocardiogram, which indicated that my heart function was normal. Then on Friday morning March 2nd I awoke at 7AM with a real humdinger - my heart racing wildly, and this time it didn't let up. Consequently I called an ambulance and finished up in the cardiac unit at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital.

The doctors at the hospital quickly found that I had two of my main arteries close to my heart blocked or partially blocked and I needed an operation to clear them. By the end of the week, I had the triple bypass surgery. It all went well, but afterwards I had a brief bout of pneumonia and partially collapsed lung and I spent a few days in intensive care, then another week of post-operative care in the Alfred, before being transferred to the Caulfield Hospital recovery centre. I spent just over two weeks there in rehabilitation, having dressings on my wounds cared for and a bit of physiotherapy. It was, as you would expect, a bit boring just lying there and sleeping most of the time. Even reading was difficult as it was hard to concentrate on it, but I got through a couple of paperbacks before I came home on Thursday the 5th of April.

Helena came to see me almost every day and it was a real drag for her, having to use public transport and change from bus to train and then tram each trip, bringing changes of clothes and such for me. Life with Helena has been good, but I never appreciated her presence more than seeing her each trip in the hospitals. And that is despite her taking photographs of me in my various stages of disrepair, beard and all. Friends came to see me including Dick Jenssen, Bill Wright, Peter and Tanya Kemp, Bruno and Keren Kautzner, Jeff Layther (a garden customer, whose flats garden in Glen Eira Road I have been attending to for over twenty years) and Lee Harding. Lee also picked me up from the Caulfield Hospital and brought me home, which I very much appreciated.

Needless to say, I have had to tell all my garden customer friends that I can no longer mow their lawns. Some others besides Jeff's, I have been doing ever since Space Age Books closed down in 1985. It is going to be a battle to survive just on our pension from now on, but I may get back to doing a few small jobs and I must start selling some of our books on the net, if we can work out how it is done.

I have no major medical complications to mention on coming home, although I still need some attention from local nurses, who call in to attend to the dressings on the graft wounds in my leg and arm, where the veins and arteries were removed and used to replace the blocked ones on the inside of the chest. I am still taking a lot of medication, about ten tablets a day. Physiotherapy and exercises at home is a bit of a nuisance. But how can I complain? I lost a month of my life, but here I am starting what amounts to as a "new" life. I looked 90 before I shaved my beard off but I am now back to looking my age of 72 going on 73.

Thank you to all our friends who rang me or sent cards and good wishes. I have a few weeks yet before I can even drive the car, the physio sessions to attend and just taking it easy, but apart from the side effects, mainly tiredness, caused I suspect mainly by the medications I am still taking, I am feeling pretty good. A few more weeks and I will be able to carry on with my usual - within limits - activities.

Merv B. 11.4.07