



## Les Birdwisa

Retired Engineer  
Cardiovascular Patient

I like to work out a little bit. I've got a treadmill and a bicycle at home, but I prefer to cycle in the fresh air, like on the Towpath where you get the benefit of the sunlight plus the clean air. It's nice.

I used to play a lot of soccer, do a bit of cycling and play some squash. In the States, I played racquetball. That was good fun. I've been in the United States 26 years. I was transferred from Luxemburg in Europe to Akron, Ohio, and that was a good move.

My family's here. Everyone settled in beautifully. And I like the people. We have great neighbors and it's just such a comfortable place to live. We're close to the airport, close to shopping. What more could you want?

The first time I was in the hospital I was 65 years old. It was the first time I went to a hospital much to the amazement of my two sons. I developed a heart murmur and that's where the trouble started.



*"The whole journey has affected my quality of life and it has given me a purpose. When you almost lose your life, you start to think, "Let me start enjoying everything more"."*

*A thoroughly integrated and highly coordinated care team – from cardiovascular to rehab – worked with Les so he can keep sharing his story with his wife, children and grandchildren.*

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I was getting my annual physical and my doctor said, "You have a heart murmur. I want you to see a cardiologist." She referred me to a cardiologist at Summa. So, I visited him, and he told me, "Yes, you do have a heart murmur. You have aortic stenosis, which translated simply into English means you're going to have to have a new aortic valve."

Well, we discussed it quite a bit. He told me the surgery was 98 percent successful. As an engineer, I thought that was a great number. I was quite happy with the thought of just being sure of the surgery. I asked him what could I do between when I was diagnosed and when the surgery would occur, and he said just keep fit, keep strong, keep healthy, because you'll need it after the operation - and he was right.

The surgery was going to be done at Summa. My wife had been there a few times. Both my sons had been there. We always received great service...first-class doctors, excellent nurses and a wonderful facility... very, very pleasant. They make you feel relaxed and comfortable and welcome.

My hospital stay at Summa was a wonderful experience. I never for one second felt in any doubt that the doctors couldn't handle anything. They did an outstanding job. The nurses were just as helpful as could be. No complaints whatsoever. As a matter of fact, in my delirium, I somehow thought I was in a hospital in Germany and I thought, "These people speak really good English," but it turns out I was wrong.

I was unconscious so I never felt a thing as soon as they put me out. It was a huge team of doctors. My wife said at one time there were about seven people in there. They just knew what they were doing.

My Summa surgeon - the one who performed the surgery - does them every day of the week. He's a very, very highly experienced doctor. He knew exactly what he was doing. All of them - they all knew what they were doing. Summa doctors are performing surgeries every day. They are highly experienced professional surgeons and they're very, very pleasant, very courteous.

It's nice to be around people who you have confidence in - and even my scar - other doctors have commented on it - it's a very nice scar. It's not too deep. It's not ugly. It's just a pencil line.

This whole experience made me more conscious of being healthy, exercising and maintaining my weight at a good level and eating properly. I always did eat quite properly, but it reinforced my desire to make sure my diet was right and my exercise was right and my weight was right.

Six weeks after the operation, I started cardiac rehab that turned out to be 36 one-hour sessions. There's a workout session and there's a classroom session. Part of the philosophy is, "If you've done this 36 times, you'll continue to do that for the rest of your life."

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I continue to do it. I joined their cardiac rehab session and I show up four times a week and work out on the treadmill, the bicycle, the rowing machine and the arm-pumping machine. It's a nice session.

After all these workouts my wife said to me that I was looking really in good shape versus after the surgery. Before, I really did feel like an old man. My eyes had sunk into my head. I'd lost about 20 pounds in weight....now, I just focus on exercising. I get focused on keeping my rate up and I keep moving and push myself a bit. I try to push myself more each time I go. I just get it done and move on to the next one.

My rehab has affected me very, very positively. My Summa cardiologist, said, "Six months from now, you'll feel the best you've ever felt in your life." And I really do feel good, very good. So, I have a lot to be thankful for. It's giving me a direction and a way of living, which is very healthy, and with somewhat more longevity than I probably would have had before.

I think I'll have a long life - a long healthy life - as long as I do what I've been instructed to do by the rehab people and that's proper diet, proper exercise and proper control of my weight. Everything else should be on automatic pilot.

The whole journey has affected my quality of life in several ways that for some reason, has given me more of a purpose. I guess when you almost lose your life, you start to think, "My goodness, let me start enjoying everything more." So, I enjoy my grandkids more. I enjoy my two sons and their families more,

and my wife, of course, who was wonderful throughout the whole thing.

So yes, it's a different perspective. It's a very positive perspective - just feeling good and living well and enjoying the moment.

It can't get much better.

