

perspectives

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

There must be something in the water

Juliet Sullivan

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Big Gary is big. He is a man with presence, an awe-inspiring energy and a story to tell.

He is tall, strong and healthy. But it wasn't always that way.

In fact, just a short time ago, Big Gary was not so big, and certainly not so healthy.

He had undergone a series of operations, had lost 70 pounds, and was lying in a hospital bed, close to death.

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Gary Derrett is a well-known figure in South Surrey. Up until three years ago, he owned and ran a chain of vacuum stores throughout the Lower Mainland called Big Gary's.

He did this for more than 40 years.

Gary was not a healthy man. He had suffered 20 years of colitis and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). He had learned to live with, and tolerate, the illnesses, as many people do.

And then one day, 3½ years ago, he was rushed to emergency with severe swelling to his stomach. He was on the operating table for six hours, after his colon burst and he almost died.

After the operation, his stomach became infected, a staph infection so bad that he underwent five further surgeries over the course of three months. The infection went on for half a year.

"They used a vise and staples to keep me together," says Gary. "And - ironically - a vacuum to clean me out. I don't think it was one of mine though?"

The household-appliance entrepreneur can joke about it now, but at the time, the pain was so intense that Gary says he had never known what real pain was until that time. Nurses have since told him they had never seen a patient administered so much morphine.

Before the fifth operation, hospital staff advised Gary's family to gather around him, with doctors suggesting it was unlikely he would come out of the surgery alive.

Against the odds, he did come out alive, but that was just the beginning. There was a long and painful road

ahead.

"Basically, they sent Gary home to die," says wife Suzie.

Once home, Gary started to suffer depression, anxiety, headaches, nausea, chronic fatigue, major arthritis, sleep apnea and lung congestion. He had post traumatic stress and had to walk with the aid of a walker. Neighbours have since told him they gave him a nickname in those days: Dead Man Walking.

It got worse.

In April 2008, Gary was driving home one day and started to suffer heart palpitations. After tests, his doctor told him his heart was damaged and enlarged, and he had developed heart arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), sometimes so bad that Gary thought he was having a heart attack.

"I was waiting for some kind of magic, but it never came."

Gary Derrett

Some time after that, Suzie received a newsletter from a wellness centre in Newport Beach, Calif.

In it, they talked about heart arrhythmia and how they could cure it with magnesium.

"Suzie had me on a plane down there the very next day - in a wheelchair," says Gary.

The wellness centre treated Gary with a series of natural remedies. Two weeks - and \$25,000 - later, Gary says the heart arrhythmia subsided and he felt "a little better," even though the centre had diagnosed yet another problem: neuropathy (numbness) in his feet and legs.

"I was waiting for some kind of magic, but it never came. Basically, I felt like I was on my way out. I felt like it was the end. I even contacted my life insurance provider, just to make sure that everything was in order..."

And then, on the flight back home, Suzie read a book. The book was about balancing the PH in the body, and talked about how disease thrives in an acidic body; something most of us, unfortunately, possess.

Due to bad eating habits, smoking, lifestyle and environmental toxins, the level of PH in most of our bodies is unbalanced. This is making us sick, fat and tired. It claimed that by increasing the alkalinity in the body,

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Feeling better every day

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simply by drinking alkaline water, disease will no longer be able to flourish.

"I read this book and it made so much sense," Suzie says. "I felt that it was the missing link in Gary's health."

Suzie knew she had to find a way to make Gary's body more alkaline. Unfortunately, alkaline water machines are not exactly common here. Widely used in Japanese hospitals for decades, the technology has only recently come to North America, and there is still a certain skepticism surrounding their effectiveness.

But when you are the proactive, forward-thinking wife of a depressed, dying man to whom you have been married for 43 years, you will ignore skepticism and employ your own judgement. Suzie was willing to try anything to help her beloved Gary.

And that is where fate stepped in.

As Suzie and Gary were flying back from Newport Beach, Suzie's brother Michael was on a plane flying back from Calgary. He sat next to a man on the flight, whose business happened to be alkaline water machines.

Despite Gary's doubts, they bought a machine. Gary started to drink alkaline water. Six glasses a day at first, gradually building up until Gary says his body was craving it.

Fast forward 3½ weeks. Father's Day 2008. Gary's four daughters wanted to take a family portrait on the beach, complete with 11 grandchildren.

"My girls thought it was my last Father's Day," says Gary, tearfully. "On the day before the photo shoot, Suzie had asked me to make sure it was a good day; in other words that I fake it. I still didn't have that sense of well-being and she knew I could be difficult sometimes.

"But that morning, I noticed when I woke up that I didn't have the usual nausea, or aches. Instead of taking an hour to get out of bed, get dressed and go downstairs, as I had done for the past three years, it took me



photo courtesy familyfirstphotography.com

The day this family portrait was taken was the first day Gary Derrett began feeling better.

five minutes. I felt good, but I kept thinking it wouldn't last.

"Later that day, after lunch, I got up from the table and went to each of my daughters and grandchildren, kissed them and told them I loved them. It was like I was reborn. I had that sense of well-being back that was robbed from me for over three years.

"Later, back home, Suzie said to me, 'Thank you for making an effort today.' And I looked at her and said 'I got news for you - I feel good!' All day I had been expecting the walls to come crashing down, but they never did."

And they still haven't. Ten months later, Gary feels more alive, more energized, and more healthy than ever.

He is back playing golf. He walks. ("I walk like I'm in a marathon," he says). He is full of life. His energy is contagious.

His neuropathy has totally vanished, as has his heart arrhythmia. Doctors had told him that he would have both these conditions for the rest of his life.

There is, however, one condition his family has noticed with all this improved health.

"He didn't really talk for three years," Suzie says. "Now he won't shut up!"

Big Gary is a man with a mission, and a story to tell.