

## One Year Sober (from Butter Tarts)

**A one year post heart attack progress report. By Ernie Bies January, 2017**

My name is Ernie and I am a buttershortbreadaholic. It has been one year since I had my last butter tart.

I thought an update on my progress and health since my heart attack a year ago would be timely, as I would say I feel 100% better than last year at this time.

As I reported last year in my story “Don’t Come Back”, one of the major coronary arteries in my heart, the left anterior descending (LAD), was 100% blocked. Thinking that it was a bad case of acid reflux-type indigestion, I procrastinated for four days before going to emergency. I couldn’t have been more wrong as it really was a heart attack, the type that is commonly called the widow-maker. The staff at the Ottawa Heart Institute didn’t waste any time installing a stent and I am very lucky to be here to write this update.

In his report the cardiac surgeon, Dr. Marquis, said that the cause of the heart attack was obesity so I finally got the hint that maybe all those butter tarts were not that good for me. I was also pre-diabetic, which was another red flag prompting me to change my habits.

My wife Sandy and I took a couple of classes from a dietitian and have followed the Weight Watchers/diabetic diet since then. The main secret is portion control.



We religiously use the portion plates that you can buy at the Heart Institute and from Weight Watchers. They are smaller, about 9 inches in diameter, and marked to show that the plate should be filled with 50% vegetables (two or more colours), 25% protein (chicken, lean meat, fish, tofu, beans, and lentils) and 25% starch (rice, pasta, bread, grains).

Adding a fruit and a serving of a dairy product provides for a well-balanced meal. The Weight Watcher’s plates are more stylish and look like a regular china plate with a design. The Heart Institute plates are more institutional looking but once you get the hang of it any plate will do.



Second helpings are a no no. You get around the hunger pangs by eating at regular times, and having a healthy snack at 10 AM, 3 PM and 9 PM. (cheese, nuts, yogurt, fruit, and carrots).

I swore off sweets for one year and I can honestly say that nary a butter tart, date square or doughnut has passed my lips for the entire year. Except for two small Easter eggs and a few of the small Halloween chocolate bars that I had to taste test, I have not bought any cookies or candy bars for the year. I'm not saying I was a complete saint as I did indulge in the occasional piece of cake and dessert that Sandy made, but again, no seconds. I have a new appreciation for fruit and veggie snacks as well as yogurt and now subscribe to the 80/20 rule. I follow the diet



strictly 80% of the time but will allow myself a treat on special occasions.

I had put "one butter tart" on my Christmas list and my son fulfilled that wish with a visit to Frank's Bakery and Catering, home of Ottawa's best butter tarts (second only to my wife's). On Christmas Day I indulged in one butter tart and enjoyed it to the last crumb. It had a nice crispy shell and not too gooey filling.

**Exercise Regime.** I completed the Rehab program at the Heart Institute although it took the physiotherapist, Sandra Black, a few sessions to help me realize that I was indeed compromised and had to work at it slowly. There is nothing more frustrating than thinking you have progressed to the next level only to be set back. She said it would be six months before I could regain a measure of the activity that I was used to and she was bang on.

I have learned not to try to go at a pace of 120% as had been my norm, but to settle for about 75% and simply take longer to get things done. I've learned to stop after 3 or 4 hours and put my feet up rather than work until the job is done.

My son gave me a Fit Bit for Christmas last year and it has been a real bonus throughout my conditioning. They expect you to do 10,000 steps a day but that was really impossible until just recently.

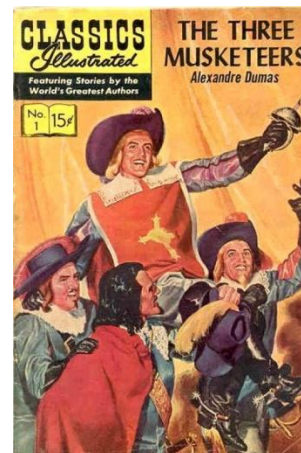
I started out just walking to the end of the driveway and kept adding on as I felt better. Invariably, I would add on too much too soon and have a set-back. After a year I am still walking every day, either around the block, in a mall or on the tread mill downstairs if the weather is bad. I walk an hour a day about 5 days a week, which is about 2.5 miles per day. A CD lasts 45 minutes to an hour so I am revisiting all my old classics, like the Beau Marks, Leonard Cohen, Lighthouse and The Band. I start with a slow ten minute warm-up walk and then a 40 minute faster walk followed by a 10 minute cool down. My Fit Bit tells me my average heart rate is 70 to 75 BPM so I'm not overdoing it. Even when I go to the hockey games I climb up to the upper ring at the Canadian Tire Centre and do three laps between periods. I see several people doing the same thing every game. My dog Bebe looks forward to a walk in late afternoon and she actually barks at me to tell me it's time to go.

The bonus is I have lost more than 30 pounds and plan to lose another 10 or more.

Metro Snow Clearing Service does the driveway, front and side walks, but I have to clear the back deck and make a trail for Bebe in the back yard for her to do her “doggie doody” duty. Light work that I can handle.

Another big change this year is some major downsizing of my many collections. When I ventured down into my basement last spring I realized that 40 years of collecting everything make a pretty daunting disposal problem. I decided to make a major push to reduce the inventory. Over the next few months I sold or gave away 1500 LPs, 100 bobble heads, 300 comics, antiques, kitchen and sports collectables, books, pressed glass, native art, and Vaseline glass. It is amazing what I am finding in the basement. Even found some original drawings by Simon Tookoome of Baker Lake from about 20 years ago and a box of paintings by Clemence Wescoupe dated 2002. I have made a lot of headway but have a long way to go before I get rid of all those collectables. Then I can start again.

One collection I have kept is my Classics Illustrated Comics. I started that collection when I was a kid and decided to try to complete the set and only need about 15 to get all 169 that



were published. With apologies to Principal McKinley I have to confess that those old Classic Comics helped me write a lot of book reports for novels that I have yet to read.

My cardiologist gave me a clean bill of health in October and said, “See you in a year’s time” which is a good sign.

It took me about six months to get into the writing mode as I just could not focus on the research and reading but I'm back at it now and have a 100 stories to tell - so look out.

In January we attended a marvelous musical comedy written by Ish Theilheimer, the man behind the Stone Fence Theatre of Eganville. Ish had his heart attack two years ago and wrote a rollicking play called “High Times at the Heart Institute”. The company presented a special fundraising dinner theatre night in Ottawa and raised \$5,200 for the Heart Institute. I am really amazed at the variety of talent that can be found in these local productions.



Rehab like this is not possible without the support of family and friends so I thank you all from the bottom of my heart (damaged as it may be). I certainly could not have maintained that diet without the magic provided by my wife Sandy who can make tofu, lentils and squash seem like normal food.

This was definitely a life-changing experience and I venture to say that it has added years to my life.

My cholesterol and sugar are back in the normal range and I am more physically fit than I have been in years.

I plan to be here for a while.