

SPRING SUMMER, 2008

PATIENT SUCCESS STORY

Vertical Sleeve Gastrectomy helps teen athlete overcome life trapped in a morbid obese body

Zack has been overweight since he was a child and remembers children being mean to him. He played football in high school where his teammates were more accepting of his super size. Now he is the goalie for the La Crosse team at UCSB. Two years ago his weight started sky-rocketing to 350 lbs. One year ago his weight was 415 and just before his Vertical Sleeve Gastrectomy (VSG), 6 months ago his weight was at an all time high of 435 lbs. Zack was only 19 at the time of his VSG. In the 6 months since his VSG he has lost 135 lbs. He no longer is the slowest runner on the La Crosse practice field. He can move more quickly now as a goalie. Most importantly, he "fits in", he can ride his bike around campus more easily and just feels no longer trapped inside a morbid obese body. Stay tuned and check in the next 6 months as we watch Zack continue to lose weight.

PATIENT SUCCESS STORY WINTER EDITION, 2007/2008

I checked in with the original surgeon several times but he became judgmental and critical. I was stunned by his new attitude and it only served to make me feel worse. Finally, my primary care doctor talked to me about a revision and I became interested after I recovered from the initial shock. I had to face the fact that the Vertical Banded Gastroplasty (VGB) was not working for me and I required both a restriction and a level of mal-absorption. The CT scan showed some leaking and a possible staple line disruption. None of that mattered to me because the critical result was that I was gaining weight and slipping backwards. I re-gained about 60 pounds before I decided to contact Pacific Laparoscopy in the spring of 2006.

Our small town has the incredible fortune of an active support group for DS and monthly visits from Pac Lap staff! I could not believe that a California clinic would take care of us here (near the border with Canada), but the first person I met at my first meeting was Dr. John Rabkin and my life changed forever! I did spend a lot of time researching DS and all the options and alternatives before feeling that this choice was the best for me. I had a lot of confidence in a surgeon who traveled with a little dog and had lots of time for all my questions and concerns.

I was impressed with the care in which Dr. John explained the details of a revision surgery to both me and my husband. There was a lot of consultation, many tests and scans before we went to San Francisco in July 2006. Again, we were private pay which was not easy but we did feel we had no choice if I wanted to focus on living a long life. I was about to become a grandmother for the first time!

With my husband and 2 adult sons by my side I faced a 2nd surgery with a lot of support and encouragement. It was frightening and ultimately painful but before I knew it we were heading back home!

The adjustments were many and I had to return to a full time desk job after only 3 weeks. However, I survived and have just passed the 100 # mark, in about 14 months, which means everything to me! I have lost more than 180# since the original surgery in July 2000 but for the first time I can say I feel in control of my future. It is not about weight loss right now, but about

a healthy life style and making the best choices. I have a new grandson who is my inspiration when I start to falter; I feel optimistic now about being here for a long time! This is a new feeling and I feel younger than I have in years. I turned 60 this year but am more active and more positive than I have felt in decades. A few months ago my husband and I made the decision to cancel the cable for the TV and we joined a health club for the same number of dollars each month! We still feel positive about making that particular exchange and it seems to sum up how we feel about our futures.

Along with the surgical intervention it has been important to me that I have total family support and have enjoyed the Pac Lap support as well. It is not possible to get back to the clinic but with staff people coming up here and with the internet I feel the power of connection. The best example of this is the way I was eased into understanding my new lactose intolerance! I fought this for months but eventually I broke through my denial and have solved several problems! I could not have managed to understand all the changes without the pac-lap information and support. This has been an intense journey for me but I know I am on my way now!

SPRING EDITION, 2005

MY CHAIR

By Nancy Christie

On the morning my power wheelchair was delivered I sat on my sofa and cried. I knew that the prophesy “she ended up in a wheelchair” was about to come true. My son Nick and his friend were with me to help me down my front stairs and I waited, sitting on a chair in the garage. As the Wheelchairs of Berkeley (WOB) truck drove up and the big, black power chair come down the ramp I thought well, here goes. I was terrified. The WOB representative had me sit in the chair and made adjustments to the arms and legs. Several of my neighbors came out to watch and I thought “great, I will have an audience to this event”. Nothing much happens on 16th Ave. The rep explained all the mechanical stuff to Nick and then gave me a lesson in how to hold the joy stick and some tips on turning and backing up. Then he was gone. In those days, weighing over 500lbs, I never left my flat except for medical appointments. I saw the world through my windows and the eyes of my children and friends. I felt safe with my books and my telephone and my computer. That chair was a great big threat to my security!

At first Nick walked beside me up and down the block as I got used to the controls, making turns, watching for cars and using those curb access things. All I can remember is terror in those early days, fear of dumping myself in the street, fear of crashing, fear of cars, fear of MOVING, which was a weird experience for a woman who could only walk a few steps on her own.

My first solo trip was from my house on 16th Ave to the Safeway on 7th Ave. I came to cross Park Presidio and maneuver into the store. This was no easy task with the automatic doors and a small entrance and sharp turn. I bought a bag of frozen peas, the first purchase I had made in 10 years. I had no keys to the house, no money of my own, and no purse. I didn't need these things as a recluse and I had to learn to remember to take the keys and the cell phone and my purse and some money whenever I went out. I also couldn't leave unless someone was home because I could not get up and down the outside steps myself. This changed as I became more physically active.

My circle of adventure expanded greatly when I was brave enough to discover Golden Gate Park. The rose garden is the closest park entrance. The first time I rolled into the garden and smelled the roses and the redwoods it was so heart lifting. It became my special place of escape and during the bad times of waiting for the DS and then after surgery dealing with the pain and the nausea and fatigue my mantra was "just get to the chair, get to the roses, get to my redwoods"

As I became more proficient and brave at handling my chair, I began to explore other areas of the park. My children grew up ½ block from the park and thought of it as their back yard. They told me about short cuts, special paths and secret spots and soon I was going everywhere. I discovered the band stand on Sundays, the fern groves, the dahlia garden, the aquarium, Stowe Lake and finally I found the arboretum. I saw so many beautiful places that I did not know existed.

I then extended my cruising area to Irving Street and Clement Street and Geary blvd. I tried going into restaurants and more stores. And my biggest trek was a trip to Ocean beach. I had never traveled that far before and as I went down that last hill and saw the waves; I knew my chair could take me anywhere...freedom. Of course there were some mishaps. I knocked over a condom display at Walgreen's and ran into a tall stack of boxes containing dead sharks in a Chinese fish market and I got stuck on a bubble gum machine at Safeway. There were a few calls for assistance from my family and I was rescued and all was ok.

The most amazing thing about being in the chair is the way people treated me. Before the chair, whenever I went anywhere in public, I was made fun of. This happened almost every of. This happened almost every time. People yelled from cars, made rude comments and the general abuse fat people endure from the public. BUT when I sat in that chair, the abuse stopped. No one made fat woman comments. No kids pointed and stared. No yelling personal comments about various parts of my large body. It all stopped. It was if by sitting in that wheelchair I suddenly gained a certain amount of respect. And a whole lot of kindness. I think the American disability Act has educated the general public that it is not socially acceptable to make fun or make rude comments to anyone in a wheelchair. Especially the kids were kind to me, which says a lot about our schools

So, my chair gave me independence, confidence, social acceptance and mobility when I needed it most. It was stage one in changing my life. My wheelchair travels gave me back the ability to talk to strangers and smile again. I was out there with the walkers and runners and joggers, the rollerbladers and the skateboarders and bicyclist, the walkers of dogs and the baby strollers and

old folks moving very slowly and sweetly. And I felt that I belonged, a member of the human family...again. I wish the walking fat people could be as respected. I guess fat abuse is the last prejudice that is socially acceptable.

I truly hope my wheelchair can give some independence to another large immobile person. Maybe ever have a little fun zooming up that ramp to St. Mary's. We don't get to zoom much at super morbid obesity stage.

My sister, Ellen says that when you have to give up something that you love and that has served you well just "give it a kiss, say good-bye and walk away".

Good-bye good friend. Happy zooming PacLap!

Nancy no longer needs the assistance of her wheel chair. She is donating this electric wheel chair to PacLap for others to use. We thank her for her generosity and sharing her story with us:

Editorial

Barbara Metcalf RN, Editor