

Remembering Wise Words

By Bruce W. McIntyre

Be adaptable.

That is the message that I got from a guidance counsellor in high school. Her message then was the career paths you are thinking about now are changing fast and we will be required to adapt with it.

The same thing is true about being as healthy as you can be given what we know now about genetic disposition and family history. It was not surprising that my daily routine of running after work was not as sustainable as I once thought. The physical wear and tear were catching up with me.

At a New Year's Eve house party a couple of friends invited me to a yoga studio. I have retained a vibrant sense of curiosity and so I went with them. My body by then was like a knot that I was trying to untie with two people pulling at both ends of the rope. During the first class I had to stop and walk into the hall to get composed. But a voice in my brain was telling me that this is exactly what I needed and so I went back in. I was completing each class without having to stop within the first month. The next phase of the journey began.

My aches and pains began to ease. Remarkably, I had more energy and stamina and I was paying closer attention to what I was doing every day. In short, I became more focused. And yoga studios were appearing on every corner. I did a little experimenting with different types and disciplines and settled on the one that was right for me. There is literally a type for everyone from children to seniors. And its closer than you think.

The story does not end there. New flexibility allowed me to do so many more things pain free. Cycling, house repairs longer walks with my wife and dog and kicking the soccer ball with the neighborhood kids. I was paying closer attention to what my body was telling me and backed off some things at the appropriate time.

I was kicking the soccer ball with a few high school aged kids when the chest pressure came. Was I just out of breath from running after the ball? Or was it something else? The family history. I had a cardiology appointment in a few days. In the past I had passed every stress test with flying colors. The cardiologist was insistent. I was going to get a diagnostic cardiac catheterization. At the hospital my wife and I were upbeat. The doctors stopped the procedure and went to speak with my wife. I wasn't going home. They had called for an ambulance to take me to Boston for an emergency triple bypass. No one could believe it. I was paying attention and listening to what my body was telling me.

The old me would have passed off the shortness of breath and tightness as the asthma that I have had all my life. According to my doctors, the old me would be dead. Sudden cardiac death would have occurred.

Yoga taught me to pay attention. It did not promise a disease-free life. Or a life without challenge. But it did teach me to pay attention.

That is what saved my life.

So I'll repeat those wise words: Be adaptable.