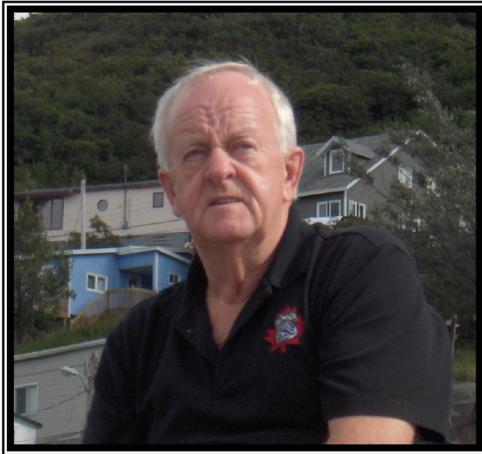


## “The Rest was Up to Me”



I first heard of COPD in 1985 when I had to visit an emergency room for shortness of breath due to a cold bug. They gave me an antibiotic and told me to quit smoking.

I never paid much attention to it after that. I continued to smoke 3 large packs a day. My smokers hack was well heard. I knew I had to quit soon.

Then in 1995, life started to unravel. My employer closed our shop so I changed jobs; my wife had a stroke that ended her nursing career. In spite of my developing a new job, extensive physiotherapy for my wife, and through a multitude of stressful events, I managed to quit smoking.

I started walking and was up to 5 miles a day when my career, with the railway, ended in 1998. About that same time my wife had her right leg amputated, below the knee, and things were

rather stressful. Through it all I stayed away from smoking.

I started long haul truck driving, in 2000, and enjoyed every mile for 3 and half years. I had gained weight, from all that driving, and had not continued with my walking. But, I started it up again when I retired in the spring of 2003. By Oct of that year I was back in shape (190 lbs.) easily walking 5 miles a day.....every day.

I had no breathing problems.

November of that year my life changed; the words, "You have a 5 cm mass in the middle of your right lung". Cancer. I had been smoke free for seven years. It just didn't seem fair.

All through the surgery and 4 months of chemotherapy I remained optimistic, and vowed to live a normal life. I learned not to listen to those who could, so easily, tell me what I couldn't, or shouldn't, do.

So here I was, with one lung and COPD reared its ugly head again. They told me it would take six months before I could walk a mile. I done it in 5 weeks after the surgery and in -30 deg weather. I was not going to live my life, in a chair, watching television.

My lung specialist never once mentioned what I couldn't do. He prescribed the appropriate inhalers; the rest **was up to me.**

I took up hiking, snowshoeing and walking my 5 miles. In just over a year I returned to driving truck 3 days a week, so my physical activity took a back seat again. I'm not consistent enough for my liking. But I continue to strive to keep a healthy weight. I'm still working towards that end.

This was my first winter that my Bronchitis exacerbated to a point that worried me enough to stop walking and warrant a visit to my lung specialist. He confirmed it and said I would just have to suck it up and wait it out. He also told me the worst thing I did was to stop my walking. He said our bodies don't wear out, they rust;

People with COPD often cut down, or stop, their physical activity to avoid breathing discomfort. But exercise training can improve breathing and the ability to exercise more. I'll remain active. *By Kevin Shanahan*