

## Heart Victim

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of heart surgery and realizing if might just as easily mean death as recovery, and walking into a costly operation (expenses were

to total nearly \$8,000 before it was all over), is a trial for any man and his wife. To the Erbs it was one more in a long chain of troubles that had struck their household since their marriage. Six years ago, the Erbs' only

son died of muscular dystrophy, at the age of 19, after having lived in a wheel chair for ten years. A few years later their youngest daughter, now 15, developed rheumatic fever. After recovering from this, she fell off

her bicycle and injured a knee. Because the fever had affected her joints, the injury did not heal properly and the girl was on crutches for a long while.

During this period, Mrs. Erb's mother was paralyzed by a stroke, and Mrs. Erb took care of her in her home for three years before her death. And just days after Erb's heart attack last July, while he was still a hospital patient, his own mother died.

In spite of, or perhaps as a result of these troubles, the Erbs are an optimistic family unit, showing neither self pity nor bitterness. They live in the same house they lived in when first married, a 16-room farmhouse off West Lincoln Avenue. The house belonged to Erb's parents, and he grew up there, helping his father farm, in turn farming it himself, until he gave up farming some years ago and leased the land to neighbors.

Their church life centers around the Neffsville Mennonite Church, and they have brought it into their home with daily family worship, usually in the evenings when their girls are home.

Music is at the core of their lives. Mrs. Erb plays both piano and organ, and Erb plays trumpet and trombone. An ardent singer, he was a member of the first Youth for Christ male quartet when it was organized in the county 25 years ago.

Spiritual awareness helped him through his ordeal, Erb says. In the weeks before his operation, while at Temple undergoing the un-ending tests and examinations, he leaned heavily on the letters and messages from friends encouraging him to go through with the operation. Many of the letters contained poems and spiritual thoughts, and all were comforting to him in this nerve racking period.

A nervous man by nature, Erb worried a lot. "But I wasn't afraid," he said. "I was resigned to it. I felt that what was to be would be. My wife and daughters stuck by me and that was important. I found out what a good wife I had and how much that really means."

On the day of his operation the Grace Brethren Church conducted a 24-hour prayer chain for him. Many persons enclosed money in their letters to help out, called "love offerings" from church groups, or just "helping hands" from individuals.

"It all meant a lot," Erb remembers. "When we needed something, it always seemed to arrive in the mail the next day."

When he came home, Erb was faced with the long, often discouraging job of recuperating. Faced with difficulties like swelling ankles, rash, the discomfort of riding in a car, he found himself wondering: "Will I ever be the same again?"

But as he mended, and the valve continued to function, he could see a brighter future, and when he passed the critical six-month period, he was reassured. "He's a walking example of what they can do, a new man today," his wife says.

What lies ahead for Erb looks like recuperation—further healing of his incision, strengthening of his muscles through exercise like walking, and learning to pace himself. He is now working half a day daily at his sales job, his wife driving him on his local rounds to farmers.

What does he advise other heart cases like his own and their families?

"Don't put off surgery if it is needed," he stresses. "The younger a man is when he has this surgery, the better off he is."

To those that must stand by and watch it happen to a friend or loved one, he says to let them know you are behind them.

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