

"Cardiac Comedian" Frank King: funny as a heart attack

Editor's Note: Local comedian Frank King, who has opened for big name acts including Jeff Foxworthy, Jerry Seinfeld and Ellen DeGeneres, keeps fit at the Cardiac Rehabilitation and Wellness gym at Sacred Heart at RiverBend, where he is also a volunteer.

At age 55, comedian Frank King has already outlived his father by 15 years. In fact, he's outlived most of the men in his family.

"We have a nickname for men in my family over 50," Frank says, pausing for effect. "Adopted."

Did I mention he was a comedian?

With a family history of heart disease, including his father's death at age 40 from a failing heart valve, Frank was aware that he might eventually end up needing heart surgery. The first time (yes, first time) was a heart valve repair in 1995, when Frank was 38 and living in North Carolina. The repair worked, but doctors told him that eventually the valve would need to be replaced and he would need another surgery. Seventeen years later, Frank found out they were right.

Somewhere between Aruba and Miami, on board a luxury cruise liner where he was the nightly entertainment, Frank started feeling pain in his chest while working out on the elliptical machine.

"I thought it might just be the cruise ship food," Frank recalls. But when the pain returned and worsened the following morning, he knew it was something more.

Frank called his doctor and flew home to Oregon. A chest X-ray, echocardiogram, and cardiac catheterization at Oregon Heart & Vascular Institute followed. Soon, cardiologist **Eric Pacini, MD**, gave Frank the definitive confirmation: it was time for the valve to be replaced.

Just two weeks after his chest pain first began, Frank was getting prepped for the 10-hour surgery, which would include both a valve replacement and a double bypass. Ever the performer, Frank started cracking jokes.

"I'm getting into the gown and getting worked up, and I keep coming up with jokes, trying to make



everyone laugh,” Frank says. “I think to myself, ‘Man, I’m killing!’ And then it hits me... I better be. It may be my last show.”

Fortunately for Frank, his show was far from over. In fact, the second act was just beginning.

Dr. Paul Koh and **Dr. David Duke** performed a successful open-heart procedure on Frank, repairing his valve and allowing his heart to beat effectively, freeing Frank of the intense chest pain he had been experiencing. When he awoke in the Intensive Care Unit, he glanced over at his wife, Wendy, who was given updates on the surgery every two hours, and gave her a simple wink—code for, “I’m OK.”

In all, Frank spent about a week at Sacred Heart Medical Center at RiverBend. During that time, he was pleasantly surprised to see that his nurses took a personal interest in his care. They continually checked in on him as he worked his way from intensive care to a patient room inside Oregon Heart & Vascular Institute (OHVI).

“It was so refreshing,” he recalls. “They must see dozens of people, but they took the time to come by and check in on me during my recovery. It was a different level of service than I had expected from a hospital.”

Now back on his feet and on stage at comedy clubs and on cruise ships, Frank is delighting crowds with his new routine: *The Cardiac Comedian: A Scar is Born*. He’s also an active participant in OHVI’s Cardiovascular Wellness and Rehabilitation Program, where he volunteers to share his story with heart patients who are recovering from surgery. While Frank is always quick to offer a humorous quip, his tone changes when he considers how his story might have ended.

“I often think that if it was another time, I would not be alive,” he says. “Just look at my dad. In many ways, his death saved my life.”

—**By Andrea Ash**, *Media Relations Specialist*