

Impact

Newsletter

Winter 2019

VGH
UBC hospital
foundation



Ritchie's astonishing recovery from a devastating spine injury

Two years after his spinal surgery Ritchie and Kristen are married and expecting their first child.

"I remember being on the mountain just screaming. All I could do was scream. That's how bad the pain was."

On January 15, 2017, 30 year old Ritchie Biln experienced a devastating and life-changing accident. An avid and experienced backcountry snowmobiler, Ritchie was out for a ride. What seemed like a perfect day quickly turned into a nightmare when Ritchie felt the snow shifting out from underneath him.

Suddenly, he crashed down 30 feet and on impact cracked his back on a metal bracket of his snowmobile.

Ritchie couldn't move and due to weather conditions, he lay in the cold for three hours waiting for the BC Air Ambulance to arrive.

Initial assessment showed Ritchie's spinal cord was badly damaged and, to give him the best chance of recovery, he needed the surgical expertise available at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH).

Leaders in spinal care

At VGH Ritchie underwent several MRIs which showed the impact of his fall had shattered his vertebrae and bone fragments were embedded in his spinal cord. The damage was so severe Ritchie's partner, Kristen, was told he may never walk again.

"When we first got to the hospital a member of the medical team sat us down and said, *I just need to warn you, this is not looking good,*" says Kristen.

Dr. Brian Kwon, Orthopaedic Spine Surgeon, assessed that Ritchie would need surgery to realign the spine and remove the bone fragments.

"It was very severe," says Dr. Kwon. "With that kind of injury we were very concerned about the potential that there wouldn't be any function from the waist down."

Dr. Kwon led the complex five-hour surgery, methodically removing bone fragments and decompressing and realigning Ritchie's spine. After the delicate and painstaking procedure, Ritchie's spine was repaired with no lasting damage.

A renewed life

Ritchie and Kristen have since married and are expecting their first child. They have come out of it with a renewed sense of life and an appreciation for the expert medical care available at VGH.

"Things can happen at any time and in the unfortunate circumstances it does, the donations that have been made in order to have state-of-the-art equipment, the best services and the most amazing staff will make all the difference in your care, treatment, recovery and outcome," says Kristen.

Support innovative surgery and vital spine research to help patients like Ritchie receive the best possible care in BC at VGH. Learn more at vghfoundation.ca/surgery

Spine Care Facts

- 85,000 Canadians live with paralysis of the arms and legs due to acute spinal cord injuries.
- The world's first human spinal cord injury biobank, founded by Dr. Brian Kwon, houses more than 20,000 samples of spinal fluid and blood, giving researchers around the world the means to tackle challenges inherent to human spinal cord repair.
- VGH is BC's sole referral centre for acute spinal cord injuries.



Fulfilling Chad's dream

Chad pledged to raise \$1 million for blood disease research. Thanks to his loved ones, his dream has been fulfilled.

In 2001, when Chad Warren was 26 years old he was told he had multiple myeloma, a cancer that affects the bone marrow and immune system. He was one of the youngest people in Canada to be diagnosed with this disease.

To add to Chad's news, one year later it was found his mother Sandy had the same disease. His mother still lives today thanks in no small part to her son's generosity and determination.

Chad and his mom spent years undergoing treatment at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) including clinical trials with the Hematology Research Program (HRP). They received exceptional care from Dr. Stephen Nantel and the supporting medical team. Their lives were improved and extended, and they felt compelled to give back.

In 2008, Chad pledged to raise \$1 million for the HRP to help support blood disease research and treatment.

Chad wouldn't live to see his dream fulfilled, but when he passed in 2009, his father Clark and his sister Jennifer took on the mantle.

In the fall of 2018, at the eighth annual Chad Warren Charity Challenge Tennis Tournament, Clark and Jennifer were overwhelmed with pride and gratitude as Chad's seemingly impossible dream was realized.

"There was cheering and clapping and we had confetti flying," says Clark. "Family and close friends of Chad's were all there along with many of the tournament players and we were ecstatic. From the outset, let's face it, it was a very large goal!"

After 10 years, the running fundraising total is now in excess of \$1,070,000.

"We didn't just fall over the line, we soared," says Clark. "I tried to think of what Chad's words would be after reaching this goal. I think he would say, *This is totally awesome.*"

Chad was determined and truly believed he was going to successfully raise \$1 million. And through his family, friends and community, he did.

Like Chad, you can help fund vital research to help those living with blood cancers. Learn more at vghfoundation.ca/cancer

Hematology at VGH

- 2,000 British Columbians are diagnosed with blood cancer annually.
- VGH is responsible for all adult stem cell transplants in BC.
- The Division of Hematology at VGH sees approximately 3,600 new patients each year.
- The Leukemia/Bone Marrow Transplant Program of BC performs nearly 250 bone marrow transplants annually.

Simon is alive today because of expert collaboration between:

- ICU (Drs. George Isac & Vinay Dhingra)
- cardiovascular surgery (Dr. Richard Cook)
- cardiology (Dr. David Wood)
- emergency medicine (Dr. Chris Lee)
- critical care medicine (Dr. Don Griesdale)
- nurses and respiratory therapists



Simon Smith is smiling and cycling again after surviving a “widowmaker” heart attack — thanks to the life-saving ECMO machine and the experts at VGH.

ECMO machine saves patient from “widowmaker” heart attack

On a typical weekday morning Simon Smith headed to work. He had no idea that in a few hours' time he would be fighting for his life.

“I remember going up the stairs and feeling winded, and it was only two flights,” says Simon. “It was unusual because I go up those stairs almost every day.”

Although his shortness of breath went away, his throat felt uncomfortable. So, he called his wife, Dr. Raewyn Broady, Director of the Leukemia/ Bone Marrow Transplant (L/BMT) Program of BC at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH).

She advised him to get medical attention right away. Simon went straight to the VGH Emergency Room (ER). He exchanged texts with his wife, telling her he was OK.

She thought everything was alright.

A few minutes later Raewyn got a call from the ER staff saying, *I'm really sorry to tell you but your husband has gone into cardiac arrest and we haven't been able to resuscitate him.* She hung up and rushed down to the ER.

Life-saving technology at VGH

When she arrived, the medical team told her that Simon's heart had stopped and he was a candidate for ECMO — a portable heart-lung machine that circulates and oxygenates a patient's blood and then re-infuses it. This life-saving technology

allows the heart and lungs to recover, and keeps organs functioning while medical teams continue their work.

Within 10 minutes of cardiac arrest Simon was in the cath lab where ECMO was initiated and blood-flow to his heart was restored. Forty-eight hours later Simon woke up with his heart beating on its own.

“The secret is a high functioning team that can provide a coordinated and critical level of care,” says Dr. Don Griesdale, the critical care medicine physician who along with the medical team made the request for ECMO. Over the years, through VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation donors have funded several ECMO machines.

Because of the medical team's quick, decisive action to put Simon on ECMO, he is back to living his life with no lasting effects.

“I can't thank them enough for their dedication and professionalism, it's just amazing,” says Simon. “I feel like I have a second chance at life.”

Join us in funding the expertise and equipment that saves lives like Simon's. Learn how at vghfoundation.ca/heart-lung

Help purchase new equipment

Donations to our *Most Urgent Needs* fund help our health care teams purchase much-needed equipment such as:

Exercise tolerance testing treadmill
\$8,000

Critical care bed
\$14,050

Bladder scanner
\$15,200

Stretcher
\$6,800

Scope
\$19,920

Wheelchair
\$7,180

To make a donation, contact:
604 875 4676
info@vghfoundation.ca

Give online at:
vghfoundation.ca/donate



Jim Eccott, former Board Member, donates securities to causes he's passionate about.



Nathaniel Lacson, RN, loves seeing his patients overcome adversity.

Gifting securities — more bang for your buck

When Jim Eccott sees a problem, he fixes it.

Nothing highlights this more than when in 2014 he was learning about the Joseph & Rosalie Segal & Family Health Centre at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH). He'd decided he heard enough. He handed Barbara Grantham, President and CEO of VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation, a note that said the amount he wanted to give in support of the new mental health building.

"That was spur of the moment," says Jim. "I hadn't thought about it. They hadn't approached me. And that's how I like it."

Jim became a major supporter of VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation in 2010. And the more he learned about the fantastic work being done, the more he wanted to get involved. Soon after, he was invited to join the Foundation's Board of Directors. Although Jim is retired, he isn't the kind of person to rest on his laurels so he created a new career out of giving back to his community. As a Board Member, Jim worked tirelessly to raise money and awareness.

"Every year, I make many cash donations to charity," says Jim. "But, if I'm in a position to do so, I donate stock. No question. You're able to give more, because you're giving away something that otherwise would be taxed."

Gifting securities is one of the most tax-effective ways to give, extending your savings beyond the donation tax credit. Most securities are held electronically and can easily be transferred from your brokerage account to a brokerage account held by VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation.

Join donors like Jim by giving a gift of securities to VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation and help make a difference. Learn more at vghfoundation.ca/ways-to-give

Behind the scenes with Nurse Nathaniel Lacson

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in the Philippines, Manila to be exact, until I was 11 years old. Then we immigrated to Canada living in Montreal and Toronto, and eventually settling here in Vancouver. I pretty much had my childhood all over the place and moved more than 20 times up until my 20s.

What inspires you?

Watching people overcome adversity inspires me. I see it every day in my work and in my life. It is very encouraging and uplifting to see that no matter how dark the tunnel, people see light at the end of it.

Tell us one thing (professionally or personally) that we might be surprised to find out about you?

I'm still a kid at heart. I have a 4 year old boy and a 2 year old girl, and I think I get more excited about new toys than they do!

How do you like to spend your down time?

My wife and I are gamers and we love playing video games. The gaming only comes out once the kids are in bed of course.

See how your support can help nurses like Nathaniel care for more patients recovering from surgeries. Learn more at vghfoundation.ca/surgery