

# Impact

Newsletter

Summer 2019

**VGH**  
**UBC** hospital  
foundation

## Elementary school teacher receives life-saving neurosurgery

Veronique Vachon and her partner, Laurent Mazurek. Veronique suffered from seizures one day and an MRI scan revealed life-threatening growths in her brain.

Veronique Vachon and her partner Laurent Mazurek were driving home from a family get-together when Laurent looked over and saw Veronique convulsing.

Laurent instantly knew she was having a seizure. He didn't waste a second — he rushed as fast as he could to the hospital.

At Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) an MRI scan revealed that Veronique had two clusters of abnormal blood vessels called cavernomas in her brain. Cavernomas are small, raspberry shaped entanglements of blood vessels which can come and go for years without producing symptoms but can then suddenly hemorrhage, causing seizures, or even death.

Veronique needed complex neurosurgery to save her life — the kind of surgery that could only be undertaken by the specialized team at VGH.

Thanks to world-renowned neurosurgeon Dr. Gary Redekop and his team's investigation, Veronique's diagnosis and subsequent surgery to remove the symptomatic cavernoma was successful. However, her long and difficult journey to recovery was still ahead.

### Rebuilding her brain at GF Strong Rehab Centre

When Veronique woke up after her surgery she looked around and thought, *What am I doing here? What happened to me?*

"Everything changed that day," says Veronique. "I don't remember those next few weeks at all. It was very slow. I had to re-learn how to eat, talk, walk — everything."

To get the help she needed to return to her former life as a school teacher, Veronique required the experts at GF Strong.

Working diligently with the physiotherapists, nurses, doctors and speech therapists at GF Strong, Veronique went from learning foundational life skills like eating and walking to performing more complicated tasks, such as following recipes.

Today, almost a year since she came to VGH, Veronique is well on her way to returning to teach her third grade class and getting back to her former life.

### The continuum of care

To ensure her health continues to improve and any future cavernoma growths don't become a threat, Veronique requires a bi-annual MRI at VGH. To better help patients like Veronique, VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation is raising funds to purchase a 3T MRI machine. This machine will help meet rising demand for diagnostic imaging and provide British Columbians increased access to the highest level of diagnostic accuracy, and improved patient outcomes.

### Brain disease and injury

- One in three Canadians will be impacted by traumatic brain injury, neurological disease or stroke in their lifetime.
- Brain disease is expected to be the leading cause of death and disability by 2020 — killing more Canadians than heart disease and cancer.
- Approximately 1.5 million Canadians are living with the effects of an acquired brain injury.
- Brain injury is the leading cause of death and disability for Canadians under the age of 40.

Help patients like Veronique on their journey to recovery. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/brain](http://vghfoundation.ca/brain)



## Bystander crushed by race car survives thanks to VGH

Jon Sedman, Christa Meissner and their son Kayden, who was born while Jon was receiving life-saving treatment at VGH after a freak accident.

Jon Sedman, 41, doesn't remember when the race car crushed him. He doesn't remember his eight-month pregnant girlfriend, Christa Meissner, going into labour prematurely when she learned of the accident, not knowing if he would live long enough to be a father.

"The last thing I remember is setting up a fireworks show at a car racing event on Vancouver Island when suddenly, it started to rain," says Jon. "The fireworks needed to be kept dry, so I went and put a plastic tarp over them."

As he started to walk back to his truck, in a split second, one of the race cars lost control. It veered off the track, flipped and landed on top of Jon.

### Expert coordination of care

"When Jon arrived, he had multi-system trauma which takes a lot of coordination of care and a lot of different subspecialists to manage," says Dr. Naisan Garraway, Medical Director of the Trauma Program at VGH.

Jon's injuries were extensive: he had a pelvic fracture with a vascular injury, splenic injury, c-spine ligamentous injuries, nerve injury to his leg and brain trauma.

Ten physicians from six different specialties worked together to care for Jon and save his life.

"In BC, Jon could only have received this type of specialized and expert treatment at VGH," says Dr. Emilie Joos, one of Jon's trauma surgeons at VGH [see her Q&A on pg. 4].

### A twist of fate

While Jon was undergoing surgery for his life-threatening injuries, his partner, Christa, was giving birth. In a twist of fate, at the same time one of Jon's trauma surgeons was working on him, that surgeon's husband was helping Christa while she was delivering her baby.

A month later, Jon was woken from his medically induced coma — a necessity to allow his body to heal. He awoke to meet his healthy son for the first time. Christa had waited so they could name him together — they chose Kayden Meissner-Sedman.

### Rehab and recovery

Jon survived, however, the road to recovery would be a long and arduous one.

Thanks to the care he received, Jon is now living at home again. While he still requires ongoing physiotherapy and has a long road ahead of him, Jon is grateful to be alive.

## Trauma facts

- VGH and UBC Hospital are centres of surgical excellence that manage 60% of BC's adult trauma cases.
- Major trauma is the principal cause of death for people under the age of 45 in Canada.
- Over 700,000 people are injured annually in BC. Of these, approximately 27,000 are hospitalized and 9,000 suffer permanent disability.
- The annual cost of injury exceeds \$2.8 billion in BC.

Join us in supporting BC's best health care teams who save thousands of trauma patients like Jon every year at VGH. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/surgery](http://vghfoundation.ca/surgery)

## Heart stops beating for 30 year old father



Duncan Ris went into cardiac arrest on his 30th birthday. When he awoke at VGH, he was a changed man.

It was the night of Duncan Ris' 30th birthday when he started feeling chest pains.

After an evening of celebrating with his wife and friends, Duncan's pain got worse and he started vomiting. Around midnight, he went to the Emergency Department (ED) at VGH where his condition rapidly deteriorated. While undergoing tests, Duncan went into cardiac arrest.

"The last thing I remember was walking through the sliding doors at VGH," says Duncan. "The next thing I know I'm waking up hooked up to a ventilator in the ICU — it is a weird and kind of scary way to wake up."

The father of six year old Caleb had undergone life-saving heart surgery.

"It was pretty serious — his heart had stopped," says Dr. Tara Sedlak, Duncan's cardiologist. "We took him immediately from the ED to the angiogram lab where we found a 100% blockage of the big artery that comes down the front of the heart. Using a balloon and stent we were able to open up the blocked artery and save Duncan."

Duncan was diagnosed with coronary artery disease; a rare disease for someone so young.

### New view on life

Following his unexpected and frightening health scare, Duncan says he views life differently now.

"Everything has changed," says Duncan. "I am much more aware of my body and appreciate

it more. The joys and challenges of family feel different when life's fragility is more deeply known and the future more plainly vulnerable. There are things to be grateful for in that. I like to think I have learned some things about enjoying the moment."

### Philanthropy is vital to health care

When faced with a medical crisis, we all hope for the best treatment available. VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation partners with generous donors to support delivery of the best care possible for all British Columbians. VGH has a long history of providing exceptional, cutting-edge cardiac care to adults across the province. VGH's cardiologists are renowned researchers in a number of areas, including cardiac oncology, women's heart health and coronary artery disease to name a few.

"Philanthropic donations support all of our important research into cardiac conditions affecting both men and women, young and old," says Dr. Sedlak. "We can develop new diagnostic techniques, new treatments and ultimately increase the chances of survival and a better quality of life."

Join us in funding leading research and equipment that saves lives like Duncan's. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/heart-lung](http://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:

**Critical care bed**  
\$14,050

**Bladder scanner**  
\$15,200

**Wheelchair**  
\$7,180

**Stretchers**  
\$6,800

To make a donation, contact:  
**604 875 4676**  
[info@vghfoundation.ca](mailto:info@vghfoundation.ca)

Give online at:  
[vghfoundation.ca/donate](http://vghfoundation.ca/donate)



Fred Town (right) with his long-time friend May James.



Dr. Emilie Joos, Trauma Surgeon at VGH, loves to help her patients restore their quality of life.

## Farmer's legacy funding the future of brain health

Fred Town spent his life with his nose to the grindstone, working hard for every nickel and counting every penny.

Fred was born in 1925 into a family with six other siblings, including an identical twin brother named Bert. He worked the shipyards in Vancouver until he and two of his brothers started their own farm in 1947.

It was there he truly found happiness and built his legacy — part of which he would selflessly donate to VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation.

“Fred was such a warm, generous soul,” says John Wood, Fred’s executor. “Despite living through the Depression, suffering through hard times and doing very physically demanding work, he was always the kind of person to give someone the clothing off his back.”

Fred left an incredibly generous gift to VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation in his will. Through his generosity, researchers at the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health are pursuing new, creative ideas to better understand and treat brain diseases.

Philanthropic support is vital for kickstarting innovative, original ideas and will impact British Columbians for years to come.

From everyone at VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation, we are incredibly thankful to Fred Town. His legacy is forever tied to transforming health care in BC.

Join donors like Fred by leaving a gift in your will to VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation and help make a difference for patients, today and into the future. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/legacy](http://vghfoundation.ca/legacy)

## Behind the scenes with Dr. Emilie Joos

### Why are you so passionate about working in the Trauma Unit at VGH?

Trauma has always been a natural choice for me. I love the definitive nature of it, the immediate decision-making process that leads to immediate results. Our team can make a huge difference in the outcome of severely injured patients like Jon [see pg. 2], and restore their quality of life. It is empowering to work with dedicated individuals who all share the same values and have the same goal. At VGH, the trauma team is my family.

### How do you spend your downtime?

I ski in the winter and rock climb in the summer — between my pregnancies! We also love camping and doing road trips with the family. And, for weekend retreats, we are building a tiny house on Gambier Island.

### What is the one of the most interesting experiences of your career?

Deploying to work as a doctor in the Congo and Central African Republic. Working in challenging environments forces me to constantly adapt my human and technical skills, takes me outside of my comfort zone and makes me a better doctor. It is an honour for me to be able to do this kind of work.

See how your support can help doctors like Dr. Joos care for patients suffering from traumatic injuries. Learn more at [vghfoundation.ca/surgery](http://vghfoundation.ca/surgery)