

My Journey

Over the years I had discomfort in my legs and feet that progressed and limited my ability to enjoy activities and travel, but I wrote it off as the pains of getting older. Four years ago, I developed a small wound on my left foot, which refused to heal. This caused more pain and limited my mobility further, and I began a journey of countless doctors, wound care centers, and procedures that brought me to where I am today.

In January 2019 I went to the doctor because of a wound on my left foot. He cleaned it and had me follow up over a few weeks before suggesting I see a dermatologist to rule out cancer. There was no cancer. After many months of the wound getting worse, larger, and more painful, the doctors suggested I follow up with a plastic surgeon to have the wound cut out and stitched closed. The concern that a surgical wound would not heal any better than the existing wound kept me from pursuing that procedure. Instead, I decided to go to a specialized wound care center in Pennsylvania that other relatives had success with in the past treating hard to heal wounds. At this point I began to have more trouble in my day-to-day life, becoming less and less mobile due to the pain caused by putting pressure on my feet. Still thinking it was a minor wound and with proper treatment it would heal.

Over the course of the following year, we drove back and forth to the wound center in Pennsylvania at least twice a month for various wound treatments. At this point, we had success at healing the original wound, but over the year new wounds developed on both feet from minor cuts and scrapes. New concern over an infection spreading into the bone on my heel presented itself when a wound that developed on the back of my right foot near the tendon grew larger and deeper. All of this caused more pain that made it harder to do normal things like driving, or even taking care of mundane tasks around my house. We live on a lagoon in South Jersey and the year before all of this started, I had purchased a new boat. By now it was very difficult for me to stand up long enough to enjoy the boat, let alone maintain it, so I put it in storage hoping this was just another minor setback. The reality was that life would never be quite the same. The fear of losing my feet or legs grew stronger with each passing week that the wounds did not improve. I resisted taking pain medication at this point because I did not want to get dependent on medication to cope with the pain, knowing it would not solve the underlying problems. Eventually the wound care center explained that there was nothing else they could try. I was urged to investigate more invasive vascular treatments with a new specialist.

It was now half way through 2020 and after visiting with several specialists I was advised to have angioplasties on both legs to get better blood flow to heal the wounds. Unfortunately, the procedures were not successful and my feet started to develop other problems. The doctor was clear that something drastic needed to be done or I might lose my right leg above the knee. It was at this point that my toes started to completely loose blood flow and die. Initially it was only my right foot, but not long after my left toes followed. Throughout this period, I was forced to start taking pain medication and following up regularly with pain management, going down a road of trying different medications to get as much pain relief with as few side effects as possible. The fear that even this new surgery may not help became a reality for me. It was impossible to imagine ever being free from the pain medicine. Needless to say, I did a lot of thinking and posed a lot of 'what ifs' to myself with the biggest being what if I don't do it. If I didn't, I knew exactly where I'd end up, so

there really was only one decision to be made. There was still hope that things could work out.

All of this was occurring during the height of new Covid-19 lockdowns at the end of 2020. It was under these circumstances that I first met Dr. Petruzzi when I was referred to him for consultation for a DVA. It was determined that I needed to have the procedure as soon as possible. On a dark December afternoon my wife drove me to Atlantic Care Hospital to be admitted through the emergency room. Due to the covid restrictions she had to leave me alone at the emergency room doors, and was unable to accompany me inside. The next morning the procedure was complete. The process of turning a vein into an artery is truly amazing, at least to this layman it is. Thankfully the procedure was a success and I was discharged a few days later to my relieved wife. Once it was safe for Dr. Petruzzi to perform an angioplasty on my left leg, he was able to restore blood flow to that foot as well. Unfortunately, despite the improved blood flow to both feet, at this point my toes had deteriorated so much that they could not be saved and would need to be amputated. This was something that was always going to be the best-case scenario and my current podiatrist, Dr. Adler, performed both amputations as soon as it was medically safe to do so. The following months consisted of regular wound care visits with Dr. Adler and diligent follow up with Dr. Petruzzi to ensure the blood flow remained robust in the leg and foot and all the wounds healed.

The journey I have been on is not something I would recommend to anyone. I recently heard a quote, 'What harms also teaches.' The harm that has come to me I had no control over, but what it has taught me is to be thankful for the little things you have now, for your ability to enjoy them can disappear very quickly. I have recovered with rehab to a place I never imaged I would be again, having regained most of my freedom and ability to take care of all aspects of my daily life without assistance, free from all pain medication. This summer I was able to enjoy my boat for the first season since I purchased it over four years ago and have begun to drive again. Today I appreciate that in comparison to others I am extremely fortunate.

I would like to thank every one of the medical professionals that I have encountered over my journey who showed me compassion and gave me hope. I especially owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Petruzzi and Dr Adler for their skills and encouragement. Last but far from least, I want to thank my wife Debbie for her undying support and encouragement during the times that I was the lowest.