



In September, 30th 2018 at Hôtel Château Laurier Québec, the **AQPS** (Association québécoise des personnes stomisées) proceeded to the presentation of its Awards *Les Reconnaissances de l'AQPS*.

At this time, Mister *Archie Fineberg* of Montréal was honored as a regional winner.

The objective of **AQPS** is to encourage new ostomates to regain hope after surgery and celebrate life. Mister *Fineberg* agreed to share his message of hope.

August 17, 2018

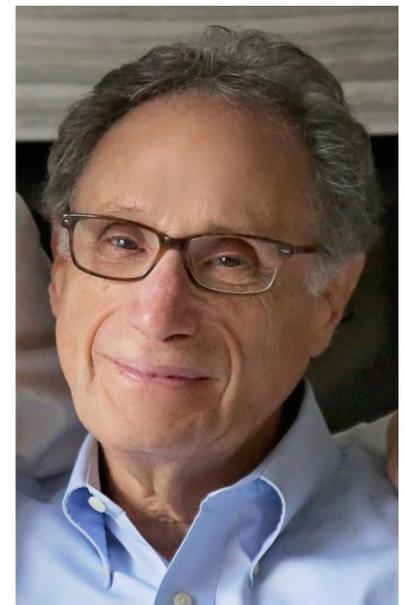
MY OSTOMY STORY

Throughout my teenage years and my adulthood, I was constantly experiencing gastric problems and very seldom felt well in that part of my body. At age of 50 I had my first experience with a dreadful episode of ulcerative colitis when I was about to have lunch with a friend. This was a traumatic experience. Aside from the pain, the highly distressing experience of dirtying my underwear and trousers left a permanent effect of constant anxiety at having a repetition of this distressing experience.

A month or two later I was seen by a gastroenterologist who diagnosed the condition of ulcerative colitis and prescribed various medications in an effort to control the symptoms. Naturally, the hope was that in time the condition would respond to the medication and I would return to better health. That, unfortunately, never happened and in 2008, after suffering from the symptoms every day for more than sixteen years I underwent a colostomy to remove my diseased large intestine.

During those sixteen years leading up to surgery, I created in my mind, the first mental GPS. Whenever I would set out on a trip, whether in Montreal where I live or a longer trip, I carried in my mind a mental picture of the toilet facilities on the route so that I would be able, in an emergency to reach a toilet before it would be “too late”. I could never travel in a state of complete peace of mind especially on an expressway during rush hour when I never knew if because of heavy and slow traffic, I would be able to make it to a toilet “in time” Apart from this constant fear of soiling myself, the pain from the bowel irritation was not always severe and consequently, had only a minor inhibiting effect on my activities. I never lost time from work and seldom had to limit my recreational activities.

After twelve years in this condition, my gastroenterologist encouraged me to have the colectomy and recommended an external pouch, but it took another four years to schedule the surgery because the surgeons kept saying no to surgery, claiming that there were too many other people whose lives were endangered by their



condition, usually bowel cancer, and that comparatively speaking, my condition relatively minor and could be controlled with steroids, whereas for these other people bowel surgery was a high priority.

In February 2008 I underwent a colectomy and was left only with my small intestine which terminated in a stoma. In late 2007, 3 months before the surgery I attended a meeting of the Montreal Youth Ostomy Group and received much encouragement for the surgery from the members and reassurance that with an ileostomy and a pouch I would have much more freedom after that. Their advice was very good.

The surgery was tough with many complications during the year that followed. Nevertheless, I was able to return to work after the first three months and continued to work for six more years after the surgery, before I retired. I was able to return to a full life with the newly found freedom and self confidence the external pouch provides. I continue to be a member of our local ostomy group to try to help others who have also undergone the surgery or are about to have the surgery. I lead a very full and busy life and I am grateful that others who had gone through the surgery and the ensuing recuperation were generous with their time and caring enough to help me with good advice and compassion.

Besides falling in love again and re-marrying before the surgery, I have had a full and happy domestic life with a loving and supportive wife for the past 15 years. Until 2009 I was an active hiker in the Adirondack Mountains in New York State and popular hiking areas in Québec. In 2010, two years after the surgery, I returned to Concordia University to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, graduating in 2016. I am currently enrolled at Concordia in a program leading to a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. I have been a volunteer in the Palliative Care Unit at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal and I have published a book in both French and English about Graffiti and Street Art in Montreal. The books are available in more than 40 bookstores and in more than 50 municipal and High school libraries. Recently I created an information campaign to inform people living with an ostomy of the availability of an income tax credit. I am grateful that living with an ostomy has given me back a full life.

Incidentally, I no longer need my mental GPS in order to know where all the washroom facilities are located “everywhere” because I no longer need it. Now I have a real GPS that tells me how to get to enjoyable places.

Archie Fineberg