



“Flesh eating disease has humbled me and brought many amazing things into my life.” Bryan Cuerrier



Top Left Bryan and Marijo Cuerrier get ready for the day. Top right the Cuerrier's enjoy a meal at their Belleville home. Counter clock wise from the left the Currier's go for a run/wheel chair ride along the Belleville waterfront. The Cuerrier's enjoy a night out at The Grind Café in Trenton. The Cuerrier's work at their home office.



The Value of Life

Photos and story by Linda Horn

Bryan Cuerrier, a 53-year-old man, sits in his oversized beige leather chair at his Belleville ranch style home. The chair is in front of a large patio window and the hot sun beats in on him.

His wife Marijo Cuerrier instantly notices that this could be a problem for him. "Do you need a T-shirt?" she asks. She is concerned he is going to overhear. "I don't have good temperature control now," he explains pointing to his phantom limbs. Marijo helps him get settled in his chair. He is worried she is going to leave the room and asks her to stay. She settles on the couch too.

Only a year and half ago he was an able bodied man with all his limbs. He considered himself an independent single man. Even though he was in a steady relationship with Marijo, he was terrified of commitment.

Then on May 15, 2010 he felt a pain in his leg after a run. The pain was different than a leg cramp. That Sunday he could only watch a few hours of his favourite hockey team, the Montreal Canadiens play.

"I had to go to bed after the second period; which is something I never do," said Cuerrier. Over the next few days, he became more ill and did not show up for work on Tuesday. His boss called Marijo to let her know that Bryan had not shown up at work and was incoherent on the phone when he spoke to him. At this point in their relationship Bryan and Marijo were not married. They did not even live together.

"When I got the call from his boss I knew there was something critically wrong," she said Bryan was rushed to Belleville General hospital. The hospital staff started circling the black spots on his legs, and was the first to suspect flesh-eating disease. He was immediately rushed to Kingston General Hospital.

Sitting in his chair now, Bryan is very animated as he speaks about the turn his life took. He talks with the hand he has left and his eyes sparkle even though he is talking about having his limbs removed.

When he first arrived at the hospital, the staff started a round of different antibiotics but his left leg still kept turning black. He was rushed to surgery and to have the black removed. He

was placed in a drug-induced coma until the hospital could figure out what to do.

The next morning Marijo was handed a consent form to amputate the leg and was told, "if you don't do this he may not make it," explained Bryan.

As he sat in his chair his eyes went soft. "Making this decision was a struggle for her. We were not married yet."

Doctors started amputating his left leg trying to stop the disease from spreading. Fortunately it stopped at his hip and he did not have to lose any bowels or other organs.

"This is where flesh-eating disease stopped for me" said Cuerrier.

"But my body, in its wisdom, decided to shut down the supply of blood to all of my limbs to protect the core. It wanted to protect what it needs to stay alive: the heart, liver, and lungs. So it cut off circulation to my limbs," explained Cuerrier.

It was no longer flesh-eating disease, it was now a circulatory problem. As a result, he lost his right leg at the knee, left arm, and his fingers on his right hand.

Though out this whole ordeal, Marijo was directing the doctors and making the tough decisions trying to save Bryan's life.

Marijo who is also an avid runner, graphic designer, and mother of grown children said it was hard being Bryan's girlfriend and having to make life-threatening decisions for him every day.

"I wasn't alone. His family was there but I was pushed to the front to make the decisions," she said.

"Luckily, I was able to handle the leadership but it did come with struggles and politics," she stated.

"There were days I thought I shouldn't be doing this, it is too big, but I would get some sleep and start over the next day. Every day his family and I would wake up thinking it couldn't get worse, but then it did," she said.

With tears in her eyes, Marijo talks about days Bryan was in a coma and how she worried that when he woke up, he would look at her, and say you were my girlfriend but I am not interested in this whole life-long thing.

When Bryan did wake up he realized what a beautiful person Marijo is. Before this happened; he did not want to get married.

"It hit me really hard in the hospital. I was thinking this person did not run from me and she could have. She has told me 100 times she does not see the amputations. It was like a light bulb went off and I thought you have a beautiful person here. What is your problem mister?" Cuerrier said with a chuckle.

Marijo was surprised when he proposed.

"I wasn't even thinking of marriage any more. I had dedicated myself to him and doing what he needed to help him," she said.

Bryan spent three months in rehab to learn to walk again with his prosthetics. Now he and Marijo work on his progress and make their own program.

Over the past year Bryan rides a recumbent bike to keep up with Marijo while she runs, and also taken up sailing, and golfing.

The biggest goal he has for himself is walking again and Marijo makes sure he stays on track.

"She gives me a good kick in the butt to get me moving. It is so easy to sit on the couch and think this is all I can do, but that is not good enough," he said.

Marijo laughs at his comment and responds "He is very goal-orientated and I use that to manipulate him sometimes. He gets into a funk and will go a week not walking. So I started a spreadsheet of his progress of his walking. He loves stats so it usually inspires him to get up and do better."

Marijo reflects on what she learned the most from all what has happened over the past year and half.

"I learned a lot about relationships. You can't have a fight for too long because in a few minutes he could need my help. In the early days we would have an argument and not speaking. Then he would have to go to the bathroom. It is hard to stay mad when you have to get that close them," she laughed.

Bryan then states "flesh eating disease has humbled me and brought many amazing things into my life."

