

## NEW HEART ALLOWS A LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE SURF TO RESUME (Article by JAMIE BROWN The Northern Star)

Ray Medhurst was back in the ocean again only six weeks after his heart transplant operation.

A run-in with Q fever left the Evans Head man breathless before he got a new heart.



Mr. Medhurst, engineer with the Richmond Valley Council and a keen surfer, survived the onset of the crippling disease, which made it impossible to breathe under normal physical effort, let alone paddle out beyond the shore break.

His heart transplant was successful and six weeks later he was standing up on his beloved surfboard.

His doctors, Paul Janze and Phillip Spratt, at the Heart/Lung Transplant Unit at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney had never heard of such a recovery. "I've been on the board now for about five weeks, a 6ft8in "Maddog" I had it made for me before my operation" he said. "It has a bit more flotation and makes catching the wave a little easier. But I'm still working towards getting fit enough to ride my new, smaller Mark Richards Super twin."

Ray, aged 58, never relented during the worst of his illness – going to work everyday and paddling out for a surf as often as possible. "I was never going to let it beat me." He confided. "As I got worse I was not prepared to give up. I just got a bigger board. Some days I could not walk along the beach in one go. I'd have to stop and have a rest. I worked the whole time. It was a bit of an effort. By the time I finished work I was exhausted. But I was not going to let anything beat me, I can tell you. And that's what you have got to do. It is all in the mind."

Q fever is spread by airborne bacteria, usually found in faeces of cattle, goats and sheep at places like saleyards.

It seems at first like a bad "flu but it can become chronic and complicating, leading to inflammation of the heart valves. In Ray's case, the bug literally ate away his heart muscle until just a quarter of the organ remained.

With a lack of circulation fluid bloated his body, built up on his chest and made breathing feel like drowning. A pacemaker was the only thing keeping him alive. "I was fortunate" says Ray in retrospect "I only had to wait three months for a donor"

A 1am phone call roused the patient from his reverie and the voice on the other end ordered him to rush to Ballina airport, where an air ambulance flew him to Sydney, stopping at Coffs Harbour on the way, to pick up a double lung transplant case, Mr. Medhurst recalls the man who needed two lungs was in a desperate way, having waited five years for the call. His doctor had only just told him he had less than six months to live.

“It is a very difficult time for the partner as well as patient. You can imagine how hard it was for us when my heart failed, but like all good couples, in love, we stuck together. I met Pam walking along the beach at Evans Head. Pam loved the beach as well and had just started to learn to surf. Now she is a competent and passionate board rider like me. Now you can understand how happy and grateful we are after a very successful transplant that has enabled us to do all those quality things together again.

If you work together, stick together, medical science can give you both a very happy outcome. Life is much better”