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# A Couple of Boys

## Max and Jasper's Top Surgery Trip to Queensland

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**T**hursday 17th March, 1994, and what a very special day it is! In fact, the whole week has been special, for here I sit in the house of a brother, alongside another brother whose pain and euphoria are the same as mine. On Sunday, Jasper and I arrived here in Queensland. Larano and Jamie were there to greet us at the airport and to whisk us off to Jamie and Sheryl's (*House of Recovery*) home where we'd be spending the next fortnight.

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The Valium<sup>®</sup> we'd had for the flight (both being terrified of flying) had worked so well at keeping us relaxed we had some again that night, because tomorrow was our big day. So, at what felt like the crack of dawn, we crawled out of bed, showered and headed for the Wesley Surgical Centre.

Jasper was due to be operated on first, around eight-ish, and so he was. They decided to operate on a youngster between our ops, which you think would throw me into nothing short

of panic. Thank the health food stores for valerian, I was so relaxed I even nodded off to sleep in the waiting room. A young nurse came out at one stage to explain the delay and on my request about Jasper she promptly returned with the information that all had gone well and he was in recovery doing nicely.

When finally I had to go in, I was asked to change into a flattering outfit of surgical gown, disposable paper hat, bootees and knickers. Left sitting in a chair while they prepared the operating room for me, I was able to see Jasper lying in recovery through a curtained doorway. I waved to him and kept looking over but I guess I'd neglected to remember that just because he appeared to be awake and talking to the nurses didn't necessarily mean he was with it.

Soon enough I was asked to follow a nurse into the theatre. Once there she introduced me to the other nurses in the room. (Who would remember what they looked like later when they all wore surgical gowns, masks and hats?) The anaesthetist whom I'd met earlier, arrived soon after I'd been settled on the table with a pre-warmed blanket. I'd been through theatre a number of times before and had experienced a degree of nervousness and fear but this time there was just a feeling of peace and total relaxation. The anaesthetist applied a needle to my arm then as he was injecting the anaesthetic, asked if I was ready for a sleep. All I remember saying was "Yeah", and closing my eyes.

I awoke some time later attempting to remove the oxygen mask from my face. Shortly afterward they moved me to the ward where next to me, in his bed, lay Jasper. We looked over at each other and croaked out a "Hi", a faint semblance of a smile playing on our lips and faces. We knew that the waiting was finally over.

After popping in and out of sleep for what seemed like an eternity, I was able to stay awake longer. Jasper was having a cursory bath and being shuffled out to a recliner chair, the next stage before going home. Jamie in the meantime was playing mother hen and going from one to the other of us lending all the support he could.

Hours later after the 'do not be sick' and 'do not pain' injections appeared to be working I was waddled out to sit beside Jasper. I must say, he kept looking a hell of a lot better than I felt. But I don't know how real that was at the time. I'm not sure what the anaesthetic was that we were given but it caused me to be sick again. I understand that the walk of ten to fifteen metres was enough to cause others such as Jasper the same stomach churning discomfort.

Jasper was allowed to go home soon after. Me? Well I was being my usual stubborn self and not really coming out of it (or is that to it?) as quickly and effectively as my brother, so I was kept some time longer. So, off into the world Jasper taxied with Jamie, home to bed while I stayed sleeping with Larano as my companion/guide/driver, who with efficient haste brought me home when it was time and helped deposit me in my bed opposite my brother in our dormitory of healing. The next day we were up, dressing gowns over our pyjamas, drains and tubes in supermarket carry bags and off to the medical centre to have our drains removed.

And, oh hell, does it hurt? First there's the prodding of the scars and then the tubes are literally whipped out. It certainly leaves the body

suffering mild shock and a lot of pain, enough that when we got home we went straight to our beds to seek refuge in sleep.

At times we have been so euphoric that we laugh hysterically and at others the pain is so much that we need to take a tablet and sleep to escape. Night-time goes hand in hand with pain-killers and sleeping-pills and yet we still wake up in the middle of the night tossing and turning for hours, unable to go to sleep and so need to be drugged again. Soon, hopefully, this need will cease to exist but we understand that part of it is caused by having to constantly sleep on our backs, I though, have sometimes found a place sort of on my side where I can lie for a while bringing some respite to my back. Mornings and days exist of vitamins, minerals, royal jellies and arnica treatments to help the healing on the inside. And to deal with the boredom, it's television, television, more visits to the medical centre, five-minute shuffles around the garden and of course more television (that is, if we're not sleeping).

Sheryl and Jamie have been pure gems. Jamie, especially on the first night was up every half an hour checking our drains and making sure we were all right. Sheryl, after having nursed Jamie for a couple of weeks after his operation (only three to four weeks ago) is now back at work and helping to care for us in the evenings. The concern from 'our family' in Sydney has been wonderful. From phone calls of inquiry about us to flowers, all let us know that we're cared for and loved very dearly.

And now in the background whilst I've been writing, I've been listening to the sounds of Jasper's new-age and classical tapes brought from home and constantly feel my eyes filling with tears. I wonder, is it for the loss of what for at least twenty-plus years was a part of me? Is it in anticipation of the bandaging and stitches coming off and out this afternoon and my fear and excitement of what I will see? Or is it just my body's way of showing relief that it's all over? Whatever the reason, I guess it doesn't really matter except that to cry is to heal that part of me that scalpel, herbs and talk can't reach. To acknowledge that it is as important to cry as all else that has happened and all that is to follow, while I heal my new chest and grow a new mat of hair where all was once shaved.

**Postscript:** Jasper and I are to attend the medical centre again next Tuesday to have the stitches removed. For reasons known only to himself our surgeon didn't remove them today. Jasper's scars look good and the result of his surgery I feel is something for him to be very happy with. I still have a small amount of fluid contained on my left side which gives the appearance of slight bustiness. Hopefully on Tuesday, if it is still there, it will be aspirated and my chest will be as complete and as promising as Jasper's.

Apart from the pain which is still in varying degrees at various times of the day, I judge that Jasper and I are making a quick and steady recovery brought about by the care given by our brother and sister here in Queensland. And by having a brother by our side going hand in hand through the very same process. Thank you to Jamie and Sheryl, and a special thanks to Jasper for being my 'bobbsey-twin', I'm sure the whole process would have been a much harder and lonelier road without you.

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