

Then it was time to make my decision. It was easy enough. I needed to be able to breathe more. My lack of breathing wasn't conducive to avoiding nightmares of suffocating or trying to clear my airway while everyone around me was oblivious.

I said, "Let's do this, Doc."

Dr. Nesbitt warned that this was going to be "a very tough surgery and recovery." He then ran through all of the typical risks and potential complications. Bleeding, infection, and pneumonia were just a few.

The holidays were looking to be a bust again this year. We left UMC and decided to stay over another night to soak in what we were just told. Nila and I found a quaint pizza place on the second floor that had a nice view from the outdoor seating of the busy street below. There weren't many people there at that time, which afforded us some privacy. I ordered a double chilled shot of Crown Royal and a beer. I had no idea what I might want to eat, only what I wanted to drink.

It wasn't the "very tough surgery" that occupied my thoughts as I sipped my Crown. It was realizing the termination of many things that I loved in life. Running, playing basketball, and more. I thought back on my years playing trumpet.

"Push from your diaphragm!" the band director would shout in order to get more volume from our instruments.

I thought of being in the army and volunteering for burial details. There was nothing more rewarding than playing Taps at a military funeral.

Before cancer I had talked to Nila about playing softball again in the men's fifty and up league. I wanted to join the wellness center and get in on some basketball pick-up games.

I even thought of going to the Veterans Administration and seeing if I could volunteer again for the local military funerals. I would have to practice and knock the rust off.

But that would be easy. I would need to be able to push with my diaphragm in order to project a strong sound.

All of those dreams died at the UMC the day I met Dr. Nesbitt.