

1 December 2020

Save A Life This Christmas

Dear Valued Supporter

For many of us, Christmas is a time of happiness and joy, time spent with our families and friends, good food and long days at the beach, but for those people living with heart and lung disease and their families, this is often not the case. Your gift to The Baird Institute's Christmas Appeal will have the power to transform so many lives.

Because of you Mark Bowyer is able to spend this Christmas with his friends and family after having recently undergone and survived major heart surgery, as a result of having suffered an aortic dissection. Mark's life was saved by one of our surgeons, Dr Benjamin Robinson, at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPAH). Let me share his story with you on the following pages.

Thoracic Aortic Aneurysm Disease is rapidly becoming one of the most common but silent killers in Western society. In fact, with many unknowns, we may all be at a risk!

Did you know that 40% of people with ascending aortic dissections, like Mark, die instantly?

However up to 90% of the remaining patients can be saved with emergency surgery - if they can quickly get to a hospital like RPAH that provides advanced cardiac surgery.

Read Mark's story and you will see that he was in excellent health, until he was struck by a condition that he had never heard of.

We could be Mark. We just don't know until it happens!

Through the research that you fund, The Baird Institute is attempting to answer many difficult questions around aortic aneurysms in addition to determining the role of genetics and other factors in their development. We are currently doing research into the formation and rupture of aneurysms using technology such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) while the establishment of our Aortic Tissue Bank and Database has allowed for research into cardiac disease processes and surgical care.

The enormous importance of research in terms of understanding the genetic nature of aortic aneurysm and aortic disease, enables us as surgeons to not only provide enhanced patient care, but it also increases the likelihood of avoiding the passage of this disease to the next generation. This is our greatest wish and that of many who suffer from this disease.

There is so much more to be done and I know you believe, as much as I do, in this research.

This is why I am writing to you today...

Your past support has enabled this research but there is more to be done. This Christmas we want to save even more lives like Mark's. With this disease rapidly becoming one of the most common but silent killers, time is of the essence.



Your Christmas gift of \$50, \$200 or \$500 will go directly towards discovering what the causes and effects of aortic aneurysms are, why they form and how to predict their expansion and rupture?

Your gift will have a direct impact on people like Mark and on the health of more than 1/3 of Australia's population, so please support us today.

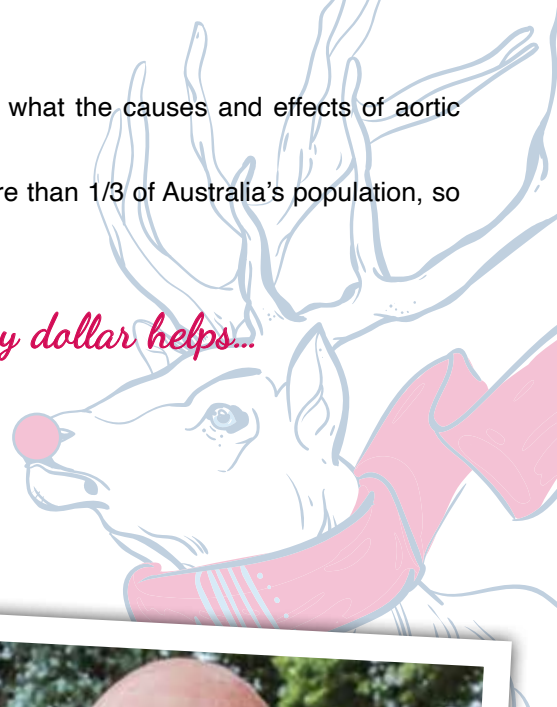
This Christmas give the best gift of all – the gift of life.

Every heartbeat matters, every breath's important, every dollar helps...

With thanks and gratitude



Professor Paul Bannon PhD MB BS FRACS
Chair, The Baird Institute



MARK BOWYER'S STORY

The Baird Institute's work in support of research and professional development has helped build the medical knowledge and skills that saved my life



I have an unusual health history. I tend to enjoy abnormally good health most of the time. Until a serious health issue intervenes.

I've lived much of the past 30 years in Vietnam, often in remote places, and I've barely seen a doctor there. But in that same 30 years, I've suffered two bouts of Hodgkin's lymphoma, and in 2014, my appendix ruptured. Both illnesses were treated in Australia.

This time, in this strange year, 2020, a long period of excellent health was broken when I suffered an aortic dissection - a condition I'd never heard of until it struck me. You don't have to search far online to discover an aortic dissection isn't a good thing.

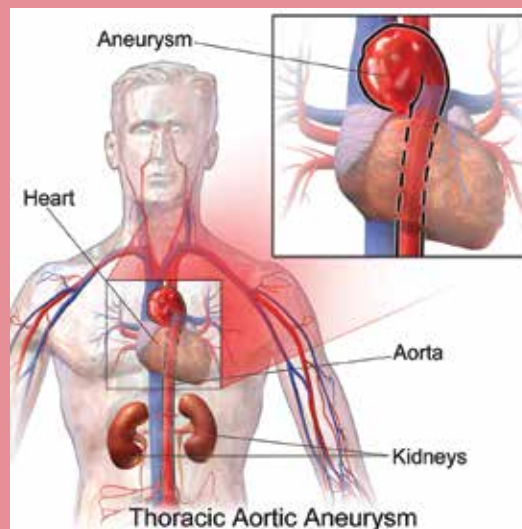
Back in May, I was stranded in Sydney because of COVID. I've long been a big swimmer and I made daily swims at Neilsen Park on Sydney Harbour, part of my COVID routine. I was feeling great. Fitter than ever.

WHAT IS AN AORTIC ANEURYSM?

The aorta is the main blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body. It starts at the chest and runs down into the abdomen where it branches into various arteries which carry blood to the lower parts of the body. The upper part of the aorta is called the Thoracic Aorta because it is located in the chest (thorax), while the lower part of the aorta is called the Abdominal Aorta. Sometimes a section of the aorta may weaken and stretch causing a bulge (aneurysm) in the blood vessel wall.

Stretching of the aorta may also lead to a sudden tearing of the layers in the aortic wall causing blood to flow in between the layers of the blood vessel wall (an aortic dissection). This can lead to aortic rupture or decreased blood flow to organs.

There is so much more to understand about thoracic aortic aneurysms. Frighteningly someone has to die in a family before we discover that other family members could also be at risk. The majority of those people who have a dissection, die – Mark was one of the lucky ones.



On May 4, after a glorious late afternoon swim, I headed back to my home in Stanmore for dinner. After dinner I started to feel pain in my stomach, back and neck. It was unpleasant but not unbearable. At first, I thought it was something I'd eaten. After 8 hours of waiting at home and hoping it would go away, I decided it might be serious and headed to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPAH). I'm lucky I didn't wait any longer. I was quickly scanned, and an emergency doctor broke the news. I was very ill and needed emergency surgery for an aortic dissection. I should call close family and let them know.

It was on again. My life pattern of extended periods of outstanding health being interrupted by medical disaster had reached a new extreme! Soon after, I was on the operating table and Dr Ben Robinson got to work on high risk, lifesaving, surgery. It was 10 hours of gruelling work and Dr Robinson has since told me there were times that day when he doubted I would make my 56th birthday.

After surgery I spent 16 days in ICU and managed to have a stroke and contract pneumonia during that time. They were tricky days relieved by fairly severe delirium and pain killers. My slow recovery was boosted by the constant hand-holding of family and friends. They were undeterred by my incoherent rambling.

Dr Robinson was generous with his time in helping me to understand what had happened to me. The quality of the care I received at RPA was astonishingly good - even for a veteran of hospitalisations. The complicated nature of my situation seemed to mean I received a lot of medical attention, and without exception, it was professional and caring.

I had further major surgery a few weeks later, and then began the long road to full recovery. Today, five months after my dissection, I am swimming and active again and leading a life that is close to normal.

My strongest sense at the end of the ordeal is one of gratitude - especially to Dr Robinson and the medical professionals at RPA. It's clear that I have been the beneficiary of exceptional medical expertise.

The Baird Institute's work in support of research and professional development has helped build the medical knowledge and skills that saved my life via the hands of Dr Robinson. I am fortunate to be able to thank them here, and to encourage you to contribute to assist The Baird Institute in continuing its important work.

Mark Bowyer

Mark Bowyer (A grateful patient)



PLEASE SUPPORT US THIS GIVING SEASON

Without you, we cannot carry on Professor Douglas Baird's vision – to identify the problems at the bedside, investigate them in the laboratory and apply the solution to future patients. This Christmas we want to save the lives of Australians battling heart and lung disease. Your gift today will give more people, like Mark, the chance to survive life threatening diseases.

Your Support Will Save Lives

WAYS TO GIVE QUICKLY AND EASILY

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Give online anytime via our secure website
www.bairdinstitute.org.au

Mail

Complete the form below and return it in the enclosed reply-paid envelope.

Phone

Call us on **02 9550 2350**

EFT

The Baird Institute Ltd
NAB
BSB: **082 057**
Account No: **53 782 2979**

MY DETAILS

Title _____ First Name _____ Last Name _____
Address _____ State _____ Post Code _____

☐ Please do **NOT** publish my name in your donor listings

Please complete the boxes below so that we can be sure we have your current details.

Email _____	Phone _____	D.O.B. _____
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MY GIFT

☐ Yes, I would like to make a gift to support The Baird Institute Research and Training Program

☐ **Single DONATION Amount** and/or

☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$200 ☐ \$ _____

☐ **Regular Monthly DONATION Amount ***

\$ _____ (minimum \$20 a month)

* A **regular** tax-deductible donation of \$20 or more **per month** entitles you to become a **Partner in Research**. Your regular gift will ensure that we have the necessary funds available to help ordinary people as they battle unexpected, life threatening diseases of the heart and lungs. As a **Partner in Research**, you will receive The Baird Institute newsletters and invitations to special events. For more information, contact Catherine on 02 9550 2350

I WILL MAKE MY GIFT BY:

☐ Cheque / Money Order ☐ EFT (see bank details above) ☐ Credit Card (please complete details below)

Card Number _____	Name On Card _____
Signature _____	Expiry _____

A GIFT IN YOUR WILL:

If you would like to be sent information on leaving a gift in your will, please tick here ☐

If you would like to advise us that you have already left a gift in your will, please tick here ☐

Please contact Catherine on 02 9550 2350 for further information or a confidential discussion

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