



A HEART OPEN TO TRANSFORMATION - SAMUEL CUMBERBATCH

by Katrina Welch

One year after successful open-heart surgery, Samuel Cumberbatch is still on his path to recovery, with a renewed outlook on life. The high-spirited 61-year-old reflected on his life and admitted that his need for the surgery was birthed from years of poor lifestyle choices which began from a very young age.

"I was a smoker and a drinker from young because I didn't have a mother and father around me. I just had a grandmother and from maybe as young as nine years old sometimes I would get away to go in the gully and smoke a gully root," he said. "In those days you could give anyone a dollar to go at the shop and buy cigarettes. My brother and his friends would send me; so, when I came back from buying their cigarettes, they would offer me. I start smoking from then when I was about 13 years old."

Though he could not remember his exact age, he knew that he was quite young the first time he was intoxicated with alcohol at a family member's wedding. His addiction to these two vices continued throughout the course of his life and even though he wanted to stop, he found himself unable to do so.

Eventually, these lifestyle choices negatively impacted

his health. "I started getting short of breath, so I went to the doctor and when he asked if I drink and smoke, I said yes. He sent me for a chest X-ray to see what was wrong and the results showed that my lungs were a bit close," he said.

His condition was caused by the drinking and smoking.

"My doctor told me if I usually smoke a whole pack a day, cut down to half a pack and keeping cutting down until you can fully quit. I did what he said, and the doctor kept looking after me, doing treatment and tests, but my blood pressure kept going up," said the father of four.

Samuel assured the doctor that he had indeed quit drinking and smoking, so another X-ray was ordered which showed that his lungs were still quite "close". To address this, open-heart surgery was needed and the doctor arranged for it to be done at the hospital.

"After my surgery, when they took me to the ICU to rest, they woke me up and asked if I could hear them because I had to go back to the operation room. I told them I already prayed and asked for God to forgive me, give me a new life, and walk with me in this operation room. I said, 'you



are the doctors, do what you have to do because He has me in his hands and will look after me'. I know I went to the gate twice with those two surgeries, but God wasn't ready for me to enter the kingdom yet," he said.

After the operations, he remained in bed in the ICU for two days unable to move, but by the third day he was ready to try to conquer this. By the fifth day he started to move around after which he was transferred from the ICU to a ward. A week later he was discharged from the hospital with strict instructions to keep his back straight and avoid certain activities such as running, heavy lifting and drinking alcohol.

Samuel, who also suffers with arthritis in his hips and his back, did his best to abide by these regulations because he was determined to turn his life around. From age 17 Samuel worked as a heavy-duty general worker but now his movements are severely restricted.

"I came home and changed my life. I was always a church member, but I started feeling better about going. My appetite has changed; now I eat more fruits and I use porridge and oats," he said. "I tried doing a little lifting, but I almost killed myself. Outside looks healed but the inside is not completely healed; sometimes I feel numbness and pain. With the arthritis I can't bend as I would like."

While he was hospitalised the doctor told him about the therapy offered by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados and he promptly registered. "When I visited the Heart and Stroke for my first therapy session, they told me I could not start the therapy because my blood pressure was too high and I needed to go back to the doctor for a new prescription," the grandfather of six explained.

This did not deter Samuel. He continued to take his medications and follow the doctor's recommendations to help lower his blood pressure. Eventually in May 2020 he received a normal blood pressure reading and was able to begin therapy three times a week, which also assists with his arthritis.

He said, "From the time I started the therapy I felt a change in my body. At first, I was working on the machine for four minutes and after I started doing well, they carried it up to ten minutes. I am coming back up in strength and I got a Certificate of Achievement in recognition of my outstanding Attendance and Achievement in the Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme; but they still don't want me to push anything too heavy to offset my heart. I never miss an appointment because I want to feel better."






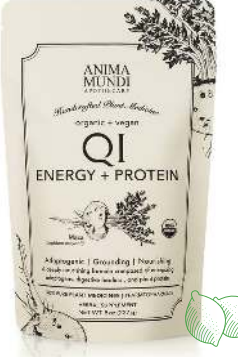
"I lie down a lot, I take the medications as I should and do what I am supposed to. I hope to get back out and recover in a year or two, but my body can't bear that hard work right now. After therapy I rest, but on the days when I don't have therapy, I exercise at home. I was told to get sea baths, but I cannot go to the sea alone because if I get into difficulty my heart can malfunction," he said with a matter-of-factness that belied his regret at not being able to do some of the things he used to.

He expressed his gratitude to those who have helped him to transform his life: "I thank the cardiac staff, the surgeons, the therapists and all who did a good work on me. I walk with a cane due to my arthritis and when I first went to the Heart and Stroke, I was crouched over. They encouraged me and I have gotten back the strength to straighten up. If you're on a machine and you don't understand it, they help and explain. The team there is very kind and loving and they have full respect for you."

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