

DON BOONE MAKES MEDICAL HISTORY

Don Boone worked below the oil rigs, 50 miles off the Gulf Coast. Each day, after work on the ocean's floor, he entered a diving bell. The bell raised him to the ocean's surface.

There he stayed on a barge in a steel-lined room. It was laid out like the living quarters of a ship. The room was kept at the same pressure as the ocean floor. In that way, the men who worked on the ocean floor could sleep and rest without being decompressed (to decrease the pressure inside the room until it is equal to the pressure outside the room). Though it may sound very unusual, this routine was quite normal for Don Boone.

The day of his accident was an ordinary Tuesday. After work, Don came up to the living quarters, changed into dry clothing, and went to the washroom.

While Boone sat on the toilet in the high-pressure atmosphere of the steel-lined room, a worker on the outside accidentally opened the valve on the disposal system. He did this at the exact moment that Boone opened the flushing gate on the toilet. The sudden change in pressure pulled Boone down into the toilet—like a cork being rammed into a bottle.

The effect was like a vacuum cleaner. Though Boone's body was too big to be pulled through the toilet, most of his intestinal tract was pulled out of his body through his anus. His colon and most of his small bowel were sucked right into the toilet bowl in a matter of seconds.

What happened next was, perhaps the first of many miracles in this story. Don Boone was able to find the strength to break the suction on his body and carry his intestines across the room to his bunk.

Dr. Carter, a specialist in diving medicine, was called to the scene of the disaster. With him came a young surgeon, Dr. Tedesco.

Both doctors understood the danger of the situation. Boone could not be removed from the high-pressure atmosphere for 72 hours. So, surgery had to be performed on a barge which was 50 miles out to sea, in a room with pressure equal to a dive 190 feet below sea level. Once the doctors entered the pressurized room, they would have to remain 3 days—until the pressure could be lowered to normal sea level pressure.

There were other complications. They had to operate in very dim light. Ordinary portable surgical lamp bulbs would be crushed by the high air pressure. Also, all containers had to have their seals punctured to prevent their being crushed.

All these adjustments took time. Even though Boone had been injured around 4 in the afternoon, it took nearly 6 hours before the doctors were able to enter his chamber.

Charlie Duff, the pharmacist who worked on the barge, had kept Boone's intestines moist with hot towels. Boone was pale, but conscious—another miracle. As the doctor's entered, he managed a weak smile and "Hello, Doc."

The doctors worked on a table made of wood stretched between 2 bunks. The table was so low that they had to operate while kneeling. And they couldn't talk since the helium in the air made speech impossible to understand.

The operation began. The blood vessels were clamped and tied. The intestines were pulled back into the abdominal cavity. The abdomen was sewed up. And the colon was gently massaged back through the anus and secured.

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DON BOONE MAKES MEDICAL HISTORY (Continued)

It was early Wednesday morning when the doctors finally finished their work. In spite of the conditions, Don Boone pulled through his first operation.

Two days later, the decompression was completed. Don Boone and his two doctors left the steel chamber. A Coast Guard helicopter was waiting to carry the 3 to the hospital.

There, a team of surgeons reopened Boone. Luckily, there was no infection. The doctors were able to complete the surgery that Doctors Carter and Tedesco began 3 days earlier.

Again, Boone pulled through the surgery. But the battle to save Boone had just started. Soon after the second surgery, it became apparent that the job now was to keep Don from starving to death.

After his operations, Boone had only 3 feet of small intestine left. (The small intestine is usually about 20 feet long.) The small intestine is the place where 99 percent of the body's food is absorbed. So now much of his food moved too fast through the small intestine to be thoroughly digested and absorbed.

Before the accident, Boone weighed 180 pounds. Soon after, his weight dropped to 125. Doctors soon realized that most of the weight loss was because of his shortened small intestine.

Boone got weaker and lost his desire for food. He constantly had diarrhea and nausea. Soon he had to receive blood and liquids through his bloodstream. These helped him regain his strength. However, eating was still difficult.

Boone's wife and mother worked hard to find new foods that would tempt him to eat. Milkshakes filled him up too fast and many other beverages were too sweet.

After weeks of trying to eat, Boone finally began to regain his health. He had to eat almost constantly — whether or not he was hungry. He ate many small meals and snacks daily.

Finally, 3 months after the accident, Boone was back to 160 pounds. He was able to leave the hospital. Nine months after the first operation, Boone weighed 165 pounds. He was able to walk and even swim, although he tired easily.

Don Boone now eats 3 meals a day, plus snacks between all meals. He eats eggs, lean meat, and cheese daily, along with lots of bread. He has to avoid liquids with his meals. Liquids move food too fast through his shortened intestines.

Raw fruits and vegetables give him gas and irritation. They also make the food move too fast down his intestinal tract. But he can eat cooked vegetables, such as peas, carrots, and green beans, regularly. Bananas and applesauce are the 2 fruits Don enjoys.

Don Boone has to take a monthly shot of 2 vitamins — vitamins C and B₁₂ — because he doesn't get enough from foods and his shortened intestines. He has learned to adjust his eating habits to meet his special needs.

Don Boone should be able to return to a full and useful life — above water. He will be able to perform as well as anybody else, except he will always remember that "ordinary" Tuesday.