REDD FAMILY HERITAGE - 1996

The Heimlich!!

On Friday, near the first part of April, I ate lunch with Spence Van Leeuwen at the Dairy Keen---"The Home Of The Train"---on Main Street in Heber. Spence and I eat lunch together almost every day and we have become good friends in addition to our working together on the developments in Midway. I ordered a Ranch Burger combo. The place was full of the lunch crowd. I ate a few french fries, had a few swallows of soda pop and suddenly a piece of food stuck in my throat. I took another drink of the soda, thinking it would wash the food down, but it didn't. I took another swig of the drink and I quickly realized that I was in trouble. Spence asked if I was OK and I shook my head---no. Suddenly I was gasping for breath and he could see that something had to be done so he came over to my side of the table, got behind me and gave me the Heimlich maneuver!! Nothing happened and I realized that he had his hands above the sternum (sp?) and I signaled him to do it again, but lower. He did, and fries, soda pop, and the hamburger came up. I was embarrassed as I could see people watching what was happening. I thought everything was OK and so I took another drink of soda to see if that would wash things down my throat, but it didn't. As soon as the soda hit the blockage, my throat spasmed again and that same gasping started again. Spence saw that it was happening, came over, have the Heimlich again and I felt much better.. He brought a towel from the counter and I cleaned up the mess that was on the bench and table. I hoped that not everyone in the restaurant had seen the mess, but what could I do? I didn't try the food again, but waited while Spence ate his lunch. As some of the people, who were at the next table, left I apologized to them for the episode and they were gracious and not upset. I remember the looks on their faces as I was choking.

Afterwards I tried to get back to what needed to be done at the jobsite and not much was said to anyone except that I was glad that it turned out the way it did. It was a very frightening experience!

As I got to thinking about it, I realized how tragic it might have been had Spencer not been there, not been aware of what needed to be done to help dislodge the piece of food, and did the job so well. It happened so quickly that I didn't have much time to think about the consequences of choking to death, but since then I have had a lot of time to go over it in my mind. Another few minutes of choking like that could have been my last breaths.

I realize that life is more fragile than we think of on a daily basis and I'm grateful for the life that I have, for the blessings of a wonderful wife who loves me, and a great family. I love them each one and I am truly blessed to have so much.

I have determined to each more slowly, chewing each bite, and---probably not eating alone.

A few weeks later, in another little place named Snow King in Heber, I was having a late lunch and this time I was alone in th walk-in part of this hamburger joint and since it was late, there were no other customers in there. I ordered a slush and a hamburger, took a drink of the slush and then proceeded to eat the hamburger. I could feel that same choking sensation starting and this time I panicked because I was alone. Since nobody was around, I ran into the cooking area and gestured that I was choking and a yound man working there got the message and burped me. I spit up some cherry slush and some chewed meat on the floor and felt OK, but I was shaking like a leaf, so I cleaned myself up and left the place. I wasn't ready for a repeat and vowed to get it looked at medically. Over the next few days I was very careful to chew and swallow slowly. I was OK for then.

Some time later it happened again at Karl's R&R Restaurant in the old Heber Creeper Station on 100 South and about 600 West in Heber. This time I was with Spencer Van Leeuwen and Dennis Gaudy, a fireman in SLC who does some construction at the project on his days off. It came on slowly, I motioned to them what was happening, and we went to a place near the kitchen that was out of the sight of other customers. It windpipe was cleared and I slowly ate but a portion of the meal. I was told later by Karl Probst, the owner, that Governor Leavitt was eating lunch in the back portion of the dining room. I didn't see him, and maybe he didn't see me.

As I put it all together it seems that the combination of a cold drink, which spasms the esophagus and causes it to constrict, followed by some food is the problem. I went to the doctor and he referred me to a specialist and he came to the same conclusion after seeing X-Rays showing a stricture. The treatment is to go in to the hospital and have the esophagus stretched with either a tapered rod or a balloon thing that they use. He said it is a fairly common problem in "older folks", so I will have it repaired when things calm down.