

# Treatment of sleep apnea revives man's life

By Alice Collins  
staff writer

Richard Bloom, a man enjoying what seems like a new life, has a story to tell — and he tells it whenever he has the opportunity.

It's a very personal story for the 38-year-old Southfield man who twice ran for city council. He feels it's his mission in life to reach as many people as he can.

"I just might be able to help save somebody's life," he said in an interview this week.

The focus of Bloom's story is sleep apnea, a treatable condition that almost killed him simply because it went undiagnosed for many years. "It can be such a deadly illness and many people who have it may not know what it is," he said, also concerned, he said, "that doctors are not looking as carefully as they should."

Bloom saw five doctors over a period of several years and only the last one diagnosed it. "And I had classic symptoms," he said.

SLEEP APNEA is frequent and prolonged episodes during which breathing stops during sleep, especially deep sleep. In serious cases it can lead to the physical and mental deterioration of the victim.

"Since I wasn't getting any deep sleep at night, I'd fall asleep throughout the day. I'd sit in my office

and sleep. I became forgetful. As a salesman, I work by appointment and it got to the point where I was even forgetting to look at my appointment book.

"Once at Vic Tanny I not only forgot my lock number, I didn't even remember which locker was mine. "I'd get so sleepy while I was driving to work and back, I'd have to pull over onto I-75 or M-59 and go to sleep for five minutes, 10 minutes, maybe an hour."

"Even my speech was affected. My wife would tell me I was stuttering and mumbling." Bloom also maintains that it affected his hearing.

BLOOM BELIEVES HIS problem began when he was 19, right after a rapid growth period of his life. "That's when my family started telling me about my snoring. I've had some tell me I sound like a wild animal and I've also been compared to a diesel truck."

"Blood pressure is called the silent killer. I call this the noisy killer." The first time he felt something was really wrong with him was when he was 28. A physical and blood tests checked out as normal and a few weeks later he felt back to normal.

The progression was slow through the years. "Again and again I'd tell a doctor I just didn't feel as good today

as I did yesterday. Then in 1988 my system went out of whack and everything went crazy for me."

He was putting on weight, tried desperately to lose it but couldn't. He weighed 185 pounds when he got married in 1974 and at one point went above 260 pounds.

"EVERYBODY IN MY family started clipping articles from newspapers and magazines about sleep apnea. Or I'd get a call from my sister and she'd say 'Turn on TV, there's a program you should see,' he said. "I believed I suffered from sleep apnea. My relatives and friends believed I had it." He asked a couple of doctors he consulted if he had it and they told them he didn't. "They just told me to lose weight. I tried, but I'd put on five more pounds."

Finally last spring he made an appointment with Dr. Michael Rosen, a

Livonia internist his sister had started to work for. "She'd told him about my symptoms and I went in we sat down and talked. He told me I suffered from sleep apnea and sent me to a sleep clinic at Henry Ford Hospital to confirm the diagnosis. It did."

The study on Bloom found he experienced 84 apnea episodes an hour. "Having 10 or more isn't normal," Rosen said. "His oxygen saturation went from 98 percent when he was awake to below 60 percent in REM (deep) sleep."

X-rays showed that the cause of his apnea was the small size between the base of his tongue and the posterior wall of his pharynx. "It measured 3.5 to 4 millimeters. The normal size is greater than 10 millimeters," Rosen said. When Bloom was asleep and the muscles relaxed, the air couldn't get through. His breathing would stop and the lack of oxygen would awaken him.

"THEY CALLED ME when I was on vacation in Florida to give me the results," said Bloom. "My body was deteriorated. Everything was being affected from my head to my toes. I was so weakened, I felt worse every day and I just knew I was dying."

The date he remembers most, last July 12, is the day he got his CPAP (continuous positive air pressure) machine. The CPAP includes a mask he straps on his face when he goes to bed. The machine forces the obstructing tissue out of the way pushing air down through his nose.

"The next morning I woke up and I wasn't hungry. I got rid of the Twinkies from under my car seat and the M&Ms out of my closet. (He'd been eating them to try and get energy.) I walked to the window and everything looked bright again. The grayness was gone."

His health returned rapidly and he began losing the weight he'd tried for so long to get rid of. Last July 7, he weighed 250 pounds. This week, he weighs 210, with a goal of 180 pounds. When he reaches that he'll be restudied to see if his problem is improved by weight loss.

SURGERY to remove the obstructing tissue may be in the future for Bloom if the weight loss doesn't help. If not, he'll continue to hook up his CPAP every night at bedtime.

Bloom's family is as thrilled with his recovery as he is — perhaps more. "I was just terrible to live with. I couldn't do anything. I just sat around and slept and snored. Janette and I have been married 16 years. Thank goodness we had a strong relationship. I don't think most marriages could have survived it."

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