



Soon after retirement in 1993, Ivan Mrevlje noticed traces of foecal blood. He decided it was time to go to his GP. After a rectal examination his GP reassured him everything was fine except for haemorrhoids. The GP prescribed Ivan some medication and advised him to modify his diet, although Ivan had normal body weight. As months passed by, Ivan's health deteriorated and he felt poorer and poorer. He went to see his GP for the second time.

»Healing haemorrhoids takes its time, so be patient, was the GP's answer. Since I had little knowledge either of haemorrhoids or any other bowel disease, I was happy with this explanation and went home. Over the next six months, I lost 20 pounds (10 kilos) and became very weak, therefore I decided it was time for some serious action. On my third visit at GP, I demanded to be referred to the local hospital. Finally, after almost a year of feeling very poorly, there I was, in hospital where I underwent a colonoscopy, which revealed two lesions, five and 23 centimetres up the rectum. It turned out I had cancer. I was immediately admitted to the hospital. My surgeon explained the whole procedure to me and at the same time pointed out the possibility of my ending up with a stoma. It was such a shock to me and to my family! However, I knew the operation was the only way out for me and I was determined to win this battle. And so, on 8 October 1996, I underwent a surgery and as the surgeon had warned me, I ended up with a stoma. It took a while for me to get used to it and adapt to a new way of life. Histology results showed I had a stage two cancer and I needed adjuvant chemo and radiotherapy.

Every day, I did a 100 km coach ride to Ljubljana and then back home in the afternoon. Due to the stressful therapy and the damage of peripheral nerves, I experienced erectile dysfunction. It was really an extremely stressful time for me as well as for my whole family.

Looking back on the whole experience, I would have truly wanted for the medical staff, particularly my GP, to have been more humane to me, as I was ill and therefore very vulnerable and in a way also humiliated. I desperately needed an expert opinion on how to go on with my life and deal with the stoma. And needless to say, I was eager to receive that opinion from someone I could create an atmosphere of trust with.

It took me quite some time to be able to rebuild my life, self-consciousness and go on with my life. I am still convinced that I would have received better and earlier treatment if I were a famous politician or a celebrity. Our health system is well defined with modern most equipment, however, with unevenly distributed access to it. My experience is one of many other people's and is in no respect special or glorious, yet it is a true account of how a steady life can turn upside down literally overnight. I would like to thank my family, my friends and the doctor, who at the end diagnosed my disease. Also, I am very grateful to the ILCO Association (an association of stoma patients in Slovenia), which provided me with basic instructions and information so I as a disabled person could become an active member of the community as well as the Association again. Now I have joined newly registered europacolonslovenija and I hope we will help other patients with colorectal cancer.«