

## *Dan's Story:*

Am I a typical male? At 69 years, old, it's hard for me to respond to this question. In many ways, I think of myself as not the typical/average male but someone who is different and unique. But there probably is one trait that might be called a "typical male" and that is I never went to see the doctor unless I had too! That probably centers on my fear of doctors. As a child, my mother had cancer and was in and out of the hospital for over five years. That was extremely hard on the family and when my mother died, I think my father lost faith in the medical profession. So, that is how I grew up and it influenced my opinions and behaviors.



That was until I went to see our family doctor about a hernia I had been living with for a couple of years. During the examination, he determined that I had a heart murmur. He sent me for an echocardiogram which identified that I had an aortic stenosis. He explained that my aortic valve was not operating properly and my heart was not performing at normal levels. At that point, he sent me to a cardiologist who performed a heart catheterization to help determine what the specific issues were. And I had several. My aortic valve had calcified. My mitral valve was leaking and one of my arteries was 60% blocked. I was shocked and overwhelmed. What does this mean? What happens now?

My doctor explained that I would need to have open heart surgery to correct these issues and sent me to a heart surgeon. He explained the specifics of the operation, how long it would take and how serious it was. He asked me if I had symptoms such as shortness of breath, dizziness, or fainting or chest pains. I had not had any. These were the normal symptoms for heart valve issues. I had always been extremely active especially with the Boy Scouts so I could not understand why I had not experienced anything.

On Tuesday, October 4, 2016, I went into the hospital for open heart surgery. The day before the surgery, my wife Helen asked me how I was doing. Was I scared or worried? What were my emotions? One of my favorite quotes is "It is what it is" so I told Helen I have no choice. I was going into the operation with a positive attitude, and I was going to add another 30 years to my life because I was fixing my heart.

Helen remembers when they wheeled me down the hall for surgery, she heard me saying "woo-hoo" and holding my thumbs up. When I came out of the seven-hour operation, I was in ICU for 16 hours and in the hospital for another 3 days. The morning of the fourth day, I was sent home. My aortic valve had been replaced, my mitral valve now has a ring to correct it, and a bypass was completed on the artery that was 60% blocked. I know now that **the first artificial valve was created by an American Heart Association researcher**, I'm so glad, he saved my life!

Four weeks after the surgery, the surgeon released me commenting on my positive attitude, quick recovery and how healthy I was for 69 years old. Two weeks after that, my cardiologist

released me with pretty much the same opinion. And when I went to cardio-rehab, the nurse commented that she had never heard of a person going home so quick after valve replacement surgery. And I must laugh, the cardio-rehab nurses are constantly telling me to slow down--it's not a race--there are no trophies. I only know one speed and that is fast--so I have had to learn to slow down and take everything one step at a time.

So, as I reflect, there are several important lessons I learned:

1. Get a full and complete annual physical. Just because you feel good doesn't mean that everything is OK. It is amazing what a simple blood test can determine.
2. Don't be afraid of doctors or hospitals--the medical advances today are incredible. They can find things before they become a problem. And they are there to help--trust them.
3. Look at your diet. What are you eating and drinking? I was drinking 5-6 cokes a day, eating too many sweets and was putting salt on everything. A dietitian helped me after the surgery and I have made major changes in how and what I eat. I don't drink soda anymore, am on a salt restricted diet and have drastically cut back on the sweets. I now am eating more vegetables and fruits.
4. I use to stay up all hours of the night and now I am in bed no later than 10pm each evening. I can't believe how much better I feel after a good night's rest.
5. Even with a new heart, I know that I can't do everything. Now I am working on slowing down somewhat, delegating tasks and enjoying more family time.
6. After heart surgery, you will probably experience some emotions (i.e. crying). That I found out is natural and OK. Good emotions are healthy. Don't be afraid to express them.
7. I was asked by the cardio-rehab nurse what my goal was. At first I, didn't understand her question. She replied, "Well after 36 cardio visits what goal do you want to achieve". I thought for a moment and said I want to hike back up Mt. LeConte to the Lodge in the Smokey Mountains and she said great--we will get you ready. So, after surgery, have a goal--it helps with the recovery.
8. Finally, God is Good. He has blessed me in so many ways. He carried me and protected me through these two surgeries. And I felt every one of the prayers from my family and friends. I can't tell you how important a support team is to your recovery.

Well this is my story. We thank God for the hernia because without that issue I may not have seen a doctor and the aortic stenosis could have been fatal in two years. Everything is for a reason. So, now my goal is to live to be 100 years old. On December 16th, I turned 70 and only have 30 more to go. My nickname is "Dan the Bear" and the Bear is a SURVIVOR. A healthy, enthusiastic and positive SURVIVOR. And you can be TOO!!!

---

### *Alisha's Story:*

I was a 28-year's young woman living in Jackson, Tennessee with two children, one 11 and the other 13. They needed me. I didn't have time for heart disease. I was going to school, getting my masters, working full time, and a mom.



I was doing all I could to be healthy. At a Zumba class, I felt short of breath. My heart didn't slow down during the cooldown, and I thought that was normal for my weight. This happened continuously for a year. During that year, I was on many medications, due to being repeatedly diagnosed with pneumonia. I found out later it was my heart!

My challenge to women is to not wait, to keep asking questions, and to keep going to your doctor to tell him or her that something is wrong. Some of us must battle the genetic side of heart disease, but 80% of heart disease is preventable. A lot of us can do something about it. We can control what we eat, and what we do! So be active and eat healthy! Don't let heart disease claim you as a victim! Start here... Go to [mylifecheck.org](http://mylifecheck.org), enter your numbers and find out your heart score today. Then, take the recommendations from the American Heart Association and start taking care of you now! That's in your control! Help us save lives and donate today!

*(To hear more of my story, come join me at this year's Go Red For Women, April 4<sup>th</sup>, Carl Perkins Civic Center)*

---

### *Joe's Story:*

I was in my studio practicing several very intense tunes for a wedding the very next day. My first-born daughter Angela called and during our conversation I felt very flush and began slurring my words. Angie asked me a few questions. Then, she told me to go to bed, rest and tell Susie, her mom and my wife, to get on the phone. She told Susie that she thought that I was having a stroke. When I saw a doctor, they told me I was having a TIA, which is a precursor to a stroke. After being treated, I was released from the hospital the next day. When I came home, I had the same symptoms again and rushed back to the hospital. This time it was a stroke.



It was frightening and it made me wake up about my lifestyle. My speech was impaired and I had to go to a speech therapist. I still must talk slower than I used to, but I've made a full recovery. Since then, I've learned all about healthy eating, exercise routines, and food labels. It's helped me totally turned my life around. I lost about 20 pounds and have a new lease on life. The treatment the

doctors and nurses used to save my life, and the information I was given to help me live a healthier life was produced by the science and research the American Heart Association funds.

---

### *Baby Brooklyn's Story:*

My name is Iesha Robertson. I am a 26-year-old, hardworking correctional officer and mom of two beautiful daughters. I always have a smile and a positive attitude. However, where there is happiness there's always sorrow.



On November 24th at 7:40 am, my youngest daughter Brooklyn Sani' White was born. Initially, I was told her (glucose?) was very low. Then, a day before we went home, the doctor told me they were monitoring what they called a "heart murmur".

After Brooklyn's discharge from the hospital, she was monitored throughout her first week. Everything was going great until we noticed her breathing was heavy. When we took her for her next checkup, the official diagnosis was PDA, or Patent Ductus Arteriosus, simply speaking an unclosed hole in the [aorta](#).

Right now, she continues to be monitored until she's old enough for surgery. The American Heart Association's training in hospitals was critical to our physicians being able to diagnose and treat Brooklyn from the day she was born. Recently, I've also learned that the organization is beginning a new study on PDA. I applaud the new information this study could provide to the doctors who treat Brooklyn and other children who are diagnosed with the same condition.

Your support of the American Heart Association makes research like this possible. Please continue to support the organization in saving lives!