



## IMT Des Moines Marathon Share Your Story

Never would happen to me.....

I had always been the healthy one in my family. Being a health care professional, I was so in tuned to all the preventative things that had to be done ever year (exams, cholesterol checks, mammograms, pap smears etc), that I never missed completing all of them. My cholesterol was normal, I exercised, kept my weight off (worked part time as a leader for wt. loss support), and took zero medications. I was ever so proud of my healthy status that I maintained over the years. Over the past few years, I turned 50, started to gain some weight (I blamed Menopause of course), and an old habit of the past resurfaced- smoking. I had quit, but due to some personal stress, started having an OCCASIONAL smoke, what I considered social smoking. I didn't smoke much in public, and most days only had 1-2 cigarettes. Of course I rationalized this as not being an issue- I mean, after all, it was only once in a while- this couldn't hurt me!! Boy did I get the shock of my life in early 2008!! In February of 08 I started to have what I had diagnosed as heartburn (nurses are great for self diagnosing) - telling myself it was because I had put on some weight. One night while watching TV, I got this horrible twisting, burning feeling in my chest, which then also radiating into the right upper quadrant of my abdomen. Oh my God I remember thinking; I am having a gallbladder attack (self diagnosing again). I had my husband take me to the emergency room, where all tests came back negative. The cardiac workup proved negative, and I was discharged with a GI workup planned. Over the next month, I continued to have the same pain, the GI workup was negative, and I presented again to the Cardiologist for further investigation. Again, the Stress test was negative, labs, EKG- everything. They decided to do a CT scan of my arteries, just to rule out a cardiac cause- this was less invasive than an angiogram. I just knew it would be negative; I had had a Calcium Scoring test the year before that was negative. Wow, was I shocked when it came back showing a blockage in one of my heart arteries. I ended up in the cath lab having an angiogram (heart cath) and a drug eluting stent to open the artery. The pain was then gone!! I remember thinking- "I can't believe this has happened to me!"

In July of 2008, I began experiencing the same type of pain again, accompanied by shortness of breath, which found me back in the cath lab to rule out re-stenosis of my stent. Luckily, my stent was widely patent, showing a 25% lesion in another one of my heart arteries. I was diagnosed with Stable Angina due to Coronary Spasm, to be treated with medications. I have had periodic bouts of Angina (chest pain), and am now taking 3 medications to control the spasms- it is working well, and as of today am chest pain free. I am feeling good.

Life has changed since then..... First of all, I ran the gamete of emotions because I never ever thought I would be diagnosed with coronary artery disease at age 50!! I went from being angry to depress over the course of the next 6 months. I wasn't able to share my emotions much at that time, kept it all inside. Then one day I decided- enough is really enough!! I could wallow in self pity and anger, or I could take action!! The choice was up to me!!

**IMT Des Moines Marathon**  
4801 Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50312

**p 515.288.2692 f 515.225.9051**  
**[www.desmoinesmarathon.com](http://www.desmoinesmarathon.com)**  
**[info@desmoinesmarathon.com](mailto:info@desmoinesmarathon.com)**



## **IMT Des Moines Marathon Share Your Story (cont)**

And I chose to take control of my life and make the necessary changes to prevent further heart disease down the road. It has not been easy- it never is- and I continue to struggle every day. I have quit smoking completely today with the help of my family physician- it is a daily challenge- but as of this date I am smoke free!! Next, I started to exercise again with some friends- I walk 5-7 days per week every morning and even completed walking a half marathon in October of 08.

I am starting to lose weight now- it is a slow process- but I am making healthier food choices. I could not have made these changes without the support, knowledge, and information I have gained from the Women Heart organization. Hearing about real stories from other women who have experienced what I have is immeasurable. Women Heart is the only national coalition dedicated solely to the education, support, and advocacy of women with or at risk of heart disease.

Of course, having a supportive circle of family and friends has helped too. The biggest lesson learned: To Live Everyday to the Fullest and Enjoy Life!! I try to not longer sweat the small stuff- when I feel stressed, I go for a walk. I am thankful that I caught my disease before I had a heart attack, and there has been no damage to my heart. I love to travel, and will be able to continue to travel due to choosing to live a healthier lifestyle.

I recently attended the Science and Leadership Symposium at the Mayo Clinic, and am now a Women Heart Champion. My goal is to spread the word to all women out there about the risks of heart disease and the importance of doing everything possible to decrease those risks and prevent heart disease. I will be walking the Des Moines Half Marathon again this October, 2009, as both a Women Heart Champion, and in honor of all my heart sisters!! GO WOMEN HEART!!

Terri Harris, Des Moines, Iowa