



I was a 35-year-old woman, with three kids under 10, a husband who loves me and a very comfortable life. I had never heard of SCAD (Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection) and had no idea how it would completely change my life.

That change came on February 1st, 2017 with no warning. I lived a healthy lifestyle – exercise, good diet, and no smoking. My family has no history of heart disease so nothing leading up to this pointed to a potential heart attack.

The morning of the 1st was like any morning except I woke up with pain in my arms and a heaviness in my chest. I became short of breath while I was brushing my 8 year olds hair for school. That shortness of breath soon turned into hyperventilating. I assumed it was a panic attack – which I have no history of – and I brushed off the need to have an ambulance called. Good thing my husband disagreed and called 911. I walked onto the ambulance and quickly became unresponsive. My heart had stopped and I was in full blown cardiac arrest. From there the EMT and emergency room nurses and doctors performed CPR and used an AED for 45 minutes. Once my heart was stable I was placed in a medically induced coma and packed in ice bags (hypothermia protocol) and put on a LifeFlight to be flown to Jefferson University Hospital for continued monitoring and care to ensure no neurological damage was done. There, I stayed on the “Arctic Sun” (hypothermia protocol) for 72 hours to let my brain heal. After eight days of being in a medically induced coma, I battled through a collapsed lung, severe pneumonia in both lungs, blood clots in my leg and heart and finally necrotic tracheal tissue blocking my windpipe which was a result of the traumatic intubation on day one.

After three weeks in the hospital I was discharged with a final diagnosis of SCAD resulting in heart attack and cardiac arrest. I was tested for FMD while in the hospital but it was determined I did not have it. After recovering at home for many months I decided that for the sake of my children’s future, I needed to find out why this happened to me. My docs were saying we would probably never know. I could accept that answer but only has a last option. I had to dig deeper. So I made an appointment with the world renowned SCAD team at The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. What an eye opening experience! It was determined at that appointment that I did in fact have FMD, a known link to SCAD, in both my renal arteries and possibly other arteries as well. From Mayo Clinic I was referred to Mt. Sinai in NYC for further evaluation with their FMD team, a leader in Fibromuscular Dysplasia research. This is where things truly came full circle for me because it gave me an answer to WHY this happened. It was confirmed that I have FMD in both renal arteries as well as my left carotid artery which puts me at higher risk for stroke as well. I would have new limitations to adjust to and a new “normal” to accept but it gave me the knowledge of what was happening inside my body. It gave me an answer to why my body betrayed me that day. With answers comes a healing process. These doctors helped to begin this healing process for me that includes learning to trust my own body again.

I never thought that I'd be a SCAD, heart attack, and cardiac arrest survivor at 35 years old. I also never thought that I'd be diagnosed with not one but two incredibly rare diseases all in the same year. This journey hasn't been an easy one. It still isn't. But I'm committed to helping others walk this road as so many have helped me and spreading awareness about FMD and SCAD.