

When I was five-years old, I contracted strep throat. The doctor my mother took me to didn't treat the strep throat very aggressively and I ended up with Rheumatic Fever. I spent six months in the hospital. When all was said and done, I had two valves (mitral and tricuspid) that were damaged quite bad and one (pulmonary) that had minimal damage. Initially, the doctors said I would need open heart surgery by the time I was 14 and would be lucky to live beyond my mid to late thirties. I was not allowed to participate in gym class until high school when I decided I had enough of being sidelined and begged my doctor to let me participate. I was told that my heart would not be able to handle childbirth, but I have three beautiful daughters. My last pregnancy put my heart over the edge and I had my mitral valve replaced and a ring put around my tricuspid valve when I was 29.

On September 19<sup>th</sup> of this year, it will be 20 years since my valve replacement. I have encountered some "small" setbacks like a stroke two weeks after my surgery that has left my right side weak and a heart attack five years ago. Overall, I feel very lucky to be here today. They have made such advancements in heart disease and surgery. I had a cardiac cath this past summer and extremely happy to find there are no blockages and my valves are doing great. I could go on and on about all the problems I've had related to the damage that was done to my heart years ago, but instead I choose to be positive, proactive, and thankful for the wonderful life I've had thus far. I fully intend to see my grandchildren have children and will challenge any doctor that tells me different.

Take care of your heart❤️❤️😊