



My LAF Journey – From Disappointment to Triumph

By Carolyn Wright Smith

I've been "accompanied" on my LAF journey with afibbers.org since 2001 when the site was a simple blog. Having found nowhere else to obtain comprehensive information on LAF, your site was so incredibly helpful. The wealth of information provided through your organization, over these many years, has given me both hope and validation I wasn't alone or losing my mind. Reading the stories and data you and others have contributed has made a tremendous difference in my life. Knowledge is power. I've participated in several surveys Afibbers.org has sent out. The data resulting from these surveys is vital, and, to many of us, the most reliable.

At 37 (1998), I was diagnosed with LAF after suffering a mini-stroke. After writing to you in 2004, you were most kind to provide me with a complimentary subscription to *The AFIB Report*. This has been a tremendous blessing as my health has never really returned since becoming hyperthyroid on Amiodarone followed by an open-heart Cryo Maze procedure also in 2004.

The Maze, not surprisingly, failed six months later. Regardless, I resumed my studies at The University of Denver on a full scholarship (being a woman over 40 has its advantages); unable to work most of that time. It has been my perception and experience in the past that most employers tend to respond to LAF with fear... of the unknown... secretly thinking we're a liability that might keel over at any moment. A perceived mess they would rather not risk.

As so many afibbers have experienced, we keep going in the midst of our rhythm issues... sitting at desks and in classes, doing our work and homework with heart rates going off of the charts, shortness of breath, and times of near passing out. Just "normal" to us. We muscle through it hoping no one will notice, not mentioning symptoms to anyone in an effort to avert pity or drawing attention to ourselves, and holding onto the hope of quickly converting into NSR so we can safely drive home. We do homework in the ICU while being dosed up on Tikosyn and then Flecainide and then back to Rythmol SR when those fail or the side-effects make it impossible to function. We go through so many years drifting through life in an afib fog. I am blessed to still be here and able to attend my daughter's high school and subsequent college graduations; cheer her on as she completes her Masters; and, attend my own graduation, Cum Laude from DU with a BA in Information Technology Studies and Minor in Business Administration (2009). Better late than never!

In June 2010, I convinced a small IT company to hire me as an intern. They then offered me full time employment (entry level IT) which included insurance coverage with Kaiser. Over the years, I've never let my coverage lapse... ever. No small feat as we all know. For financial reasons I had to make a choice between Rythmol SR and Coumadin before Kaiser's coverage took effect. I chose the former. As the Rythmol SR began to fail again, in September 2010, I suffered another one of many TIAs. My current

employer has been amazing! I was fortunate to be referred to a brilliant Kaiser EP Cardiologist and Surgeon, Dr. Laurent Lewkowicz, who performed a Catheter Ablation at St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver on December 22, 2010. Although I've had a few, small breakthrough episodes, I'm already feeling better than I have since 2003. Dr. Lewkowicz said, regarding my Maze procedure, "they did the most invasive procedure using the least effective method."

It is my hope that by sharing, if my story touches one person, inspires hope, or confirms that on this afib journey we are not alone, it will make it all worthwhile. The afibbers.org stories of triumph and disappointment gave me courage to keep pushing forward through the years. They helped me to appreciate and be thankful for the good days, so that the "lost" days wouldn't be bitter. It is my belief that life is 98% attitude and 2% of what we have no control over. If you have a positive attitude, it greatly influences the other 2%. Everything is how you choose to look at it.

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