



AFIB No More

By Suzi E.

AFIB knocked on my door or, better said, hijacked my heart in February of 2006. It was in the morning at around 9AM. I was sitting on the floor surrounded by receipts from my art studio, trying to organize them for my accountant to prepare taxes. I had been working about an hour and a half, fueled only by strong coffee. I was 61 years old at the time, in good health, slim and active.

I began to feel hungry, and started to make breakfast, when I suddenly felt very dizzy. I could feel my heart racing, but attributed it to the coffee. I didn't have a blood pressure cuff, but I did have an exercise monitor. I put it on and my pulse read 190 bpm!

My normal BP is 100/70 and pulse 60. I checked it several times, but the readings were the same. A neighbor took me to the hospital, and I was admitted and diagnosed with AFIB and tachycardia. The attending cardiologist put me on a beta-blocker and Coumadin. "How long will I have to take this?" I asked, as I knew I did not feel comfortable with this protocol. "For the rest of your life", he answered.

A little background here, I've been a health "foodie" since before it became fashionable, and I take very little medication – antibiotics when needed, an occasional sleeping pill, but nothing like warfarin. I think my afib was mixed. Often when resting I experienced lots of ectopics after meals, especially heavy meals. I remember waking up at night once with an episode, driving in the car, but never really after exercise.

I made an appointment with the top electrophysiologist in my area, a Harvard medical school graduate. He had me continue the Coumadin, and try another beta-blocker, which he assured me was very mild. I felt horrible, like I had the flu. My resting pulse was in the 40's or 50's. I could barely get out of bed.

I began to Google desperately, and found the www.afibbers.org website. I'd never heard of afib, and wanted to educate myself. A RN friend recommended Dr. Jamnadas, an Interventional Cardiologist in Orlando. He took me off the Coumadin, had me take lots of fish oil and nattokinase, and controlled the arrhythmia with low doses of propranolol. This was tolerable, but I still had daily, sometimes disturbing, bouts of PACs and PVCs. My daily propranolol dose was anywhere between 20-60 mgs. At higher doses, I felt very tired and lethargic.

I read Hans' books, frequented the afibbers.org bulletin board, e-mailed Jackie and other members, and tried everything to find natural ways to control my arrhythmia with taurine, l-arginine, magnesium. I cut out caffeine, most carbs and sweets. Nothing seemed to make any difference.

It's important now that I relate a bit about the circumstances of my life, as ultimately my physical health and AFIB were completely intertwined with my emotional well-being. At sixty, I found myself single, having recently ended an eight-year relationship with an alcoholic man. My lifelong relationship history had been

with artistic men, with no money and substance abuse problems. This all stemmed, I came to understand, from my relationship with my wealthy, abusive, controlling, narcissistic father.

Ever since early childhood, my father had rarely been pleased with me, and the stronger his displeasure, the stronger my need to please. My mother was distant, meek, and emotionally battered herself. As is so often the case, she always sided with my father. I was alone to defend myself. On the outside, our family looked prominent and successful, but the interpersonal relationships were destructive, and I was definitely the scapegoat.

Although my father was forthcoming with financial gifts, the lifelong criticism and belittling made it hard for me to hear my own inner voice. His questioning of my every decision, made me doubt myself.

In 2007, my father then in his eighties got very sick. He developed aspiration pneumonia, and was in and out of the ICU. Ever the dutiful daughter, I frequently made the drive from Orlando to West Palm Beach, to help in any way I could. I remember one instance when I was pushing my Dad in a wheelchair around an assisted living facility that he wanted to visit, as he barked orders. All the time, I was popping propranolol to keep my afib at bay. Always looking for that approval, minimizing my own needs. Interesting, although I was victimized, my fighting spirit made me believe that I was OK. It all felt normal – just the way things were.

In November of 2009, my father died. I was filled with a tremendous sense of relief, both for him and for myself. His last years had been miserable. He suffered horribly in the hospital on life support and feeding tubes. All the while, I was there to help him and my mother.

After he passed I sold my house in Orlando and moved to West Palm Beach, to be close to the ocean, and to my mother. I made an appointment with Dr. Sergio Pinski at the Cleveland Clinic in Weston, Florida. My arrhythmia had become intolerable, and I was considering an ablation. Dr. Pinski, upon reviewing my charts, did not seem alarmed at all. From all the tests, my heart was perfectly normal and healthy. I have always exercised, and have done yoga since the 1970's. There was no physiological reason for my erratic heartbeat.

As I adjusted to life in West Palm, I began to notice that my afib was absent, and the PACs and PVCs were becoming less and less. My father's death had lifted a huge burden from my heart. No more abusive phone calls, no more constant belittling, no more making me doubt the power of my own inner wisdom, no more guilt trips. I felt free and light!

Over the last almost two years there has been no afib, and I haven't taken a propranolol in months. I never realized that I was under stress. What I rationalized in my mind as "normal", my heart knew as danger. When the emotional abuse stopped, so did my afib. My father's death removed a huge stressor from my life. It was this stress, and the constant pressure that I felt, as I tried to please someone who I never could, that had caused the racing erratic heart.

I hope that my story gives hope to others.

The AFIB Report is published by Hans R. Larsen MSc ChE
1320 Point Street, Victoria, BC, Canada V8S 1A5
Phone: (250) 384-2524
E-mail: editor@afibbers.org
URL: <http://www.afibbers.org>
ISSN 1203-1933.....Copyright © 2001-2013 by Hans R. Larsen

The AFIB Report do not provide medical advice.
Do not attempt self- diagnosis or self-medication based on our reports.
Please consult your health-care provider if you wish to follow up on the information presented.