

2018 Southern Tier Heart Walk Inspirational Honorees

Deborah A. Nowalk: A Stroke Survivor

Sunday, November 6, 2016 was the day my life changed, along with the lives of my husband, David, my friends and my family. Really anyone that knew me. That's the day I had a stroke. After a full day of activity, we came home to finish up my PowerPoint for my college course. When I finished, I felt a pinch in my right hip. I found that it was difficult to stand. Scared at this time, I called to my husband. He quickly walked to the bedroom and he asked what was wrong. I told him something is wrong, I cannot move my right arm and right leg. He suggested we go to the hospital.

While in the car, David asked me a question and this time I was slurring my words. David, thank god, knew the warning signs of a stroke and called 911. At the hospital, I received the time sensitive tPA shot to dissolve blood clots. Tests showed the stroke affected the left side of the brain. My cognitive thinking was not affected, but muscles in my arm and leg were.

My ability to understand my uncomfortable feelings was clear now. I was not able to stretch my arm out straight and my leg also gave me resistance and I could not stand on it. I need assistance with everything and will have to work hard to regain my independence.

I took it hard. I had a stroke. Me. I could not believe it, and neither could my family and friends. With our faith, David and I knew, God is with us in whatever we were going to endure. Everyone that visited me and called me while I was in the hospital was encouraging me and said I have a good attitude. I was told I would have intensive physical therapy. I was willing to do whatever it took to be mobile again and as independent as I could at this time. I was in the hospital for a week and everyday I was out of bed. I spent another three weeks on the rehab floor.

December 1, 2016 was the day I went home to practice using my walker. The following week I borrowed a wheelchair. I continued physical therapy outside of the hospital. I worked so I could use the walker less and less. I used a cane for awhile until my balance came back. Now, when I am tired, I may use my cane and/or wheelchair. My husband and I joined the Southern Tier Stroke Support Group and found this group helpful. On January 18, 2017, doctors found a hole in my heart. I had a procedure to close it in May and I was home in 24 hours.

I know that's amazing. I know I'm going to make it through with a story to tell, with a smile that cannot be taken away, strength in my stride that comes from someone who knows what it is like to look fear in the eye and say, "You can't have my joy-not today, no way!" There is nothing love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance. Love will come to an end.

[Click here to see Deborah's invitation to the Heart Walk.](#)



Gigi Puglisi: A Heart Disease Survivor



I have realized through my own personal experience how precious and fragile life can be. A few years ago, I never would have believed I had coronary artery disease and would need major heart surgery.

About six years ago, I was having some health problems. I thought they were minor, like mild asthma and a pinched nerve. Pain progressed and I was feeling run down and more tired than usual. My yearly check up showed no problems. My blood pressure was up a little, but we thought it was nothing to be concerned about.

I had a very busy life. I was active and I was not a smoker. I got scared when I noticed upon exertion I had jaw pain and increased left arm pain. I decided I needed to mention this to my primary care doctor.

He listened to me and sent me for a stress echocardiogram and to see a cardiologist. I flunked the test and had a stent put in. I was shocked by it all. The next step was cardiac rehab and it truly saved my life.

As I started my exercise plan, my heart was not happy. I was sent back to my cardiologist for more testing. Ten days later I was having triple bypass. Lifestyle changes had to be made and exercise was number one. Once again, cardiac rehab was going to play a big part in my recovery. The program gave me the confidence to get strong again.

I am very thankful for the wonderful medical care I received. My message to everyone is to listen to your body and learn the warning signs of heart disease. Also, listen to your doctors, eat healthy, and exercise. It can all make a big difference in your heart health.

[Click here to see Gigi's invitation to the Heart Walk.](#)

Help Deborah and Gigi fight heart disease and stroke by fundraising for the [Southern Tier Heart Walk](#).