

Brenda's Story – Orillia, Ontario

Brenda had been healthy and active all of her life. She competed in the Boston Marathon 3 times, had done multiple triathlons and one ½ ironman. She had no cardiac risk factors, ate a healthy low fat diet, exercised everyday, and never smoked. Her blood pressure and cholesterol were always normal. However she is an example of how cardiac disease can affect anyone, at any age, anytime and anywhere.

On August 1, 2012, at the age of 49, while biking with 2 friends, on remote roads in Muskoka, training for her next ½ ironman race, she suffered a heart attack. Her heart attack was so sudden and so massive that within seconds she went into cardiac arrest, collapsed while still on her bike and crashed.



Her friends responded immediately, Barb called 911 and Ginger began CPR in the middle of the road. In the traffic jam that this created was a volunteer firefighter, Ken, who offered his help. Ginger and Ken continued CPR waiting for more help to arrive. Ken called his volunteer station to inform them that he was already at the scene at that they needed the AED immediately!

When the volunteer truck arrived, the AED was used to deliver 2 shocks, and eventually after an exhausting 27 minutes of CPR a pulse was detected.

A few minutes later the ambulance arrived, Brenda was taken to Bracebridge hospital 30 min away, and was eventually airlifted by ORNGE ambulance to St Michael's Hospital in Toronto. While in emerg she had another cardiac arrest and eventually was sent for an angiogram where they discovered a massive heart attack with significant muscle damage. An angioplasty was performed to open up the blocked artery, but her doctors feared she would not survive.

A special cooling system was used to cool her body for 24 hours. This procedure attempted to decrease the brain swelling and neurological damage that doctors feared she would have after such a lengthy cardiac arrest and CPR.

Brenda had multiple broken bones (including 12 ribs) and remained intubated unable to breath on her own for 2 weeks. Incredibly, after only 2 ½ weeks in hospital, she was discharged home.

Although it was a long recovery involving 14 different health care services for her multiple complications, Brenda not only survived, but has been able to return to much of her previous life, with normal brain function. She has resumed working as a cardiac nurse along with her husband in his internal medical practice in Orillia. She continues to exercise everyday despite her new breathing limitations caused by vocal damage from the lengthy intubations. But mostly she is grateful to be back as her full self as wife, mom and friend, much to the amazement of all who prayed for her recovery.

Brenda and her husband believe in the power of paying it forward. Three months after her discharge from hospital, they organized a fundraising event. With the amazing support of their friends and the Orillia community, they were able to raise \$45,000, to provide the same cooling system used on her to their local hospital in Orillia.

In spring of 2013, after months of rehabilitation and gradual exercise tolerance, Brenda along with family and friends, completed the 30km Around the Bay race in Hamilton. During the race they wore Team Brenda t-shirts, designed by her son, to promote CPR as they ran and walked to the finish line.



Brenda believes God had his hand on her that day, and made sure there were no missing links in the chain of skilled, determined, and courageous people she would need to save her life that day. That chain started with first responders Ginger, Barb and Ken, who recognized the need for CPR and the AED, were brave enough to respond, and determined enough to not give up.

Brenda is grateful for all of the life saving services she received that day and is especially grateful for her first responders. It is Brenda's hope that her story will "inspire more people to learn CPR, and to find the courage to use it, if ever needed, because even though the outcome is not always successful....the outcome if you don't try....is never successful".