Survivor Stories
"Ironically, I remember feeling the best I had in a long time on the morning of that fateful day," notes 41 year-old wife and mother of two, Dawn Botwen-Hauver, of Hollywood, Florida. On February 11, 2009, Dawn received a phone call from her son's school, alerting her that her five-year-old son wasn't feeling well. Little did she know how his illness would end up saving her life that very same day.

After taking her son home and calling the family doctor, Dawn was instructed to take him immediately to the hospital. Weakened by his illness, her son was unable to walk from the house to the car and into the hospital, so Dawn carried him. "As I approached the ER desk at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, I told the receptionist that I felt like I was going to faint." Dawn then collapsed and went into sudden cardiac arrest. A nearby paramedic caught her son as her body fell to the floor.

Her husband arrived to find that his son was no longer the issue, and was immediately escorted to the adult ER where CPR was being administered on Dawn. "At first, he couldn't see my face and thought he must have walked into the wrong room. And since I have a history of passing out, he definitely wasn't expecting to see me in such grave condition."

Dawn was initially treated for what was thought to be a seizure but later diagnosed as ventricular fibrillation and Prolonged QT Syndrome coupled with premature ventricular contractions (PVCs). After her condition stabilized, a cardiac catheterization was performed which showed that none of her arteries were blocked. She was then placed in a hypothermic coma for 24 hours to reduce swelling in her brain and prevent any potential brain damage from taking place.

"On the day I was to be taken out of the coma - someone working on my case told my husband there could be many outcomes: from brain damage to death to not being able to breathe on my own." After an unsuccessful attempt at removing her breathing tube, doctors placed Dawn back in the coma. She was eventually able to be taken off machines and begin the 13-hour long "defrosting" process. To the relief of her entire family, she awoke, was able to speak and had no signs of brain damage.

Yet her journey to recovery was not complete. She immersed herself in educational
materials, finding out as much as she could about Prolonged QT Syndrome (LQTS). She was implanted with an ICD.

Two weeks later she was back in the hospital only to learn that the ICD needed adjusted, after going into ventricular fibrillation, passing out again and being shocked twice. Back in the hospital, this time Dawn was without a crucial part of her support system. "My husband was on the tarmac at Miami International Airport, and officials would not let him off the plane. So, he had to fly to New York and take the early morning flight back home the next day."

Two weeks after the ICD adjustments were made, Dawn was back on the road to feeling well, yet her journey remained unfinished. She soon learned that LQTS is either genetic or acquired, and since she had children, she needed to identify if the deadly condition could be passed on.

Unlike most victims of SCA, Dawn had experienced cardiovascular problems in the past. In addition to her frequent fainting spells, about a year and a half earlier she was diagnosed with arrhythmia. She was placed on beta blockers and has since been under the care of a cardiology specialist and electrophysiologist.

"I was referred to as a 'miracle' by one of the hospital administrators, and I have my five year old to thank. Had this not happened at the hospital, I would not be here today." Her family is currently undergoing genetic testing for LQTS.
Survivor

Ryan Arnold

Age: 25
Save Date: June 16, 2009
Activity: Playing softball

When Ryan Arnold woke up in a strange room with no idea how he got there, the first thing that crossed his mind also happened to be the first thing he saw just a few moments later.

"It was her," he said, looking at his fiancée, Jamie Sawyer. "She was right there by my side."

Arnold, 25, spent nearly four days in the hospital - including almost two in a medically induced coma - when his heart stopped after he was struck in the chest Tuesday night with a softball during a game at Stewart Park.

He was cleared for release from Billings Clinic and a little more than an hour later was surrounded by nearly 100 friends and family at a barbecue fundraiser in his honor. As Arnold slowly walked up to the barbecue at Rose Park, heads turned and a round of applause rippled through the crowd.

"It makes you feel good," he said of the support. "I guess you don't know how many friends you've really got until something happens. That means a lot."

Wednesday night, more than 150 people attended a candlelight vigil to pray for Arnold.

When Arnold's heart stopped after the softball, thrown from the outfield, accidentally hit him in the chest, two Billings Clinic nurses who were at the park, Megan McLeod and Becky Parnell, performed cardio-pulmonary resuscitation until firefighters and paramedics arrived. They intubated him and used a portable defibrillator to shock his heart back into beat.

Arnold said McLeod and Parnell saved his life and that he owes them "a million thanks."

"I call them 'angel one' and 'angel two,' " said Laurie Dukart, Arnold's mother, of McLeod and Parnell.
The accident almost threw a wrench into what Arnold said is the most important thing on his mind now, his upcoming marriage to Sawyer. The two have been dating for about four years and are scheduled to be married on Saturday. She was by his side for much of the time he was hospitalized and was there when he was brought out of the coma almost two days after the accident.

Family members said they are optimistic the two will be able to walk down the aisle as scheduled.

"They predict he's going to make a full recovery," said Arnold's father, Gary Arnold. "Every day he gets a little bit better, and they plan on going through with it."

While Sawyer declined to be interviewed, the look of relief on her face was evident as a small smile spread across her face when people lined up to hug her fiancé.

After word spread that Arnold had been released and as friends and family waited for him to make an appearance at the fundraiser, they expressed their relief that he is recovering and their thanks to everyone who had a hand in helping him out. Dukart and her husband, Scott Dukart, said the support was overwhelming, with 95 people visiting Arnold during the first two days he was in the hospital.

"What do you say to everybody?" Laurie Dukart asked. "It doesn't seem like 'thank you' is enough."

Eric Keller has known Arnold for 20 years, since they started playing tee-ball together as kids, and expressed similar feelings.

"It's thank you enough to see him up and walking around," he said. "It restores your faith in the community."

Arnold said he doesn't remember the day the accident happened and that he is feeling "a lot better." He is already chomping at the bit to get back on the field and jokingly argued back-and-forth with a teammate about playing in their next softball game on Tuesday.

When asked if he had anything else to say, Arnold plugged his favorite sports team.

"Go Yankees," he said.
It was her first day back to work at the Department of Labor after Christmas vacation in 2003. After returning from lunch, Jacquelyn Carter of Laurel, MD, then 60 made what she thought was going to be a quick stop at the restroom. Beyond those details, Mrs. Carter – like most SCA survivors – doesn’t remember much about her SCA. “My coworker has since told me that one minute we were talking and the next moment she suddenly heard a loud ‘thud,’ and there I was... passed out in the restroom.”

A native Washingtonian, Mrs. Carter knows the city like the back of her hand. Yet that day she wasn’t aware of one small but powerful device that would play a crucial role in saving her life. Fortunately, her coworker knew that an AED was installed nearby in the Labor Department’s Health Unit, and as she called out for help, she specifically instructed bystanders to retrieve the AED.

After CPR was performed and several shocks were administered by the AED, Mrs. Carter regained consciousness and began breathing again. By that time, paramedics had arrived and she was immediately transferred to George Washington University hospital. Days later she was released from the hospital with an ICD and a new lease on life.

“Today, I’m functioning as I normally would: enjoying my family and friends, playing cards, following a regular exercise program, and gardening. “I just feel great!”

As is also common with other SCA survivor experiences, Mrs. Carter had no prior signs of heart problems. In the days leading up to her SCA, she helped her mother complete some household chores. She lightheartedly recalls, “My mother later scolded me because I hung some drapes for her, and she thought that physical exertion may have brought on my SCA.”

While she may not know what exactly triggered her event, Mrs. Carter tends to focus on the positive outcome. “My mother still had a daughter, my daughter still has a mother, and my coworkers have become educated on the existence and importance of AEDs.”

Now retired, Mrs. Carter recently received a new ICD. “I tell my friends, getting the ICD was a piece of cake, and because of it, there’s nothing I can’t do.”
Vince Graziano

Save Date: February 13, 2009

Vince Graziano knows all too well the mysterious omen of Friday the 13th. On Friday, February 13, 2009, he remembers that day started out like many others; he arrived at work shortly after heading to the gym for his daily swim. While sitting at his desk and talking to coworkers, Vince suffered SCA. Up to that point, he led an active lifestyle, cycling, exercising, swimming and following a reasonably healthy diet. "I thought I was doing all the right things and in relatively good shape, but apparently it wasn't enough," recalls Vince. Two of his colleagues, Richard Reynolds and Robert Hughes, immediately began CPR while others called 911 and alerted building personnel. Moments later Frank McLean, a building security agent, arrived with an AED and proceeded to place the pads and deliver a shock. EMTs arrived quickly thereafter and transferred Vince to NYU Medical Center where he received immediate hypothermic treatment.

Over the next few days Vince remained unconscious while doctors still tried to explain what caused the SCA. Vince soon experienced a Myocardial Infarction, and doctors quickly performed an emergency cardiac catheterization which showed that all coronary arteries were 90-100% blocked. Unable to place stents or do angioplasty, a surgeon was called in to perform an emergency triple bypass. "The surgeon informed my family and friends that this was my only hope and the chances of survival were 50%. Through God's grace I made it through the surgery and with each passing day improved."

After six days on a ventilator, Vince was extubated, and although he does not recall anything that happened, he was fortunate to have suffered no cognitive deficits whatsoever. He now participates in a cardiac rehab program and has since received an ICD.

"Without the courage and willingness of my coworkers and the building security staff to act quickly I would not be here today. My angels were surely out in full force, at the right place at the right time."

Like most SCA survivors, Vince had no prior signs or symptoms of heart problems. "Had this taken place an hour and a half earlier, I very well could have drowned in the
pool," he remarked. The prior evening he was on a flight from Houston returning from a business trip.

Numerous medical professionals who have been involved in various stages of Vince's care remain awestruck at how he has managed to pull through, and all of them have attributed much of it to the quick action of his first responders.

Throughout the entire ordeal, Vince's outlook remains positive. "So much for bad luck on Friday the 13th!"
Survivor

Kayla Donahe

Age: 16
Save Date: 5/19/2009
Activity: Playing soccer

Tuesday, May 19, 2009: this date I will remember for the rest of my life. It was what seemed to be a normal day. I woke up at my usual time, got ready for the day and headed out the door for school. I was a 16 year-old sophomore at Valley High School in West Des Moines, Iowa. The school day, again pretty typical, ended and I headed home to get ready for my last soccer game of the season which was against my school's biggest rival, Dowling Catholic High School. This is all that I can remember from that day.

My next memory is when I awoke several days later in the hospital, surrounded by my family, clueless as to what had happened to me and why I was there. It was explained to me that I had suffered a sudden cardiac arrest while playing soccer. This was so confusing to me and my family as well, as I have always been active and healthy, had never displayed any signs or symptoms and there was not a family history. I had played soccer since I was five years old, ran track, and played volleyball, too.

From what I am told, I had been playing in the soccer game for about five minutes when I suddenly collapsed midfield and was unresponsive. The coaches called 911 and spectators from the stands rushed to my side to start CPR. Nearly nine minutes later, two police officers arrived with an AED and administered the first shock. The EMS/Fire crew arrived shortly thereafter and began their resuscitation efforts. Several shocks later and still unresponsive, I was loaded into the ambulance and in route to Blank Children's Hospital. Thankfully, I finally returned a pulse. The records indicate that I had been without a pulse for 25 minutes that day.

I spent a week at Blank Children's hospital and was then transferred to the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City for further testing. A diagnosis had not been made but it was determined that I should have and ICD implanted. The ICD was implanted, and six days later I was on my way home to continue my recovery. I had missed the last two weeks of my sophomore year.

Now, I am a junior at Valley High School. I am restricted from competitive sports but am allowed to do pretty much anything else I choose. My memory of everything prior to that soccer game is amazingly intact. Even though it is unknown as to what exactly
happened at that moment during the game, I feel extremely fortunate to have survived. I am very grateful for everyone that had a hand in saving me that day, the people performing CPR, police officers, EMS crew, doctors, nurses, etc., and so thankful that they did not give up on me. I thank God every day that I am alive and healthy.
Survivor

Timmy Kiedrowski

Age: 19
Save Date: 5/2003
Activity: Playing softball

From an email sent from Timmy's brother to family and friends

In May of 2003, Timmy (19-yrs-old at the time) collapsed during one of our softball games. An ambulance was called and they immediately took him to the hospital. At the time, we thought he was dehydrated, so we thought nothing of it and played the rest of the game. Actually, things were a lot worse than we thought.

On the way to the hospital, they had to give the "Paddles of Life," while he was awake to bring his heart back down to a normal beating rate. Before the paddles, his heart was beating too fast that it seemed to stop. He suffered from ventricular fibrillation (VF), where the top and the bottom of the heart can get a rhythm and beat faster to catch up with the other half and it's just a violent cycle. His heart was beating at 425 beats per minute. (The normal rate is around 80-100 beats per minute.) From what he was suffering from that day, only 20 percent of victims live. Essentially, God kept him here that day.

My cousin in Colorado died of a mysterious heart disease when he was 20 back in 1998. After looking at the data, they determined that he had something that resembled what Timmy had. After looking at this, they never officially narrowed it down as to what he had or what caused it, but it was determined that he probably had something called Long QT syndrome. It's a genetic disease that appears in the late teens and it cannot be diagnosed easily. The only cure for such a disease is to take heart medicine, avoid participation in rigorous athletic activities (football, basketball) and implant a device called an implantable cardioverter defibrillator or ICD. The ICD in Timmy's chest will jump start the heart if it goes into VF again.

They say that of the 20 percent that survive the first attack, only 50 percent survive the second if they don't have an ICD, so he got the ICD. Because it's genetic, we all got tested and it was determined that Mark and I don't display signs of having it now, but I could also appear around the age of 40. Michael heart rate, on the other hand, was a little irregular but wasn't as severe as Timmy's. And after having my mom's whole side of the family tested for this, we found out that one of our cousins (19 yrs. old) might have the same thing Timmy does.
So everything was fine till five months later (October 6, 2003) when the ICD went off when he was playing basketball at college. I live close to where he goes to school and I picked him up to take him home. While he was waiting for me, it went off again. He said it's like a metal baseball bat hitting him in the chest as hard as it can and he blacks out. So we took him to the hospital and they said that it went off at the right times and that they had to change his medication. Things were quiet for the last year.....till Sunday (October 10, 2004). About 7 pm, Timmy and my parents were over my house and he was complaining about how he wasn't feeling well. He got up to go to the bathroom, came back into the living room, took off all his clothes to his underwear, started breathing heavy and said he couldn't slow his heart down. He was walking over to sit next to my mom and we heard a huge "THUMP!" like someone punching him in the chest. It was his ICD going off. It threw him back onto the couch and he had this immense look of pain in on his face. I ran out to his car and got his pills and my parents took him home that night. He said he was okay and wanted to go to the hospital in the morning. They checked him out in the morning and said that everything looked okay and that his electrolytes were low and white blood cell count was high, but other than that nothing else was wrong and they let him go home.

That Monday, I got a call from Joy on my way home from work around 6:30 pm. She told me that I needed to get home and we HAD to get to Lorain ASAP. She told me that my parent's neighbor called and told us that Timmy was in the hospital and it wasn't looking good. We rushed there and she told us this story that Timmy's ICD started going off at my parent's house around 5 pm and went off 20 times in the matter of an hour. She said that it was hitting him in the on the porch, on the grass in front yard and in the ambulance when they got there. She said he would close his eyes, take a deep breath, a thumping sound would come out of this body and his body would jerk. Then he would wake up and it would happen again between 3-5 minutes later.

They go him stabilized 20 minutes after he got to the hospital, and put him on some serious medication. Eventually he got transferred to a different hospital that night where his doctor came and reprogrammed his ICD to that it would pace his heart down instead of just letting it get up to around 400 beats per minute and go off. He was discharged from the hospital on that Thursday and was told he can go back to living his life like normal. His doctor said Timmy is a rare case that he lived through all this, and it seems like Timmy is his golden boy. It's tough for him now because he suffers from thoughts that it's going to go off again whenever it feels like it, he has to take medication that screws with his intestines and makes him tired and sleepy. He has gone back to school now and the teachers are very supportive of him. They are working with him to get him back on track, and he might be going to counseling to help him lose the stress of thinking it's going to go off. He's okay now and looking to get his life back on track and in the groove of things.

Lots of people were praying for him and still are. God kept him here for a reason. Keep him in your thoughts and prayers. Just wanted to let you guys know what was going on. Thank you for your thoughts and prayers.
On February 6, 1998, I was celebrating my 48th birthday at a restaurant when I suddenly collapsed on my husband’s shoulder. He thought I was just sleeping because as an Operating Room nurse, I was on call the night before and had worked all night and all day. He tried to wake me up but I was not responding. Our friend sitting across the table from us thought I didn’t look so good and said that they should call 9-1-1.

The Maitre d’ called 9-1-1 while my husband started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. They also called out to see if there was a doctor or a nurse in the restaurant. Lucky for me there was a doctor and a nurse who was an EMT. They came around to our table, laid me on the floor and started CPR. Within a minute or two, Police Officer James Brierton came in to the restaurant with an AED, an oxygen tank, and an airway. He connected me to the machine and pushed the analyze button. The machine told him that I needed to be defibrillated. He had to defibrillate me twice before my heart went into normal rhythm.

The ambulance came within five minutes and took me to the St. Charles Hospital emergency department. I was still unconscious when I arrived. The doctors gave me a paralyzing drug and put a breathing tube in my throat. An EEG was done to see if there was any damage to my brain but it was negative. The next morning I started waking up and the breathing tube was removed. They told me that I was awake and talking but I can’t remember my whole stay at St. Charles Hospital. I was transferred to St. Francis Hospital on Sunday, February 8. An Echo Stress Test was done the next day and it was negative. On Tuesday, a cardiac catheterization and a renal angiogram were done which turned out to be negative also. On Wednesday, they did an electrophysiology study of my heart. The doctor could not even induce my heart to go into ventricular fibrillation. They did not know what to do next. But because I was a documented cardiac arrest patient, they implanted an ICD on Thursday February 12. The device was tested the next day and I went home on Saturday February 14, Valentine’s Day.

What a present for my family. A bouquet of flowers was waiting for me at home from my guardian angel, Police Officer James Brierton. I went back to work after four
weeks but was not allowed to drive for six months. I have been back to work full time and have done some traveling to talk about how important it is to have an AED close by when the need arises. I am thankful to the Suffolk Police Department for implementing a program in which their squad cars are equipped with AEDs and their police officers are trained EMTs. I have been involved with the American Heart Association and the American Red Cross in their symposiums on AEDs in Schools and Communities. I was asked to testify at the Suffolk Legislative Assembly about the importance of Public Access Defibrillation. I am involved with a local cardiac arrest survivor support group and I am a board member for the NCED SCA Survivor Network that has a website with a chat room. My goal is to be visible and let the people know that a life can be saved if we give it a try.

The reason I am here today is because the chain of survival was carried out smoothly—early action (calling 911), early CPR (husband, doctor and nurse doing CPR), early defibrillation (police officer with AED), and early advanced cardiac life support (ambulance to hospital). I am happy to be one of the five percent that survived sudden cardiac arrest.