

Experiencing a stroke first hand was a life changing experience, and an event that I never predicted having to personally deal with. On the morning of April 11, 2009 I began noticing weakness in my left hand while getting ready for work. After being at work for a few hours I suddenly felt like I was going to pass out and my vision blacked out momentarily. Walking proved to be a difficult task because my left leg felt heavy and was not able to provide much support. I called my mom to come get me because I was feeling so terrible. As soon as she walked in the door and took a look at me she told me we were going to the emergency room.

When I was in the car I remember laughing because the thought of having pins and needles on my entire left side was so bizarre. I did not know what a stroke was or what the symptoms of a stroke were. My mom even laughed when I told her I felt like the blood inside my arms was “jumping around”.



Upon reaching the emergency room the personnel at the front desk asked me to fill out some forms and take a seat. Another thing I did not know about my symptoms is that they were not the kind that you take a seat and wait for your name to be called. It was about noon when I first spoke to a nurse. The doctors started to run some tests and draw blood and I had a CAT scan. I had been sitting in the emergency room for nearly five hours at this point. The doctor's couldn't find anything wrong with me.

The nurse came back and said they wanted to do an MRI; it could pick up something that the CAT scan missed. Being naïve about my condition I told her I felt it was best for me to go home, eat, sleep, and come back the next day if I still didn't feel better. Luckily, I have a smart mom who felt it was best to do the test and they gave me some more medicine to calm me down. I agreed to do the MRI if I could go home after. Once the MRI was complete at 7:00 p.m. the doctor told me I had a stroke. The only thing I remember is crying. I wasn't going home; I was being admitted to the ICU.

After that things moved fast. The doctors needed to run more tests to attempt to figure out why I had the stroke. We discovered that I had a PFO, a hole in the heart that almost 25% of the population has. After a week in the hospital I left with a new level of knowledge about strokes, hearts, blood, and lots of flowers and balloons from my very supportive friends and family.

It has been a little over a year since the stroke and I was finally able to get the PFO closed last November. Dealing with everyday life has been a challenge, but also has made me grow in countless ways.

I am very dedicated to advocacy for the American Heart Association for many reasons. It is important for everyone to be aware of what a life threatening event such as a stroke looks like, how to prevent it, and how to help one if it unfortunately has occurred. Awareness and prevention are two powerful things that we can do to prepare for situations like I experienced. If I could help one life be saved or help one person from experiencing something like I did I know that my efforts as an advocate for the American Heart Association are worth it!