



Racing Heart Tamed, But Not Competitive Spirit

Marian's heart was racing, but today it was not because of how hard she pushes herself on the basketball court. This has been happening more and more often. After a basketball game she would be flushed with her heart beating rapidly, the only way to find relief until it passed was to sit with her knees to her chest.

Marian was referred to the Cardiology clinic at the Alberta Children's Hospital to find out what was happening. There she received some heavy news; she had a condition called Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome. In Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome, there is a problem with the heart's electrical system that can cause the heart to beat very fast, even while a person is at rest. For a competitive athlete that is driven to push herself to her limits, this can cause some scary moments. But the real fear was in the unknown. Some people with Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome also have a risk of sudden cardiac death – and Marian was unsure if she carried this risk.

Marian was diagnosed when she was twelve years old. Marian and her family had some difficult choices to make. Should she travel to Edmonton to have surgery? This had its dangers. Her parents were concerned about the possible scar tissue that would be left in her 12 year old heart. Marian and her family decided to wait for Marian's heart to develop and for treatment options to advance.

In the meantime, what did Marian do? How did she cope with this condition? She took a 'break' from her competitive life and did ballet for a year. But holding back Marian's competitive drive was like holding back a team of horses. She returned back to basketball. She did weight training and circuits in her sport performance class. She was torn between going full-out, and holding back because she was constantly terrified if she was the one in one hundred Wolff Parkinson White patients that carried the risk of sudden cardiac death.

Five years filled with fear passed. The Alberta Children's Hospital had a new cardiologist, Dr. Robin Clegg who studied at the Boston Children's Hospital and The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto specializing heart rhythms and issues surrounding them. A treatment option was now available in Calgary. Marian could now have a procedure called an ablation, which could eliminate the faulty pathways that were causing her heart to race.

On May 29, 2009 Marian was among the first pediatric patients to have this procedure in Calgary.

First, a map of Marian's heart was created. With this map of the heart, Marian and her family would finally know if for the past five years she was at risk for sudden death. A local anesthetic was applied to Marian's leg and four catheters were inserted in Marian's femoral vein and up to her heart. These catheters created a three-dimensional computerized image of Marian's heart, showing both the structures and the electrical pathways. The procedure took longer than expected because during the study a second arrhythmia was found. Marian was the one in one hundred patients that did carry the risk of sudden cardiac death.

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Dr. Clegg went to work to eliminate the faulty pathways and the risk of sudden cardiac death. With the map, the electrical abnormalities are located and either hot energy (radiofrequency ablation) or cold

energy (cryoablation) is applied to destroy cardiac tissue and stop the electric current from travelling on that path.

Marian was in the hospital for one night and her recovery was rapid. Within one week she could return to normal activity. The surgery left no scars and eliminated the faulty pathway. But most importantly it eliminated the constant fear and allowed Marian to return to her no-holds barred competitive lifestyle.

Today, Marian is swimming competitively with plans to travel to Asia or South America next year. Dr. Clegg is building a dedicated arrhythmia clinic at the Alberta Children's Hospital seeing approximately 70 children in the pacemaker clinic, six patients with implantable cardiac defibrillators with this population growing by one patient per month. In addition, Dr. Clegg sees patients who have other arrhythmia issues such as Long QT Syndrome, Heart Block and Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome. Approximately one of these patients each week is a possible candidate for ablation.

February 7-14 is Congenital Heart Defect Awareness week in Calgary. An estimated 180,000 Canadians have Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) of which, approximately 8,000 reside in the Calgary area. How can you help during this week? Visit the Heart Beats' Website (www.heartbeats.ca) to learn more about Congenital Heart Disease. You may send an e-card to let others know that you care about children with this condition. You may also donate to Heart Beats to help provide financial assistance to families having difficulties meeting expenses related to their child's heart defect.

The Heart Beats Children's Society of Calgary (www.heartbeats.ca) is a grassroots, registered charitable organization offering information, resources and emotional support to families dealing with Congenital Heart Disease (CHD). Since 1987, our group of parents, caregivers and professionals have provided practical and compassionate service to children and families impacted by Congenital Heart Disease (CHD).

-30-

Photos available: Three dimensional heart images, Marian Hatcher competing, Marian Hatcher Dr. Robin Clegg

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