



Thanks to an AED and a Prepared Sports Club Staff, I Celebrate Two Birthdays

by Richard Brown



November 9, 2001 started out much as any other day, with a special twist—it was my birthday. As I did my morning workout, I remember seeing the sun pouring through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the Sports Club LA in downtown Washington, D.C.

I jumped rope as my trainer counted down the seconds on his watch. I thought about our special family plans that night. My wife Katherine and two of our children, Matthew (then 11 years old) and Garrett (then nine), were taking me to a Wizards basketball game to celebrate my birthday. I made a mental reminder to call ahead for early dinner reservations in the restaurant overlooking the court. Why was that my train of thought? In my peripheral vision I could see Michael Jordan exercising with his trainer...

That's the last thing I remember until I woke up in the hospital many hours later, with my wife and my best friend, Harold, standing over me. I knew considerable time had passed because Harold lives in Florida. The first thing I said was, "I guess this means we're not going to the ball game tonight." Although I can't remember much of that day, others relayed the events to me. When I crumpled to the floor in sudden cardiac arrest, my trainer yelled, "Richard is down!" Several other trainers rushed over and one started mouth to mouth. I was turning blue. Another trainer started CPR. I turned bluer. A third trainer called for the AED (automated external defibrillator). When it arrived they shaved my chest and adhered the electrodes. They only had to shock me once to bring back a heartbeat, and I started breathing again.

Elapsed time: approximately 10 minutes. During those 10 minutes, someone at the fitness desk called 9-1-1, but the line was busy, so a friend ran to the fire station across the street to summon the emergency medical services team. Shortly after I revived, responders to a second 9-1-1 call arrived and rushed me to the hospital. Because I was breathing normally when I arrived at the emergency department (ED), the ED staff members thought my collapse was due to a stroke and examined me for brain damage, not heart damage. Later, it became clear that I had a heart problem. A heart surgeon did an angioplasty (cleared a blocked artery) and installed a stent, a small wire mesh tube, to help hold the artery open. Two weeks later I was exercising again—and have been ever since.

I was lucky. Just a few weeks before my sudden cardiac arrest, a younger member of the health club collapsed and died. In that case it took 45 minutes for an ambulance to arrive. A friend and I who witnessed this were appalled and suggested, among other things, that the club purchase an AED. It did, and several trainers learned how to use it. I was the first person saved by the AED. Without it, my five kids might not have a father today.

AEDs save lives, and they do it effectively because they stop a condition that will kill you. Sudden cardiac arrest gives no forewarning, and it can strike anyone. CPR would not have been enough to save my life. Thanks to an AED and a prepared sports club staff, I celebrate two birthdays—one in 1944 and another in 2001.

Note: AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Please consult your physician. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that survival rates can be dramatically improved with early defibrillation. For more information, please call 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.medtronic-ers.com.

Richard Brown resides in Washington, D.C. with his wife and two youngest sons. He has his own firm specializing in communications law. Brown serves as president of the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Survivor Network, a division of the National Center for Early Defibrillation (NCED) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He enjoys an active lifestyle biking, skiing, golfing, playing squash, coaching his son Garrett's basketball team, and spending time with his family.

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