

Living with AF

Clive's story

I was diagnosed with AF nearly two years ago and just recently I have been feeling probably the most positive I have ever felt about the condition. I thought it might be worth putting "my story" on paper because if it gives even one other sufferer some cause for optimism it will be a good thing.

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I am 51 years old and a married man with four daughters and a step son. I have always led a very busy life with family and friends, a pretty stressful job and lots of hobbies including my biggest passion, which is running - marathon running in particular. Like lots of people I believed I was invincible and a routine medical in late 2011 didn't really hold any fear for me. You can imagine my shock then when an hour after walking into the clinic for the medical I was being carried into an ambulance and transferred to the local A & E with all sirens blazing. I had run the Venice marathon two weeks earlier in what was for me quite a respectable time!

I had never heard of AF but was quickly told that's what it was and also that I had a very rapid heart rate. Several hours later I was sent home with Adizem, calcium channel blockers to slow my heart down, warfarin and the expectation of having a cardioversion in due course to attempt to sort me out. The consultant convinced me that I wasn't about to die but that equally this wasn't to be taken lightly. To be honest I had been getting strange palpitations for some time but just put it down to coffee.

I immediately started researching and getting my thoughts together ready for a cardioversion in a few months time. At every point the assumption was that I was in constant AF. You can imagine my shock then when I was gowned up ready for the procedure in February 2012 to be put on the monitor and told that I was in normal sinus rhythm! They clearly weren't going to shock me under those circumstances. I was sent away and spent the rest of the day on a lovely walk with my wife on a cold winter's day.

I was subsequently put on a 3 day heart monitor which proved that I had paroxysmal AF and was regularly going in and out of AF. Eating and lying down were triggers as are hangovers and stress. I was considered to be fairly fit so, I was discharged by the consultant and it was even considered to take me off warfarin. I wasn't keen on that and remain on it now. In reality I expect to be on Adizem and probably warfarin for the rest of my life.

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In the subsequent months I tried to come to terms with it, carried on doing some running but not to the extent of previously and went skiing, which is another of my passions. My wife has always been supportive but ultimately doesn't really know what it's like to know and be able to feel that your heart isn't working as designed.

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By the middle of 2012, I was feeling increasingly low and was prescribed some antidepressants by my GP. I had suffered with depression previously and didn't really blame the AF at all; there were other issues which seemed a far more likely cause. The depression didn't get any better and in April this year my antidepressants were changed to one I had found previously to be far more effective.

My mood did improve and has continued to since. I don't know to what extent AF was contributing to my depressive problems but it certainly wasn't helping. It knocks your confidence in all sorts of ways.

I don't know what started my AF, it could well have been stress (whatever the experts say!) , could it have been my running, trying to run too far when not fit enough, who knows. The day of my original diagnosis wasn't a good one as I was also put down as query diabetes! I have been re-tested recently and all seems to be clear.

As things have improved I decided to take the big plunge and enter another marathon. With some friends I am going to Chicago in early October 2013 and I will run it. So far all my training has been on my own and yesterday was very significant as I ran 13 miles without stopping. This is the longest distance I have run since the diagnosis. I often train whilst in AF and I have a personal theory that sometimes on a long run my body decides that as running in AF isn't very efficient it would be far more sensible to flip me back into sinus rhythm ! I did discuss this with one medic who did concede it could be possible.

I went to my first ever AF support group meeting in July 2013 (Bradford) and although 20 years younger than the other members I did find it extremely useful.

As I started by saying, I am at my most positive yet and AF is not going to get me down any longer. In the future as time permits I really want to get involved in supporting the various charities working with AF and seeing what I can do to help.

Clive Siddall
Halifax, West Yorkshire
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