

## Chris Johnston and Jeff Johnston: Father and Son Atrial Fibrillation Story

Father's Day, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017



Chris Johnston, a local here on Hilton Head Island, better known to most as the bartender “CJ”, was diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation in the fall of 2010, at just thirty years old. He was going in for a routine hernia procedure when the doctor noticed something irregular was going on with his heart. He was immediately sent to a cardiologist, who then referred him to an Arrhythmia Specialist in Charleston, South Carolina. CJ was then diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation. The doctor put him on medication, and monitored the condition for several years. After a few years of monitoring the condition, CJ’s quality of life was diminishing due to his atrial fibrillation and extreme rapid heart rate. He said, “I was feeling very weak, unmotivated, and had trouble doing anything physical. It was very taxing doing the smallest tasks, which made my life pretty difficult.” The Arrhythmia specialist recommended a catheter ablation surgery to hopefully correct the condition. This surgery took place in Charleston, South Carolina in the spring of 2014.

Several months after the surgery, CJ noticed he was not feeling completely normal, and when he went back to the doctor it was determined the surgery was unsuccessful in correcting the A-Fib. He then went to get a second opinion at Cleveland Clinic, near his hometown of Dover, Ohio. The Cardiologist in Cleveland said it was best to try another ablation. The next surgery was then scheduled for February of 2015. Thankfully, due to close monitoring and focus on a healthier lifestyle, the second ablation was successful.

Now, over two years later, he is feeling healthy and normal. His doctor has taken him off all medication except a baby aspirin each morning. He has made sure to take care of himself through exercise and healthy eating, as well as avoiding caffeine and limiting other activities that could cause A-Fib symptoms to flare up. When we sat down to talk to CJ we asked him what he would advise to someone else in his position, he said, “Make sure to look for resources and listen to your doctor, avoid triggers that can cause the symptoms of A-Fib to flare up or worsen. But what has helped me most is talking to someone that has my same condition; it is such a hard feeling to explain, and those

that have never been physically in A-Fib will not understand the extent that it can change your life. It has been comforting to talk with people that have experienced the same thing that I have.”

Unfortunately, the story does not end there for the Johnston family. In January of 2014, CJ’s father, Jeff Johnston was diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation and Atrial Flutter. Similarly to CJ, Jeff was going in to have a knee replacement surgery, and as he was getting the sedation, he went into A-Fib. The doctor immediately stopped, and postponed the surgery for six months, while they monitored his condition and tried to treat it. Since then, he has had two cardio conversions that only kept me in sinus rhythm for a few days each time, and then ended up also having Atrial Flutter. In November of 2014, Jeff had a cardio ablation done with intentions to correct the atrial fibrillation and flutter. The atrial flutter was corrected, but due to some bleeding issues, the A-Fib was not corrected. Jeff said, “For months, I kept going in and out of rhythm and had no energy. In December of 2016, my doctor decided to switch my medications, but I had some side effects with it as well.” In January of 2017, Jeff came down with an extreme illness that lead to him being in the hospital for several weeks. The circumstances of the illness, lead the doctor to taking him off his A-Fib medication. Since then, Jeff has gone back into A-Fib. He is back on medications, and being monitored closely by his doctors to make sure everything is kept in check. Jeff said, “I am not someone that worries much, so I don’t dwell on it. The doctor’s say it is being controlled with medication, so I take my meds and I am good.”

“Many people live with A-Fib on a daily basis, and I will continue to follow-up with my doctors, take my medication diligently, and live each day to its fullest,” Jeff and his wife, Valinda Johnston, said of how he plans to continue to monitor his condition and health. Jeff is feeling better following his severe and sudden illness earlier this year, and the Johnston family are so grateful for the improvement he has made during such a scary time.

Valinda and Jeff Johnston have another son and two grandsons who will be two and three this summer! It is safe to say, they are all spending as much quality time together as possible, and will continue to live each and every day to its fullest! Hug your loved ones – and squeeze your dad extra tight this Father’s Day!

