



Faces of CHD | Karl's Story



Meet Karl S. of Winnipeg, MB

Age 54

CHD Diagnosis: D-Transposition of the great arteries with ventricular septal defect, hypoplastic right ventricle.

The mantra my mom taught me growing up and living with CDH was “Have fun, but don’t over do it!” It is probably the same one I still live with today.

The doctors didn’t actually discover I had CHD until I started to learn how to crawl, and my mom noticed I was turning blue. At the age of three I had my first surgery and then my Mom was told that was really all they could do for me. So throughout my childhood I got tired easily and couldn’t really play with my peers and friends. My mom went and bought a piece of property and built a cottage up North so at least I would have a place that I could get some fresh air and go for walks. That was amazing!

That kind of support from my mom, my family and friends, the great doctors I’ve had throughout my life is what I am most grateful for. It allowed me to have so many opportunities.

My mom never gave up - she was my fighter. At 10 when they told her there was no solutions, she brought me back two years later, as an outpatient. And it was there that a cardiologist from the clinic recognized me and started to really dig into options. At that time they were only doing Fontan procedures on infants and I was already headed into my teens, but patience and perseverance won out, and 5 years later, at age 16, I underwent a successful Fontan procedure. From there life was fantastic, I wasn’t tired anymore, I could do things I hadn’t been able to.

I went off to college and then after a time with CN decided to try and become an air traffic controller.

This was probably the biggest challenge I had to overcome. With the strict health guidelines, due to the stress load of the work, I wasn't sure if it would be possible, but after 2 years of perseverance, I was accepted into the field.

My health continued to be good for a long time and it was only about 5 or 6 years ago that I started having troubles and had to have a procedure to close off the repair made when I was 3. This caused me to have continuous issues and at 55 I took an early retirement because of my continued conditions.

Now I live each day as it comes - we travel and enjoy life between all the doctors appointments. But there are some nights when I go to bed and wonder if I will wake up in the morning, but so far, I always have.

Advice I would give to anyone living with CHD today - take care of your teeth; be healthy - sleep well and eat well; live without regrets.

I remember a time when I used to dream of living to see the year 2000, and look where I am now. I think life is really what you make of it and it is all relative to your health and state of mind. I've always had a can-do attitude and I always like to think there is a tomorrow still to come - that is what keeps me going.