



## **Our Hearts. Our Stories.**

Stories of Resilience from Women Living with Heart Disease

### **Transcript: Roz's Story**

Hi, my name is Roz. I live in Ottawa, but I originally came from England 35 years ago. I trained as an RN (registered nurse) and midwife in England and worked in obstetrics and general practice until my retirement in Canada.

I have coronary heart disease and had three stents fitted three years ago. I have a terrible family history of heart disease— all the male members died of heart attacks in their early 70s. Unfortunately, my older brother died unexpectedly of a heart attack during COVID.

I was very distressed by this and felt worried and anxious, so I went to see my GP (general practitioner). She was amazing, listened to my concerns, and reviewed my family's medical history regarding heart disease. I had no signs or symptoms of heart disease— all previous blood work and my blood pressure had been normal. I've never smoked, I drank very little alcohol, and I was active and a mother of four.

After the initial heart checks appeared normal, my doctor decided I should have a CT (computed tomography) of my heart, as a newer test— lipoprotein(a)— was positive, showing I was genetically at risk for heart disease. I had never had that test before.

After the CT examination, I was shocked— the test showed I was 80–90% blocked in my left descending coronary artery, commonly known as the “widow maker.” The stent procedure went very well physically, but mentally I was very shocked by how my body had let me down.

Afterwards, I attended all the cardiac rehabilitation offered by the Heart Institute. However, I have struggled since the surgery. The diagnosis has definitely changed me. My husband says I am now somewhat heart obsessed— checking my pulse, worrying about its rate and irregularities. I feel very anxious at times about my heart and experience feelings of panic.

At present, I am looking for a psychologist to help me find coping mechanisms to deal with this stress. I also worry about my children's heart health. Three have had testing, and one of my sons has a high lipoprotein(a) level, so he has been started prophylactically on cholesterol-lowering medication.

Even though all this has happened, I still feel very lucky. My GP listened to me, sent me for the relevant tests, and I was able to have stents fitted in time. She has enabled me to have a long and active life ahead of me, and I am very grateful. Thank you.