



FROM MY heart TO YOURS

by Dr. Renee Boyce

The alarm went off once more signalling the start of another hectic day at the office. I had three more deadlines to make by the end of the week and my manager was breathing down my neck.

After my third cup of coffee I felt that burning sensation in my chest I had been ignoring for the past month and started to regret cancelling another doctor's appointment. I just couldn't risk losing my job during these difficult times. I vowed to set another appointment as soon as I reached those annoying deadlines.

The traffic was even worse this morning and as I got ready to shout at the driver who had just cut in front of me, I felt that burning in my chest. Maybe I just needed to calm down.

I took some settling breaths and commanded my thoughts to stop racing through my head. The pain, however, had a different idea.

It started to hold my chest in a vice grip and the sweat began to cascade in waterfalls down my forehead. I was just a few minutes away from the office when the pain intensified and thankfully I managed to pull into the parking lot. I flung the car door open and without my usual poise and chic, I burst into the office, begging someone to help me.

Everything began to fade around me and never had I imagined my life would flash before my eyes. What about my mother? Who would take care of her? What about my job? Who would get my office?

Why didn't I keep that appointment? Could I have taken better care of myself? Minutes passed by then I heard a siren and in the haze I saw two men in blue reaching to lift me up. Surely I must be dead, but as far as I knew angels wore white, not blue.

The alarm went off again, but I was certain I had turned it off before I left for work this morning.

The pain had eased marginally allowing me the opportunity to take a look around.

I saw wires running from my chest, arms and legs towards machines with flickering lights and squiggly lines. I saw men and women rushing around the room as though their very lives depended on their actions.

The thought then hit me like the pain that was sitting in my chest... my life depended on these men and women working feverishly, doing whatever important things they were doing.

A kind woman came to my side and let me know she was a nurse, and would be taking care of me. As I struggled to sit up and be in charge (of what I don't know), she gently pressed me back onto the bed.

I was in the emergency department and I seemed to have suffered a heart attack. The doctor would be with me shortly she assured me and would be

able to answer any questions I might have. A heart attack? I was too young, too busy, and too important to my company to have a heart attack. I was not obese and I didn't smoke every day and I took care of myself! Or did I?

The doctor, who I thought was too young to be a specialist, confirmed my worst fears. I did suffer a heart attack and would need to be admitted after being treated and stabilised.

Like the sweat from earlier that morning the tears poured from my eyes, the sobs adding to the ever-present pain in my chest.

The baby-faced doctor explained the treatment and how it could help, and the risks associated with deciding to accept the medications and procedures.

I wanted this pain gone...I wanted to be better and do better. I wanted another chance at life.

As I signed my name with a shaky scrawl I vowed that when I got through this, life would be different.

As I lay on my hospital bed a few days later my eyes fluttered open and I recognised that indeed I had survived the ordeal. I was fortunate and, more than that, I was thankful.

What I learned is what I want you to learn. Life is a precious gift and should be treated as such. I had spent my life climbing the corporate ladder. There is nothing wrong with hard work, but I neglected to include time for friends and family. And so, at my time of greatest need, I was alone and afraid. I should not have ignored the pain and chosen to infinitely reschedule my doctor's appointments.

Those things, however, are now in the past. The pain was gone, I was still breathing and so I had hope. With this second lease on life, I was going to make life count. Make your life count. Take care of your health and leave your footprints on the sands of time, so someone can step on them into greatness.

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RISK FACTORS FOR HEART ATTACK

- Post-menopausal female
- Family history
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- High-fat diet
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Overweight or obesity
- Smoking

WAYS TO REDUCE RISK

- Smoking cessation
- Low-fat high-fibre diet (inclusive of fresh fruits and vegetables)
- Reduce salt and salty foods
- Reduce alcohol consumption
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Controlling chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol
- Take medications as prescribed
- Managing stress levels
- Keeping scheduled doctor's visits