

Editor's Note: "My Story" is a first-person column about health issues that touch New Albany community members. Have a story to share? Email gbishop@cityscenemediagroup.com. Submissions should be no more than 500 words.

In a Heartbeat

Living with atrial fibrillation isn't a breeze, but Rosalie Ungar doesn't skip a beat

I can't believe it. This year, I will turn 80 years old. What's more unbelievable to me is that I feel better mentally and physically than I have in more than 15 years.

Is aging gracefully working for me? Yes and no. I strive to thrive and survive. It takes energy and attitude, neither of which happens without effort. Atrial fibrillation has been with me for 35 years. More than 5 million people in the U.S. suffer from AFib. Projections show that, by the year 2030, more than 12 million will have it.

A heart attack woke me up. Discomfort from AFib was getting in my way. The only relief was the blood thinner warfarin and an anti-arrhythmia drug that worked about 90 percent of the time. The other 10 percent was a doozy.

Seventeen years ago, I had a heart attack while giving a speech to 25 people about heart-healthy foods. It happened in Omaha, Neb., while I was working as a regional sales manager for a food manufacturer. Imagine my horror when I felt a wrecking ball hitting my chest – from the inside. I knew exactly what was happening. At the hospital, I was told by the doctors that tests revealed this was not my first heart attack.

The question: Did I know it? I recalled some strong mid-chest discomfort a month prior. I was on a plane at the time and dismissed the pain as part of the AFib I had been suffering from for the past 20 years. It wasn't the AFib. I was told they weren't related.

At the hospital's ICU in Omaha, cardiologists did tests and a heart catheterization, and four days later I came back to Columbus with a DVD and a file of documents for my cardiologist at the The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.



Being no stranger to health issues since age 15, I had developed the attitude: "Okay, something else is in my way. Let the doctor fix that one, too." I knew nothing and relied on doctors for everything, not even questioning them. I took no part in my own health. Between 1998 and 2003, I had five surgeries.

I had to do something, take charge of my body. I knew to be able to do this, I needed to partner with my doctors and, from now on, be part of the cure.

Though none of my health problems are cured, they're managed through medications, procedures and ongoing visits with electrophysiologists, cardiologist, endocrinologists and pharmacologists. But most of all, diet and exercise make up my primary regimen.

Doctors at the OSU Wexner Medical Center and Ross Heart Hospital say that I have reversed all heart





damage caused by my heart attacks. I am told this is unusual. I chalk it up to diet, exercise, attitude and partnering with my doctors.

I have learned that knowing your body and what you put into it is key. Ask questions, especially if you don't understand the answers. Learn about your medications, why you are taking them,

Rosalie Ungar's doctors tell her that it's extraordinary to have reversed the heart damage caused by heart attacks. She tells them it's all thanks to diet, exercise and attitude.

how and when to take them, and their side effects.

My recent memoir, *In a Heartbeat: The Ups and Downs of Life with Atrial Fib*, tells my story from a patient's point

of view. It's available on Amazon, Kindle, Nook, kobo and iTunes and at Barnes & Noble, and locally available at Hayley Gallery in New Albany and the Book Loft in German Village.

Rosalie Ungar is the author of In a Heartbeat: The Ups and Downs of Life with Atrial Fib and No Sex in St. Tropez. She is a New Albany resident. Feedback welcome at gbishop@cityscenemediagroup.com.



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