

Our Story

The 26th April is always an important day for my family, it's my mum (Jackie's) birthday. It will now also be remembered as the most traumatic but miraculous day in our families lives for reasons, I am about to share. We hope this story inspires people to learn some of the key skills and information that our family benefitted from, from complete strangers, who are now our heroes and also helps people on similar journeys during the aftermath and recovery and how to manage the effects of living through such an event.

We had planned to go out for my Mum's birthday meal in Cheadle Hulme that Sunday 26th April, my dad (Paul) kindly agreed to picking me up so I could have a few celebratory drinks for the occasion. On the drive back to Cheadle Hulme, we were laughing as a family, the usual stuff, football, work, how long it took me to get ready. Then the day took a horrendous and traumatic turn with no warning signs. My Dad (who was driving) suddenly collapsed on to my Mum in the passenger seat and immediately became unconscious, the car then veered into the wrong side of the road and struck a bollard. Luckily there was no oncoming traffic on a usually busy route. My mind was trying to process what was happening and myself and my Mum were screaming for my dad to wake up. I immediately rang 999 from the backseat of the car and urgently shouted for assistance. We didn't know this at the time, but my dad had suffered a Cardiac Arrest.

My Mum managed to get out of the car to scream for help from bystanders, I was still stuck in the back, locked in, but on the phone to the emergency services. Luckily strangers who we previously had no connection with, jumped to help without hesitation. They got my dad out of the car and flat on to the pavement and then pulled me out of the back of the car. Incredibly, there were off duty Nurses and Doctors having their lunch on a Sunday afternoon in a restaurant opposite where the incident was unfolding, who immediately ran out to help us and started to deliver CPR. Without this help, the story I am now telling could have ended very differently. A more familiar face to my family, and a real hero of this story along with the CPR givers, Tesco Staff and emergency services, is Laura, who works at the restaurant and who I grew up with, nearby. In a frantic situation where none of us could think straight, she took over to calm me and my Mum down and ran for more assistance and to flag down any more immediate help. Laura's knowledge of where the Defibrillators are located in the local area also played a vital role in the ending of this story, one which me and my family are forever grateful.

After complications in attempting to secure the device located at the Methodist Church, the Tesco Express staff gave Laura and the off-duty nurses the AED device which is stored in their shop. Bearing in mind this all happened within 4 or 5 minutes, it's incredibly lucky that with this coordinated effort, it gave my dad a fighting chance in what I now know are incredibly difficult odds.

After what felt like hours but was only 6 minutes, an ambulance and an air ambulance arrived, and the paramedics then continued the work on my dad. One of the paramedics then kindly took me and my mum away from the scene to protect us from seeing further images that we still can't get out of our minds. After 5 charges of the Tesco defibrillator and 2 charges of the device brought from the Ambulance, Laura and my uncle then came to inform me and my Mum that my dad had come around and was talking again.

Those moments of being with my Mum, hugging and crying with her were the most horrendous of my life but we were incredibly fortunate to have my dad conscious again. At the time we didn't know what the journey we had ahead of us would look like, but the main priority was now to get my dad to the best place to recover. He has no recollection of the event at all, but it gave me comfort that he was immediately asking, 'where is Jackie?' and then 'where is Nick?'.

It was then decided that my dad would be taken to Wythenshawe Hospital Coronary Care ward for thorough tests and to determine the cause and recovery steps. As my Mum went to change

quickly with my uncle and auntie, I went in the ambulance with my dad, who incredibly after everything that happened, was talking as normal. He was slightly dazed and confused, but we were chatting about what had happened and jokingly saying we were going to see Marcus Rashford in Wythenshawe. (I obviously downplayed the event to him and eluded that he had just taken a fall, due to fear of it happening again. We also didn't disclose that an Air Ambulance came to him until a couple of days later when we knew he was stable).

I can't speak highly enough of the emergency staff, Laura, the off-duty nurses and doctors, and Tesco staff who helped with their coordinated effort, they all saved my dad's life with their actions and quick thinking, and my family will be forever grateful.

The journey we have been on as a family started that day and only 1 in 10 cardiac arrests that occur out of hospital result in survival. The chances are even slimmer if the person suffering the cardiac arrest is driving a vehicle at that time. We still can't believe how lucky we are. After 10 days in Wythenshawe Hospital, being looked after by the incredible staff there, my dad was fitted with a CRT-D device to help his heartbeat more coordinated and to protect against dangerous heart rhythms happening again. It is a similar device to what the footballers Christian Eriksen and Fabrice Muamba had fitted, both stories have also been very useful to raise awareness.

The road to recovery has been incredibly difficult, with challenges with shoulder pain after the device was fitted, fatigue and tiredness, conflicting information on what you can and cannot do with a device fitted and the lack of formal follow ups once you are discharged. The care received whilst in hospital was absolutely amazing, but once you leave, the recovery process can feel isolating as me and my Mum sought help from all avenues doing our best. That's why it is extremely important to support charities like NW Hearts Charity who run the ICD Support Group. Without organisations like this, you can't learn vital information, receive vital support and compare notes with other families who have gone through similar traumatic incidents. Charities like NW Hearts Charity are paramount in navigating the post cardiac arrests challenges.

6 months on from the incident, we are doing a lot better and are now a lot brighter as we navigate the new normal. My dad is doing so well, and I am incredibly proud of him and my mum. He has reached recent major milestones including going out to the pub for a meal as a family, getting back to going to football after missing the end of last season (though the results haven't been great), gardening and walking. My dad has missed driving but is looking forward to driving again in a couple of months and has had a great deputy chauffer in myself to take him round.

We have learned so much as a family and are now extremely passionate about raising awareness about CPR training, knowing where your nearest defibrillator is, PTSD support and any other key learnings. If our story helps at least one person to get the chance my dad got, it will be great that a positive has come from such a traumatic episode.

We have also been incredibly lucky with support received from friends and family who have also taken a keen interest in raising awareness. We also recognise that it is not just the patient who suffers from such incidents, but loved ones who see it all unfold do as well, which is why we are extremely passionate also, about guiding people to the right support they need. Me and my mum are in a much better place now after having anxiety and panic attacks over the summer. I don't think what we saw will ever leave us, but how we manage that has got a lot better. Again, if our story helps people to share and speak up, help is always out there and speaking from experience things do get easier to manage.

We are incredibly grateful for charities like NW Hearts Charity, and we hope you get the help and support you if you are going through your own similar journey.

Thanks for reading,
Nick

