



Vacationer saved by Maui police officer

Don McQuinn's Story

Without that machine, I was gone. I was finished. It was over.

Playing water volleyball in a hotel pool Don McQuinn suddenly went face down in cardiac arrest. Quick-thinking friends administered CPR to no apparent avail. His doctors later called it ventricular tachycardia. Don called it “lights out.”

“My friends had been kidding me about making the young guys look bad,” Don McQuinn said. “I said, you know, I’m old but I’m not dead yet. And within 10 seconds I was. I went up, they tell me, to spike a ball and came down face down in the pool.”

Few people expected such a thing to happen to Don, a self-described “ne’er-do-well grandfather,” a former Marine and a tough man who blew stress tests “out of the tub.” At 68, as vigorous as ever, enjoying success as a novelist, Don walked three miles on most days and swam often.

Don never had any symptoms

He also lifted weights and got regular checkups that showed him he was in excellent health. His cholesterol was low. His family showed some history of heart problems, but Don never had any symptoms.

Then came the water volleyball game he will remember for the rest of his life. After 15 minutes of CPR, a policeman arrived with an automated external defibrillator. The officer had only recently been trained with the defibrillator and had never used it in an emergency.

Placed on his chest, the defibrillator automatically analyzed his heart rhythm and instructed the police officer to deliver the single shock that brought McQuinn back to life. One shock was all it took.

The policeman used the defibrillator for the first time

“Without that machine I was finished,” Don said. “The policeman used the thing for the first time, so I have to think it’s foolproof. It’s reading what’s going on in there and telling the guy.”

“That’s the miracle of it,” said his wife, Carol, “because if the machine doesn’t read that it’s a real cardiac arrest, it will not go off.”

After a brief recovery period and even more ribbing from friends, Don returned to life as usual—with some changes. These

days, he’s cut down on drinking, though he still visits bars to talk with friends. He’s working on his 10th novel and still attending writers’ conferences. The thing he’s most grateful for in life is the fact that he has it.

“I think I’ve grown a little more introspective, a little more sensitive,” Don says. “And I know from my own reactions I’ve become more sympathetic. I think my emotions are perhaps a little more closer to the surface than they ever were in my life before.”

“I don’t feel that I’m supposed to do anything except take very close account of my own life now. That’s what it’s all about. I enjoy the hell out of being alive, and I intend to work at it as long as I can draw a breath.”

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Printed in The Netherlands.
4522 962 94601 * APR 2013