

# Surviving a Heart Attack: Sharon Cotterman Tells Her Story



Sixty-one-year-old Sharon Cotterman of Kansas City woke up at 2:30 a.m. on the morning of November 15, 2000, feeling nauseated and hot. She and her husband Brant were visiting friends in Palm Desert, and they had been out to dinner the previous evening. "It's probably something I ate last night," she told herself, as she walked to the bathroom to try to vomit.

Returning to bed a few minutes later, she tried to get back to sleep. But she was uncomfortable and she felt restless. There was also a strange tightness in her chest. Finally, at 6:30 a.m., she went back to the bathroom to try to vomit again. This time when she stood up, she knew something was terribly wrong. She turned to her husband and said, "Brant, I really don't feel good." And with that she collapsed into his arms.

Brant frantically called 911, and within minutes the paramedics arrived. They put Sharon on a stretcher, and raced her to Eisenhower's Emergency Department (ED), calling ahead to alert the ED that they had a life-threatening situation. "On the way to Eisenhower Medical Center," Sharon recalls, "I couldn't move, and I couldn't talk. But I remember the paramedics yelling, 'We're losing her; we're losing her.'"

Once in the Emergency Department, Sharon remembers being raced down a long hallway with her husband running along side trying to kiss her. "The next thing I knew, I woke up in the cardiac cath lab." [Ed. Note: A cardiac catheterization, or cath, lab is a room equipped with radiology equipment where a catheter is inserted into the heart to obtain information about the coronary arteries.] "There were nurses around me and Dr. Lê was there," Sharon continues. "I said to the nurses, 'Who's that young man?' And the nurses replied, 'That's the man who saved your life.'"

Khôi M. Lê, MD, a Board Certified Interventional Cardiologist at the Desert Cardiology Center located on the Eisenhower Medical Center campus, remembers that morning. He had just finished another procedure in the cath lab when Sharon was brought in at 7:54 a.m. "She was immediately cleaned and prepped," Dr. Lê says, "and we started the case at 8:03 a.m., nine minutes after she was brought into the cath lab. The first thing we did was put in a pacemaker because her heart rate was too slow. It was down in the 30s. By 8:07 a.m., the pacemaker was in, and her heart rate was in the 60s. Then we took pictures of her coronary arteries. We knew she was having a heart attack. We just had to confirm which vessel was involved. We found that she had 100 percent blockage of the right coronary artery."

By 8:15 a.m., only 21 minutes after her arrival, Dr. Lê and the cath lab team had the vessel open with normal blood flow restored. "Everybody exhaled at that point," Dr. Lê says. He then put in a stent to make sure that area remained stable and didn't close back up again. "The stent was in at 8:25 a.m.," Dr. Lê says. "So, essentially, the case was done at that point." Not only did the timely procedure save Sharon's life, the speed with which it was done prevented Sharon's heart from sustaining any lasting damage. "We're incredibly blessed at Eisenhower to have an exemplary cath lab crew," asserts Dr. Lê. "The nurses and technologists are smart, reliable, and caring individuals who work together extremely efficiently."

Sharon was not an obvious candidate for a heart attack. She was, in fact, in perfect health with excellent blood chemistry and no history of heart disease in her family. Her parents had lived into their 90s. Furthermore, she had just had a complete physical, including a stress test, at home in Kansas City, and had passed with flying colors. "At no time that morning did I think I was having a heart attack," Sharon says. "On the way to the hospital, my chest began to hurt, and I remember complaining about that, but even then I didn't think it was a heart attack."

Today, Sharon and Brant spend the winter at their home in Palm Desert. "We moved here because I wanted to be near Dr. Lê and Eisenhower Medical Center and the excellent medical care that they provide," Sharon says.

Sharon—now 65 years old—exercises six days a week. "For a long time after my heart attack, I was afraid to do anything," she says. "And Brant was always tense about letting me go out alone." To ease his fears, Brant bought an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) unit and completed a training course in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and AED use. Brant was the first person in Kansas City trained to use AED—not in a medical field—for personal use.

"I think he still has some fear," Sharon continues. "Overall, though, I feel great, and I really do owe it all to Dr. Lê and Eisenhower Medical Center."

Reflecting on that November morning, Dr. Lê notes, "If Sharon had not been brought immediately to Eisenhower Medical Center, she probably wouldn't have survived. I'm glad we were here and prepared," he continues. "Of all the things you can do and feel good about yourself at the end of the day, this is right up there at the top."