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Matters of the heart are important to Cheryl Hatfield and her daughter Laine Berry, Mrs. Arkansas International 2005 and Womens Inc 2006 Volunteer Woman of the Year, in many ways. Together, they have touched many and saved many lives. They hope to save many more.

With Cheryl's warm smile and trim physique, there is no hint of the serious health problems that nearly claimed her life and shook her family just a few years ago. Not only did the events of 2000 change Cheryl's life forever, they would profoundly impact Laine and her path.

### **Symptoms Appear**

Cheryl, mindful of her health, ate right and exercised. She and her family had always enjoyed good health.

That was until 1999

Cheryl knew something was wrong when she developed problems sleeping and experienced fatigue and depression.

"I never considered for a moment I'd have heart disease." She said.

Each symptom was treated, but Cheryl still suspected that something "wasn't right" for nearly a year. In early 2000, symptoms worsened.

"My blood pressure started to rise and get dangerously high. I even spent one night in the hospital," Cheryl said. "But because I didn't look like a heart disease patient, and I didn't have classic symptoms, it was not considered a problem."

As her symptoms worsened, Cheryl grew weaker. Something had to be done. “My husband went to the doctor with me, and in his man voice said ‘Do something.’ He saved my life.”

### **Finally a Diagnosis**

Although other tests on her heart had not turned up anything, the family physician ordered an arteriogram which revealed Cheryl’s heart was in distress.

“We found that, at age 48, my heart was in severe jeopardy,” said Cheryl.

Three days later, Cheryl underwent heart surgery for a triple bypass. The location of the blockage in her heart is typically referred to as “the widow maker” in men.



“As a family, we learned what heart disease looks like in women, and how easily it is misdiagnosed, and missed,” Cheryl said.

### **Getting Involved**

Laine still recalls how grave her mother’s condition was during her stay in the critical care unit. “I thought this shouldn’t be happening to anyone’s 48 year old mother. At that moment, I thought, ‘I’ve got to get involved’.”

After her mother left the hospital, Laine contacted the American Heart Association to see how she could get involved. For the past eight years, Laine has served as both a state and national spokesperson for the heart association.

Cheryl considers it a blessing to have an articulate activist as a daughter. Laine adds that her cause is a “woman’s right to live.”

“I’ve put many miles on my car for the Heart Association,” quips Mrs. Arkansas. “It’s a full time job that I do in my spare time. It’s my passion in life. This is really why I get up every day.”

Cheryl adds, “Can you imagine how loved it makes me feel?”

With a smile and a hug for her mother Laine replies “She’s my best friend.”

Now Laine’s closet is full of red ensembles, several for every season of the year. Also, she has collected quite a few heart shaped pins.

“I call myself a crusader. I’ve taken up this banner, and with it I’ve gone into battle,” Laine said. “I don’t care if you don’t like what I have to say, it’s the truth.”

Laine has also founded [Taking Wellness to Heart](http://www.takingwellnesstoheart.org), which is focused on women and educating them about heart disease. (For more information visit [www.takingwellnesstoheart.org](http://www.takingwellnesstoheart.org)).

The not-for-profit organization works locally to increase awareness and provide financial resources to purchase defibrillators for places like local athletic facilities and public schools. Each unit costs about \$1,800. To date, [Taking Wellness to Heart](http://www.takingwellnesstoheart.org) has placed over 30 units.

According to Cheryl, it is common sense to have defibrillators in public places. Both women know firsthand how important the devices can be. They lost a friend at a sports center when he went into cardiac arrest while exercising. A defibrillator might have saved his life.

### **Scary Statistics**

Since her mother's surgery, Laine has spent much time and energy learning all she can about heart disease.

Prior to 1993 women were not routinely included in heart disease research, according to Laine, and as a result their symptoms are often incorrectly compared to those that a man experiences.

“Women's heart disease doesn't fit into the heart disease guide,” she said.

Cheryl shared how a friend suffering classic symptoms of a woman with heart disease was told by a health care provider that she was suffering from reflux, and was sent home. Fortunately, the women persisted and her heart disease was detected in time.

According to Laine, heart disease claims the lives of 1,500 women each day. “That's almost as many lives as we lost in the Twin Towers, but nobody knows,” she said.

“Heart disease kills more of us (women) and is quicker than with men,” Cheryl said. “A higher percentage of women than men will die from a first heart attack.”

Cheryl and Laine have different thoughts on why heart disease goes undetected and why women seem less concerned about the illness. Cheryl believes when women seek medical care there is a tendency to suspect hormones or another female reason. Laine thinks “appearance” is a reason that more women aren't talking about heart disease.

“Heart disease patients don't look ill. If we don't see it, we don't talk about it, and we ignore it. This has been a blind spot in our society. We don't think women have heart disease,” she said.



One mistake women make is waiting until they are 40 or older before having their cholesterol checked. Laine recommends women in their 20s and 30s because the damage from heart disease can start at a young age.

Both women think the best way to spread the word about heart disease is through grassroots efforts- women talking to other women. Laine said if one woman hears the message and acts on it, the efforts have been worthwhile. Her message is clear, “Know you own body and be your own advocate.”

### **Enjoying Life**

Although she has made a full recovery, heart disease has changed Cheryl’s life.

“Once you have a disease that you live with, you are always conscious of your body, what you are putting in it and how you are treating it. You are very conscious of your beating heart and how precious and fragile it is.”

Cheryl is also more aware of others, what they are eating and whether they are exercising. “I don’t want them to have their chest cut open and go through the anxiety of having a sick heart.”

Many things have happened in Cheryl’s life the past four years, events she would have missed had her heart disease continued to go undetected. Their church constructed a new building. Her other daughter, Leigh, married and has just given birth to her first child. There have been family get-togethers, holidays and vacation. And Laine has travelled the nation speaking to a broad forum about Heart Disease and Women.

“Seeing the life I’ve lived the last eight years is overwhelming. I would have missed a lot,” Cheryl said. “Life is so much more precious.”