



“EVERY TIME SOMEONE LOOKS AT MY MEDICAL CHART, THEY TELL ME THAT I’M LUCKY TO BE ALIVE,” SAYS JEANNE ARNOLD, 52, OF NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, TEXAS. IN LATE JANUARY 2009, ARNOLD HAD EMERGENCY SURGERY AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER AT DALLAS FOR AN AORTIC DISSECTION.

In recounting her experience, Arnold relates a string of unusual circumstances that conspired in her favor to get her to Baylor Dallas in the early hours of January 27. The series of circumstances included an astute doctor in the local hospital’s emergency room, an ice storm that left many closer hospitals short staffed and unable to take Arnold’s case, and the fact that Baylor Dallas had the surgical team in place to perform the surgery she urgently needed.

GETTING TO BAYLOR DALLAS

Arnold was eating dinner with her sister and her sister’s family when she felt a searing pain in her chest. Her sister’s family insisted she go to the local emergency room, although she didn’t want to, thinking it might be heartburn. “I really thought that it wasn’t anything very serious. I kept thinking, it can’t be anything really bad,” recalls Arnold, who is extremely active – she works out, runs and competes regularly in tennis tournaments.

The hospital monitored and tested her for a few hours

while the pain persisted, and then the ER doctor ordered a CAT scan, which is when the aortic dissection was discovered. An aortic dissection occurs when there is a split in the inner wall of the aorta, the major artery from the heart.

Seven hospitals were contacted; none of them could take Arnold’s case, either because they didn’t perform the necessary surgery or because the ice storm prevented them from pulling a team together. Baylor Dallas was able to take her.

“I didn’t fully understand my condition, but I did know that it was critical and life threatening,” Arnold says. “It was my extreme good fortune to be taken to Baylor Dallas. I feel like everything that could have gone wrong in my body did, but all of the circumstances that could have gone right to fix me also did, even the ice storm.”

Arnold had a contained rupture that required an extremely delicate operation that lasted for over eight hours. In order to not touch or disturb anything, surgeons

A physician’s greatest strength is to see every patient as a unique case, and to not perform cookie cutter procedures – each patient is different, says Baron L. Hamman, M.D.



performed the bypass by going on the heart lung machine through a leg artery. The heart and lungs are protected during surgery using a heart lung machine, but in this case, the precarious nature of the operation prevented any instrumentation or manipulation in the chest other than addressing the weakened and torn aorta.

REGIONAL REFERRAL CENTER

What isn’t unusual is that Arnold found the care she needed at Baylor Dallas, which is a regional referral center for high-risk and difficult cardiac cases.

Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor Jack and Jane Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital, located on the Dallas campus, offer a full complement of heart and vascular services, including cardiac bypass and interventional cardiology. Baylor Dallas has a long history of excellence in cardiovascular surgery. Surgeons on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas have often been the first in North Texas to adopt advances in surgical techniques and

have popularized, refined or pioneered several techniques that make cardiovascular surgery more effective. Ongoing research continually leads to new ways to diagnose and treat heart and vascular conditions.

“Baylor is a good place to be if you have a heart problem,” says Arnold. “From the moment I arrived at Baylor, I felt well cared for – from the surgery and the nurses during my recovery, even to the housekeeping staff. I’m really grateful.”

In a rapidly evolving field like cardiovascular surgery, being at the forefront requires more than experience and expertise with advanced techniques. Physicians must have the drive and commitment to patient care to constantly push for ways to improve on the latest techniques, according to Baron L. Hamman, M.D., chief of cardiothoracic surgery and a physician on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital. A physician’s greatest strength is to

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