



## Eliz Greene's First Person Story of Surviving a Heart Attack while Pregnant with Twins

*(Eliz is pronounced e-liz as in e-mail)*

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### **Being pregnant with twins was not the easy road I anticipated.**

As a dancer and an active person, I expected to dance and work right up to my due date. Yet the challenge of keeping up with two babies proved too much for my body. By the third month of my pregnancy I was put on bed rest. When I was six months pregnant I went into the hospital due to pre-term labor.

Doctors were able to stop my labor, but I had to stay in the hospital for the rest of the pregnancy. There I stayed, quietly laying on my left. With the babies taking up more and more room and eating my meals in a reclined position, heartburn was a constant companion. So when heart burn struck as I finished my shower one Sunday morning, I wasn't too concerned.

However, five minutes later I was in real pain. Fortunately, I was in the right place, St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Milwaukee, a very good hospital with a NICU and a cardiac unit. Some people might say that I was unlucky, but actually, I think I had all the luck. Except for having a heart attack, everything else went my way that day.

I was in a hospital and received very high quality care immediately, had I been at home the girls and I would not have survived. My High Risk ObGyn just happened to be at the nurse's station and was at my side within minutes of my symptoms starting. She and a team of professionals were already in my room when I had a cardiac arrest.

I was without a pulse for ten minutes, but received oxygen and CPR immediately. The cardiologist on call arrived moments after my arrest and was able to shock my heart back into rhythm. After I was stabilized, he took me to the Cardiac Catheterization Lab and diagnosed the problem.

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My Left Anterior Descending Cardiac Artery had spontaneously dissected. The dissection continued down several branches of the artery, making it impossible to fix in the cath lab with stents.

My only option was bypass surgery. The doctors discussed several options and decided my best chance of survival was to deliver the babies by C-section then immediately do the bypass. They were sure the babies would be fine. Even though they would be 7 weeks early, the babies were big and had been treated with steroids earlier to help develop their lungs.

However, the doctors were not too sure about me. They were confident I would not survive a traditional bypass using the heart lung machine, which requires the blood to be thinned to such an extent that they believed I would bleed to death from the c-section.

Fortunately, my wonderful surgeon is a pioneer of the beating heart bypass. He uses a special instrument to stabilize small sections of the heart so he can stitch on a beating heart. It is never stopped. So, moments after our girls were delivered in the Cardiac Operating Suite, my heart surgery began, and my poor husband spent 5 hours contemplating raising two daughters on his own.

When I came out of surgery, someone told me I had twin girls. We didn't know the sex of the babies beforehand and until my absolutely beaming husband, Clay, came to the ICU and showed me pictures of the girls I didn't know if it was true or if I'd dreamed it because I really wanted girls. You've never seen a Dad more in love with his daughters; of course he was pretty happy to see me too.

Today, I am healthy and happy to be raising my daughters with my dedicated and loving husband. The girls were totally unaffected by the events of the day of their birth, other than being born a little earlier than we would have liked. They are beautiful, healthy and energetic girls.

When I woke up that day in the ICU, I knew I'd been given this story for a reason. The past ten years with my family is a gift, a gift I work hard not to take for granted. Working with other busy people to improve heart health, reduce stress, and increase the zest in life is my way of giving back for that gift.

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