

INSPIRING HOPE

Courtney Williams - "I am thankful for all the obstacles I have been able to overcome".

As a baby, I was diagnosed with pulmonary aortic stenosis at 6 months old. That was the beginning of a long journey living with a Congenital Heart Defect.



I had my first open heart surgery at the age of 4 and a second open heart surgery at 10. Both of these procedures were done to help widen my aortic and pulmonary valves until I was old enough to have them replaced. **As a child I wanted to be like everyone else and I did not let my heart condition control my life!!** At the age of seventeen, my heart was weak and the doctors decided it was time for my third open heart surgery. During that surgery, they replaced my aorta with a mechanical valve. I got extremely sick following that surgery but I recovered enough to have my fourth open heart surgery that replaced my tricuspid valve with another mechanical valve only a few months later. Such was my life as a child!!

I went on to college at The Ohio State University and got my Master's degree in teaching. A few years into teaching, I started to notice that it was harder for me to climb the steps at school. I went in for another appointment and was told I needed to have a fifth open heart surgery to replace my pulmonary valve in hopes to improve the right side of my heart which was failing. During this surgery, the doctors implanted an **Internal Cardiac Device (ICD)** to protect me against irregular heartbeats that could stop my heart. It had been ten years since my last surgery and I then learned that you cannot predict the future, especially when you are born with a congenital heart defect. This was the hardest surgery for me because as an adult I realized the risks of a procedure like this and had so much to live for.

After making it through my *fifth open heart procedure*, my ICD was recalled and later broke. It was then that I was faced with a new journey. I had two additional ICD's implanted which resulted in infections and needed to be removed. The second infection caused an abscess on my aortic valve. I was sent to the Cleveland Clinic to have a sixth open heart surgery. There they replaced my aortic and pulmonary valves (again) with tissue valves in hopes that the infection would not return. After 32 days in the hospital I was able to come home and begin to enjoy my life again. Several months later, after my heart had healed and my infection was gone. I went back for a fourth ICD to protect me from dangerous arrhythmias, however, within two weeks that device failed and it needed to be replaced. I immediately had my fifth ICD surgery because I did not want to take a chance after everything I had just gone through.

At this point, I live my life day to day and **I am thankful for all the obstacles I have been able to overcome.** I do not know what tomorrow will bring but I have faith that research and medicine will give me a way to live at least another 32 wonderful years.

If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to Courtney about living with heart disease, her contact information is listed below!

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It is great to be alive – and to help others