



# Survivor story



## **Mark Wendruff, 64, London**

Looking into the eyes of a young grandchild is a special thing for any grandparent. For Mark Wendruff it is extra special.

Mark very nearly missed out on even seeing his grandchildren born, his children get married and the host of other wonderful experiences of the last 18 years.

A 46-year-old fit and healthy Mark was leaving his office on a chilly December morning in 1994 when without warning he collapsed with sudden cardiac arrest.

Thankfully for Mark, a paramedic with an AED on board his vehicle was a short distance away and a colleague he was with administered CPR until help arrived.



Mark went on to make a remarkable recovery after having an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) fitted in his chest.

Here he tells Arrhythmia Alliance how his second chance made him appreciate life even more and shaped his views about the vital need for defibrillators in public places.

“When I think of all the things I have been able to do in the last 18 years I realise just how lucky I am,” says Mark Wendruff.

Mark knows he beat the odds - having survived sudden cardiac arrest and going on to live a full and happy life. But he is also well aware things could have been very different.

Like many others who suffer sudden cardiac arrest, Mark had no warning signs at all.

“It was 100%, completely out of the blue,” Mark recalls.

“I had not had any problems previously. I wasn’t a regular gym goer but I was active and healthy.

***‘I had absolutely no warning signs’***

“I was leaving the office that day, feeling fine and then ‘bang’, the lights just went out. No warning at all.”

A passer-by spotted Mark and alerted a colleague inside the office who quickly phoned an ambulance.

Thankfully for Mark, his colleague, knew CPR and began working on him almost immediately. Around eight minutes later, the paramedic arrived and administered a shock with a portable automated external defibrillator (AED) bringing Mark’s heart back into rhythm.

An ambulance crew joined soon after and worked on Mark for half an hour

“I owe my life to them,” says Mark. “They kept me alive.

“It was a combination of my workmate’s CPR, the paramedic Russell’s quick arrival and the AED that saved me that day.

***‘I owe my life to the AED that saved me’***

“If it wasn’t for all of those things and the way everything just came together, I would not be here.”

Like many sudden cardiac arrest survivors, Mark’s memory of the day was completely erased and he relied upon others to fill in the blanks once he recovered.

He regained consciousness the day after his collapse and four weeks later had an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) fitted. Just over a week after that Mark left hospital.

“The device is incredible. I have gone into cardiac arrest twice since I had it fitted and it has done its job and saved my life.

“I have had a couple of replacements, which is standard, and the device is now monitored remotely so doctors can see what is going on 24/7. But other than that life goes on and I am back to how I was.”

Though separated by almost two decades, Mark’s experience parallels that of the footballer Fabrice Muamba very closely and seeing his story play out in March 2012 resonated deeply with him.

“Seeing what happened to Fabrice Muamba brought everything back into focus again for me.

***‘It’s a travesty so many people are dying when we have this technology’***

“He collapsed without warning like I did and again, he was lucky enough that there was an AED available at the stadium and he had the right medical people around him.

“But again it was chance. What if he had been somewhere there hadn’t been a defibrillator, just like many people who don’t make it?

“It’s amazing that Fabrice survived but it makes me quite angry to think that all this time on nothing has really changed – it was still chance that Fabrice was in the right place at the right time – just like I was. But it shouldn’t be anything to do with chance.

“These AEDs need to be everywhere, I cannot stress that enough. Something must be done to get these devices in every community.

“There is often no warning. Sudden cardiac arrest can hit anyone at any age – I was 46, Fabrice was in his 20s and there are young children collapsing and dying.

***‘It’s great to see Hearts & Goals getting more AEDs in communities’***

“It’s a travesty that so many people are dying every year and yet we have the technology to help prevent many of these.”

As the years go by Mark’s views get stronger and stronger as he knows every day is a gift – a gift many others have not had.

“I know how lucky I am and I am so thankful for everything – being able to see my children get married, my grandkids growing up.

“It’s sobering to think that I could have missed out on all that – and sadly many others do. This has to change.

“It’s so great to see campaigns like Hearts & Goals getting more of these lifesaving devices into communities.”