

I woke up the morning of March 10, 2011, with what I thought was a bad migraine. I got in the shower and started to get ready for work. I am a kindergarten teacher. I had to at least get the kids (then ages 11, 9 and 6) up and off to school. Somehow I got dressed and made it down to the kitchen with the kids. As I was walking to the refrigerator, I felt dizzy and sat down at the desk. My daughter asked if I was okay and I told her I just had a headache and would be fine. Then I felt nauseous. I don't remember how I got to the bathroom, but managed to do so and began vomiting uncontrollably. The room was spinning. My daughter told me it was almost time to leave and I told her to get the boys ready and get in the car. I guess I could go without breakfast today. She told me I was not making sense; I was too sick to drive and she would not let the boys get in the car with me. She asked me if she should call 911 and I told her not to---it was just a headache. I don't remember much else.



My daughter did call my mom. She told my mom that I had never been sick like this before and that I couldn't go to work. She told my mom that she and the boys were ready for school and that they could wait and take the bus instead of being dropped off on my way to work. My mom drove over as soon as she could, a little frightened, but still thinking it was a bad migraine. As my mom turned onto our street, she saw the kids at the bus stop in the rain. As the bus pulled up, my daughter told my mom that I was on the bathroom floor and that I was talking funny.

I do not remember any of this happening. I could not move my body or feel anything on one side. Apparently I had repeatedly told my daughter NOT to call 911, because I thought I was fine---it was just a headache. My mom immediately called 911 when she saw me and the paramedics were there within minutes. I spent the next week in the hospital.

I was initially brought to the stroke unit at our local hospital. They began treating me for stroke like symptoms. My breathing was labored and I was intubated. I also had CT and MRI scans, blood work, chest x-rays, EKG's, and a spinal tap. They told my husband that I did not have a stroke and they moved me from the ER to a room on the neurology ward. I continued to be in severe pain and lost consciousness a few more times while in the hospital. They kept running tests and telling my husband that everything was fine.

After a week in the hospital I was discharged to go home and was told that I had complex migraines and that I should look into getting some psychiatric therapy if life was "too much" for me. I still had a headache and I was also very weak---I could not walk without having help. My husband and my parents were surprised that I was being sent home in this condition with no real answers about what happened.

On March 21<sup>st</sup> I turned 40. The best birthday present for me came two days later when I met with a neurologist that my best friend had recommended. He spent 2 ½ hours with me and went over all of my tests---not just reading the reports, but actually looking at the scans. That's when he saw it.

My right vertebral artery had dissected due to a rare arterial disease called fibromuscular dysplasia (FMD). He showed me the CT scan. My vertebral and carotid arteries looked like strings of beads. He also told me that I was very lucky. I may not have had a full blown stroke, but I did have a "mini-stroke" or transient ischemic attack. I was misdiagnosed at the hospital and lucky to be alive. I was also lucky to have found a doctor that had actually heard of this rare disease called fibromuscular dysplasia. Later testing also showed FMD in my renal arteries as well.

My name is Tracey Conard. I have a wonderful family, and now they all know how and when to call 911. I am no longer teaching kindergarten, but I am alive. After seven months, my dissected vertebral artery has healed. But I will always have FMD.