

# Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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*Thoughts  
from  
Dr. Amy*

**Dr. Amy Doneen,  
DNP, ARNP**

It's February. And that means it's once again American Heart Month. While every month is 'heart month' at the Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention Center, I'm pleased to see a vital national focus placed on heart health each year. As you know, awareness is crucial to saving lives!

During February we're also celebrating the one year anniversary of publishing *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*, a book I co-wrote with Bradley Bale, MD and Lisa Collier Cool. Already in its fourth printing, the book continues to be a best seller in the Genetics category on Amazon.com.

I'm excited to tie both themes together in this edition of the Heart Talk newsletter by bringing you update interviews with five of the exceptional women featured in our book. Keep reading to hear from Katharina Friehe, Sue Dills, Camile Zaleski, Lauralee Nygaard, and Juli Townsend. All are sure to inspire!

Finally, thank you for your continued interest in your own health and well-being by reading Heart Talk News!

*~ Amy*

## Dr. Amy's Interviews with Five Inspiring Women

Many of you have already met these amazing women in the pages of *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*. Dr. Amy interviews each of them in Feb. 2015 and presents their updates below.

**Note:** Page numbers after names relate to where their stories begin in *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*.

### Katharina Friehe—see pg. 151

*Katharina was 25 years old, traveling the world, not at all concerned about her vascular health until she learned that she had the arteries of a 55-year-old woman and genetic risk for diabetes and a heart attack.*



**Dr. Amy:** *You were 25 years old when you came through the clinic and first learned about your insulin resistance and genetic vascular risk. You have been able to treat your risk with lifestyle and avoid medications. How has this information been helpful to you?*

**Katharina:** Knowing that I was insulin re-

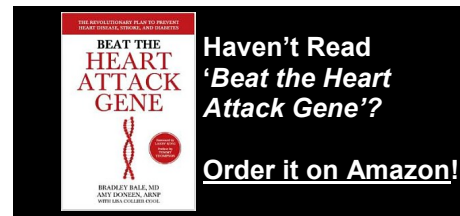
sistant at the age of 25 allowed me to be aware of the risk of gestational diabetes risk when I did decide to have a child. I was resistant at first to make lifestyle changes. I wanted to initially ignore the information.

**Dr. Amy:** *You now have a healthy baby boy, named Caleb who was born weighing a healthy 8 lbs. How did the knowledge you learned six years ago affect your pregnancy with Caleb?*

**Katharina:** I wasn't shocked with my diagnosis of gestational diabetes; I was prepared to handle it and I went through my pregnancy healthy and fit. I tried to stay active – love to run but can't run due to knee pain. I try to walk daily – once I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes, I was diligent to walk/get active at least 10 min after every meal and eat a healthy diet. Light activity – walking and being active.

**Dr. Amy:** *Is there anything you want young women to know about heart disease?*

**Katharina:** It was incredibly empowering to know that I did have genetic factors – knowledge is power! I try to educate people that just because you are young and feel invincible, things can go on underneath the surface and the best thing you can do is find out your true risk. If I had relied on the standard of care, I wouldn't have known how to STAY healthy.



## Dr. Amy's Interviews with Five Inspiring Women from *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*—cont.

### Sue Dills—see pg. 81

*Sue has always been an athlete, non-smoker and super-fit, yet she had high cholesterol. She was stunned to learn that she also had silent vascular disease.*



**Dr. Amy:** Sue, you are turning 70 years young this year and I know many are anticipating you may set a national record with your swimming. How is your training going?

**Sue:** Well, believe it or not, my swimming career has taken a bit of a backseat to a new

passion...ballroom dancing! I now dance 5-7 days a week while swimming is now down to 2-3 times per week. I absolutely love it. Jack and I are taking lessons and enjoying every minute of it!

**Dr. Amy:** I know how competitive you are — does dancing offer the same aerobic and competitive drive that you get with swimming?

**Sue:** Well...dancing is a GREAT exercise for the brain and body. It requires concentration, balance, breathing, and focus. It makes me smile! I will never stop swimming and I still plan to compete this year with aims to break the national record in swimming, but I encourage everyone to start dancing!

**Dr. Amy:** I bet it gives you a whole new appreciation for how easy the 'Dancing with the Stars' professionals make it look on the dance floor!

**Sue:** Oh most definitely. I am going to compete in an International Ballroom Competition in Banff, Alberta, Canada in the novice division in the Foxtrot, Waltz, Tango, West Coast Swing, Triple Swing, Country 2-Step, Country 3-Step, Country Shuffle, Salsa and the Cha-Cha!

**Dr. Amy:** What is more fun — shopping for a new swimsuit or a new dress for competition?

**Sue:** That's easy! For the novice group, we wear a long dress for the smooth dances and a short dress for the rhythm dances. I can't wait!

**Dr. Amy:** What other exercises do you incorporate into your daily routine?

**Sue:** Jack and I live on the 33<sup>rd</sup> floor of our building in Bellevue so we try to take the stairs as much as possible. Jack does them twice a day!

**Dr. Amy:** What do you want women to know about heart disease?

**Sue:** When I first came in for an evaluation, I didn't expect to be told I had vascular disease. I want women to know that it IS treatable. Now, 10 years later, I continue to live my life in optimal health — with vascular disease! You can have plaque in your arteries and never have a heart attack or stroke, as long as you are getting the right treatment. That is why I stay engaged in the clinic. I have too much living to do to have a stroke or a heart attack!

### Juli Townsend—see pg. 65

*Juli, a 37 year old mother of a toddler, was misdiagnosed twice with pneumonia. She was actually having a heart attack.*



**Dr. Amy:** Juli, you had a heart attack at age 37 and it was a complete shock. How are you doing now? What are you doing to stay healthy?

**Juli:** My life has been busy and I have been blessed with many challenges and changes.

Through it all, I continue to realize the big value of small changes. I try to eat healthy. I've completely cut out sugar as that seems to be a trigger for me. I have more energy and no sugar cravings in the middle of the night.

**Dr. Amy:** What has been the most important value of coming through the Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention Center?

**Juli:** Education! I know what caused my heart attack which means I can avoid another one! I am still shocked that women still really don't know that heart disease is the top killer of women. I feel like we are making headway but women don't know it yet.

**Dr. Amy:** We have talked a lot about stress. How do you manage it?

**Juli:** Stress is a huge factor for me (and I think a lot of women). I have learned that sitting quietly is OK. I have found peace with allowing myself to not have something scheduled every minute of the day. Being calm is something that takes practice and I'm

getting better at it.

**Dr. Amy:** How do you teach good health to your 5 year old daughter, Salah, who was 2 when you had your heart attack?

**Juli:** Matt and I make sure that she is aware of the importance of nutrition and exercise — letting her understand that food is for keeping her body healthy. We stress vegetables and proteins with each meal and often encourage her to participate in the planning of our meals. She eats candy of course, but she is probably the only 5 year old who asks for almonds to go with her M & M's to "balance them out." We also dance together and find ways to exercise as a family.

**Dr. Amy:** Many people think prevention is too expensive. How do you feel about that?

**Juli:** Yes, it does cost some money for prevention but I guarantee you, a heart attack costs more! It could even cost your life!

## Dr. Amy's Interviews with Five Inspiring Women from *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*—cont.

### Camille Zaleski—see pg. 6

*Just 40 years old, Camille couldn't believe she was having a heart attack when just months before she was told she had no risk and was healthy!*



*Dr. Amy: Camille, it has been over 10 years now since you have had your heart attack. How are you doing and what message would you like to share with others?*

**Camille:** Having heart disease can be managed — I'm living proof!! It has been over 10 years since my heart attack now. I had to make several lifestyle changes and it hasn't

always been easy, but it's been worth it. I am healthy and happy!

*Dr. Amy: What do you want women to learn from your story?*

**Camille:** When I went to the emergency room (ER) my symptoms were missed and ignored by a female nurse. Although my symptoms were "classic" symptoms by the time I arrived at the ER (chest pain, left arm pain), they did not start out that way. I felt something with my heart beat. I felt sick, but not like a flu, it's hard to describe. I thought it might be a panic attack, but it didn't feel like that really. I could feel inside something was wrong. I would emphasize to women, get to ER. Call 911. You are potentially risking your life. Get medical care. Don't second guess yourself!

*Dr. Amy: For those who have had a heart attack or stroke, what do you want them to understand?*

**Camille:** If you do have a cardiac event, afterwards, you have to take charge of your medical care. You need to know why you are on a course of treatment. If you don't know

why you had a heart attack or stroke how can you prevent it from happening again? If your doctor cannot explain it to you, get another doctor! The information is in the book, "*Beat the Heart Attack Gene*." Read it! Insist on the care you deserve!

*Dr. Amy: Camille, you and I have talked over the last decade about 'being healthy no matter what size you are.' What advice do you have for women who have struggled with weight most of their life?*

**Camille:** I am not size two, nor will I ever be. Being healthy and happy is not about a size or weight. I have had many exercise and nutrition goals over the last 10 years. Some I've met, some I've fallen short on, and others I've missed completely. Whatever happens, never ever give up. Do not beat yourself up for falling short on a goal. Reevaluate daily if needed, what goals can you realistically handle today, then push yourself to be just a little better. Walk five minutes more, try to work in one more serving of fruits or vegetables, drink one more glass of water.

### Lauralee Nygaard—see pg. 37

*Lauralee suffered a stroke at the age of 37 and was told the cause was 'unknown.' Inflammation due to gum disease, her dental specialty, was one of the drivers of her risk.*



*Dr. Amy: Lauralee, your message of education conveys your personal and professional life daily. You are always been so gracious to share your own stroke story with your patients.*

**Lauralee:** I want people to know that you don't have to be afraid of heart disease.

Learning why I had vascular disease and understanding the genetics gave me peace of mind — gave me hope — it wasn't the end, but the beginning. My goal is to live to be at least 100. Don't let disease define your destiny.

*Dr. Amy: Professionally, how has your stroke affected your practice?*

**Lauralee:** As a periodontist, I tell my patients that they have to decide what is important to them. A healthy mouth makes for a healthy brain and a healthy heart. I talk about inflammation differently than I did before. Vascular disease has become a foundational pillar of my periodontal practice. I have created educated employees and educated patients. It is safe to say that my team is "passionately enthusiastic" about educating our patients about the oral/systemic inflammatory connection. I am open about my own gum disease and vascular disease with my patients and I think that honesty helps them understand its importance.

*Dr. Amy: You are a mom of two teenagers. How do you talk to your children about your stroke? How do you bring your healthy lifestyle into your home?*

**Lauralee:** As a mom, I am honest about what

happened and I want to get them tested for their vascular risk when they are 18. My stroke radically changed how we ate at home. Prior to my stroke, we were going out 50% of the time, eating processed foods on the fly like many working households. Now things are different! We have no soda, no processed foods at all, no trans fats, and lots of fruits and veggies. I try to not be too restrictive and I love to bake but I'm careful about the ingredients I use. I am known as the 'healthy baking mom' at my kid's school. I'm proud of that! Practice life sports with kids. Engage them in healthy habits.

*Dr. Amy: Can you share how you have been able to incorporate exercise in your busy life?*

**Lauralee:** I make it a priority. I have never struggled with my weight but I am a perfect example that a thin, non-smoking, size 2, can have a stroke! I now work out to keep my brain and heart healthy. I actually love exercise (a miracle!). I work out twice a week with a trainer for 20 minutes and I walk briskly on the treadmill 15-20 minutes every day. I love it!