



## Faces of CHD | Rita's Story



Meet Rita F of Lethbridge, AB

Age 49

CHD Diagnosis: Tetralogy of Fallot

I was born on January 1970 in Lethbridge, AB. Within one week I was diagnosed with a heart murmur, and by one month of age, referred to Dr. R. Sommerville in Calgary, AB. I was diagnosed with Tetralogy of Fallot. At around four months of age, I had my first surgery, by in Vancouver BC. In 1978, I went back to Vancouver for another open heart surgery.

The great news is that after this second surgery I felt fantastic, I got married in 2001 and life was "normal". Since my cardiologist had retired, I was not followed until 2001 when I returned to care in Calgary, AB. The greatest concern, was that all of my old patient records, had been destroyed! All I had was a handwritten letter from my Mom, who is an RN. Make sure you are always followed by a cardiologist!!!

After a series of lengthy delays, I received a third heart surgery in Edmonton to replace my pulmonary valve in 2010. By this time I had one episode of Atrial Fibrillation.

If I had to give advice on CHD, I would say – ask a lot of questions, and be honest with your doctors about your lifestyle, and plans for the future. Also, stay as active as you are able, it will help to keep you strong.

It can be really challenging to stay positive when you aren't well. I really appreciated being on the CCHA forum while I was recovering from surgery at home. It made me feel like other people could understand the difficulties I was facing.

I worry about having more surgeries, about not being well, or able to self-care. I worry about the effect on my family.

One of the things I'm most grateful for is the support of family and friends and for the wonderful people who I have met on this journey.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experience with the community of CCHA and anyone who has been touched by Congenital Heart Disease.