

Carol Allan

I was born with tetralogy of Fallot. At birth my cardiologist told my mother I would not live past my 16th birthday if medical science did not go forward. At age three, mother and I traveled to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. At that time we were told that the heart muscle was too small to operate on and to return when I turned seven for surgery. The year was 1945.



In 1949 I had my first surgery at the Mayo Clinic. We were told the surgery was a medical failure. Although it gave me a boost of energy that lasted about two years, I continued to have little energy, lots of chest pain, shortness of breath and because of my low oxygen level, I was always blue. Walking across the street was an ordeal for me. The only thing we could do was to hope and wait. I had to wait for the invention of the bypass machine and then wait again as they did research. Time was running out. Finally, a

brilliant surgeon at the Mayo Clinic consented to operate on me. However, he did tell me that I would not walk out of the Mayo Clinic alive. Everything was so traumatic! Even the day of surgery, my family was told I had little or no chance of survival. It was January 1958. As I slowly recovered, I would hold my hands up in my oxygen tent and watch, as the blueness would come out of my hands. It was unbelievable! Finally the day came when I was to return home. I so longed for there to be a place where I could stop and recover before returning home. I left a 1,000-bed hospital at the Mayo Clinic to return to my rural town in southwestern Saskatchewan that boasted a population of 1,000 people.

Slowly with the wonderful support of family, teachers and friends I recovered and was able to slowly return to school. Little was known in those days about diet and exercise or even seeing a cardiologist on a regular basis. I was left to my own devices. I must admit even though I grew up in a small community and my cardiologist was 200 miles away, my care was exemplary.

In 1994 I came under the care of Dr. Nanette Alvarez at the Adult Congenital Heart Clinic in Calgary. I am so blessed to have her as my cardiologist. Food restrictions and exercise have kept me maintaining over the years. To date I have had no further surgery. Today, I am 71 years old and maintain a healthy lifestyle. I am ever so grateful and blessed by the support and love I have received from everyone along the way.