Ron Parker, His Story: *It Could Happen to Anyone*

> ***Ron says "There are so many things I took for granted. While I had given blood myself, I did not realize how important it really is. Now I think, 'what if there was no available blood'. When someone gives blood, he or she is giving life to someone else. This sort of thing could happen to anyone"***

In 2006, 52 year old Ron Parker was an active successful business man, and a partner with his father, Fred Parker, in the Fred Parker Company Inc, a residential design, building and remodeling company. He and his wife Lila, married for nearly 25 years, had a son Aaron in college and a daughter Shannon about to graduate from high school. Life was very good.

Ron, very athletic, really enjoyed working out, but one day he ruptured a disc in his lower back in a weight lifting accident. The injury required two back surgeries and nine months of recuperation. A year later in spite of the fact that his back was healing and doing well he still was not regaining his strength. By April 2008 he felt very weak and had shortness of breath. A thorough physical examination determined that he had a severe atrium arrhythmia with a heart rate over 160 beats per minute, double the normal rate. On top of this, his red blood count was half what it should have been indicating he had internal bleeding. He immediately was admitted to Cardiac ICU to bring his heart under control and determine the cause of the bleeding.

Immediately several units of blood were given to Ron to help restore his strength and reduce the stress on his heart. He said he could actually feel life being restored in his body while he regained his strength. Internal bleeding is very difficult to find, and several tests were performed. The blood loss was finally identified when a small pill-like camera was swallowed. It was eventually determined that the prolonged use of prescription and over the counter pain medications for his back injury had caused slow internal bleeding in his small intestine. Ron said that the bleeding was so gradual that he never saw any visible signs of blood. The significant loss of blood created a great deal of stress on Ron's heart triggering the arrhythmia. Several medical and surgical procedures were performed along with medications to bring down his heart rate. After a week in Cardiac ICU, he was released from the hospital, but his challenges were far from over.

Ron's arrhythmia grew increasingly worse over the next several months. His heart rate was extremely erratic and the heart medications made it difficult for him to function normally. Lila, an ASID Interior Designer and his dad helped with his work, while his daughter Shannon, chauffeured him to his building projects. In August of 2008, Ron underwent a very risky eight hour catheter surgery to cauterize the interior of the atrium of his heart. This surgery performed by two electro physiology cardiologists was tremendously successful and Ron is now free from any heart issues and lives without any medications.

None of that would have been possible if donor blood had not been available to allow Ron to get his strength back so he could tolerate the tests and surgeries. As a result of those units of blood and the surgical intervention, Ron is back to work full time and full of energy. He is looking forward to Aaron's graduation from college and up coming marriage to his fiancé, Amberly. Shannon is working on a degree in music education and planning on going into the music ministry and teaching. Ron and Lila recently celebrated their 27th anniversary and couldn't be happier. Ron is again exercising, taking care of himself, and busy with his dad, designing and constructing homes.

Ron says "I am grateful everyday for my restored life, my loving and supportive family, the tremendous doctors and medical team, and the thoughtful and caring people who donated the blood that kept me alive. I will never again take my health or the opportunity to donate blood for the health of others for granted." Shortly after regaining his health, Ron Parker joined the Rotary Club of Fort Worth South and vowed to give back to the community as so many people had helped him when he was in need.

Photo: Ron Parker, Lila, Shannon and Aaron