

Curtis: The Road to Heart Transplant

"I was told that I had heart failure. I was told that the bottom part of my heart was dead. I was told that there was-- my veins, my arteries, was too corroded to perform any type of bypass. I was informed that my heart was enlarged and I had fluid."

"The defibrillator is a device that if your heart gets into a bad rhythm, right, it-- the pacemaker will kick in and it will regulate the rhythm of your heart. If it gets too out of whack then the defibrillator will shock the heart, stop it, so that the pacemaker could pump it back up to a rhythm that will keep you alive."

"It started getting weaker and weaker. The left side started getting weaker and weaker to the point where it's I didn't want to get up. I didn't want to eat, and a nurse came to the house and they started checking me. Said, "Mr. Atkins, if you don't go to the emergency room right now, I guarantee you within a day or so, you're dead," and pretty much that's how I got to the hospital and that's when they gave me the LVAD. That led up to the transplant."

"When you get a transplant, a heart transplant, you have to wait on a waiting list. For every thousand hearts that are available, it's 20, 30,000 people waiting for one, and the way they disperse a heart is by blood type. I had to wait a year, okay, in order for my transplant to take place."

"The first year is the major year. If you get past the first year it gets easier every year after that. It's been almost a year and a half for me, and I'm just starting to feel like I'm recovering."

"You can breathe, you got to get up. Things will get better, okay? I went from rock bottom, now I've got a new heart, I've got a new wife. I've got a nice place to live at. Doing okay. All right. But you can't give up. There's times you going to want to give up. There's times you going to want to feel that it's time for you to join your family. You can't give up, all right? Things will get better."