The very fact that I’m here to relate this story required many happenstance events taking place all at one time. For whatever reason, I’m eternally grateful.

What follows is a piecemeal story that was related to me by many people, mostly first-responders and the heroes and heroines that came to my aid the day I suffered a catastrophic sudden cardiac arrest.

I’m employed by a state agency and work in downtown Phoenix. On August 1, 2012, instead of customarily closing my office door and eating my lunch alone, a co-worker was in my office going over some last minute preparations for a project we’d be presenting that afternoon. While we were talking I looked at my friend and uttered “I can’t breathe.” After slumping over in my office chair my co-worker rushed to my side and called out loud for “somebody to call 9-1-1.” One of our administrative assistant’s dialed 9-1-1, while others were alerting our building security personnel of a medical emergency taking place on the fourth floor. Our highly trained facility manager raced to my office with an AED unit and a strong conviction that I was going to leave this building alive. Thank goodness our facility manager just happened to have spent many years as a volunteer firefighter and has many CPR and life-saving certifications under his belt.

Before the facility manager could physically get to my office, one of our administrative assistants, saw that I wasn’t breathing and didn’t have a pulse. Without hesitation she immediately began performing continuous chest compressions. Co-workers helped by taking turns when one of them became physically tired. When the facility manager arrived in my office a few minutes later he began the life-saving actions as directed by the Automatic External Defibrillator device we have available at our agency.

Thankfully, the story doesn’t end there. I was given excellent medical care by the Phoenix Fire Department EMT’s and I’ve been told they delivered five or six more electric shocks to my body before we arrived at St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center. The emergency doctor, nurses and team were incredible and did everything humanly possible to continue to save my life.
I’m enormously grateful that our agency and my co-workers were able to initially save my life by simply having available an AED device and possessing easily-learned skills.

It was only after I returned to work that I realized this event didn’t just affect me, it affected everyone that was at work that day in a lot of different ways. Co-workers will share with me that a family member or a friend died from sudden cardiac arrest. I’m honored that they also share with me that they’ve taken a CPR class, because of what happened to me, so that they won’t ever feel so helpless again. That’s empowering.

I’m also thankful that so many people have learned basic CPR and know what to do when they are witnesses to a person suddenly falling to the ground. Encourage family members and friends to take CPR classes, or at a minimum watch a video regarding sudden cardiac arrest. Just do something.