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## **My DVT/PE Story**

**By: Nina Sabbatini Meins**

At the age of 32, I was an active, working wife and mother until deep vein thrombosis (DVT) changed my life. I never had issues with blood clots, in fact, I knew nothing about them. I had taken birth control pill for 14 years, which I previously stopped to become pregnant with my first child. The first pregnancy progressed with no complications. My second pregnancy would prove that anyone's life can change in an instant. Not only did my life get turned upside down, but my husband, children, and immediate family and friends felt the effects of my health problems.

It was May 2006 and I was pregnant with my second child. At the start of the pregnancy, nothing seemed abnormal - I had no complications or major health problems. However, at 31 weeks, the pregnancy began to get complicated when I was hospitalized with pre-term labor. The two week hospitalization was followed by strict orders for complete bed rest for the remainder of my pregnancy. At the end of week 36, I went back to the hospital with labor contractions. Having delivered my first child via c-section, there was no question that this delivery was to following the same course. I ended up delivering my son the night of May 16<sup>th</sup>. He was a month early, but healthy as a horse.

The second morning after my delivery, I was examined by my doctor and given the clearance to become mobile. Anxiously, I followed the doctor's orders.

It was at that point that I noticed my left leg was swollen and heavy – from toe to hip. An ultrasound was performed, revealing a massive DVT. I was immediately transferred from the Women's Hospital to a general hospital where the medical staff was more familiar with treating DVT. The hospital staff decided to treat me with a low molecular weight heparin rather than a Heparin drip, even though an IV was in place. I was also started on Coumadin.

Less than 24 hours after starting the anticoagulant therapy, I developed chest pain. I was put on oxygen. The next morning the hospital staff talked about releasing me. My INR was far from an optimal range, I was still on oxygen, and no one seemed to understand why! Finally, the staff decided to send me for a CT scan of my lungs. The test revealed that a pulmonary embolism (PE) was responsible for my shortness of breath. As a result, I remained in the hospital for another three days until my INR was in the appropriate range.

At this point, I was having a hard time understanding what was happening. My family and I did not know what questions to ask. I had an infant to think about as well as my three-year old daughter and husband. I was trying to nurse or pump milk while I was receiving oxygen. The thought of dying never crossed my mind because I was focused on my baby.

Three months later, I saw a specialist. On my first a new blood clot was found in my leg. When the specialist looked at my old hospital charts he learned that I had been diagnosed with two different clotting disorders during my previous hospitalization. With this new information in hand, and the new clot in my leg, it was decided that an IVC filter would be appropriate.

I now see a vascular doctor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. He placed three venous stents in my abdomen in April 2008. In the process, he learned that my original clot, which is now calcified, extends from mid-thigh to my navel and that the main vein is completely damaged. The venous stents help the blood flow back to my heart easing my shortness of breath caused by the lack of oxygen.

This experience has taught me to listen to your body, ask questions, (regardless if you think they are stupid or not), and get second, even third, opinions. I now understand my purpose in this life. I know understand that my strengthening patient advocacy is one of my purposes in life. Raising awareness about DVT/PE symptoms and risk factors is widely needed for healthcare profession and patients, as well as for the general public.