



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

# MY Y STORY

## Member Spotlight: Karen Graham

Karen Graham is a brand new member at the Auburn Y. Her reasons for joining may sound familiar to you: she wanted to get healthier and lose some weight. But Karen also joined because in 2001 she had a massive heart attack. Karen has permanent damage to her heart putting her at risk for sudden cardiac arrest. She was looking for a program to support her and was delighted to learn about the Auburn Valley YMCA's Cardiac Wellness Program.



Before Karen had her heart attack she was in a small prayer group with close friends and read the verse, *"He restores your soul"*. This had special meaning for Karen as she had recently experienced some set backs in life including a torn meniscus in her knee, painful surgery and lost her job. She felt a powerful calling to take stock of her life, change courses, and de-stress, but thought to herself, "I don't have time to do that right now, I'll start making changes in January." Two days after her knee surgery she experienced a massive heart attack.

Looking back, Karen realizes she was experiencing symptoms, such as shortness of breath, for some time prior to her heart attack, but dismissed it as being "out of shape". Two hours before the attack, she began perspiring and felt chest pain but thought, "This isn't happening to me"... When she finally called her husband, he instructed her to call 911 right away. In the hospital, the direness of Karen's situation was apparent to all but her. She says, "I felt a Profound Peace, a reassurance and knew I was going to be alright, even though my doctor wouldn't say so."

From her experience Karen says, "I don't know why God gave me back my life, but it is a gift." Karen joined the Y this year and recognized right away that the Cardiac Wellness group had a sense of humor. In fact, she says, "it was a hoot. I have never seen joking around in a fitness class. Usually, people are so serious and hardcore. These people are enjoying each other's company. I can really identify with the group." This sense of community is one of the many strengths of the Cardiac Wellness program. Karen is also impressed with Nurse Nancy Handeland and YMCA Trainer, Cheri Loden. She says, "Both Nancy and Cheri allow me to do what I am able to do and show me how to modify exercises I can't do. They encourage me to take my time and adapt slowly because I find exercise to be very hard."

Karen knows from experience that reaching her goals is going to take real work. When asked what's motivating her now she responds, "It's the simple things. I want to be able to walk up my stairs and go outside to do a bit of gardening, it's just the daily activities we take for granted. I also want to manage my pain better for my arthritis and know that if I keep moving, it will get better." Karen recognizes how far she needs to go and also what kind of support she needs. In fact, that is one of the things she appreciates most about the Y. "The Y provides so much and is just there for you. I know if I tried to do too many things and signed up for it all at once I would get overwhelmed and quit, but everyone there is helping me take it slow, one step at a time. It's so important to be able to go your own pace."