One morning in February 2007, JulieAnn DuLong-Saferian woke up with shoulder blade pain. She assumed that she had overdone it at the gym. However, over the next two days the pain got worse.

“At first, the thought of a heart attack didn’t enter my mind,” she said. Then on the third day, she woke with severe pain in the right side of her jaw and right shoulder blade. Even though she was not having chest pain, difficulty breathing, or numbness in her left arm, she realized that she may be having a heart attack.

“Because of my previous experience in EMS, I knew women do not always experience the same symptoms of a heart attack as men,” JulieAnn said, adding that in fact, jaw and shoulder blade pain are common signs of a heart attack in some women.

She immediately called EMS, and although paramedics arrived quickly, by the time they arrived she was having a full-blown heart attack. JulieAnn was transported to the local hospital, where doctors found that the main artery that fed the back of her heart was 99.9% blocked. A stent was inserted and saved her life.

Said JulieAnn, “I was told that if I had waited any longer I would have died! I thank God every day that I was aware of these not-so-common signs of a heart attack in women, and am still here for my daughter Candice.”

JulieAnn had watched her mother suffer from heart disease for many years. She died in 2002, before anti-platelets drugs that could have saved her life were used. Since then, the risk of another heart attack for survivors like JulieAnn is greatly decreased thanks to medication and continued research.

“I am an active advocate for the American Heart Association, because I know that through research, education and healthy living habits, someday we will prevent my daughter and our children from having even one heart attack,” said JulieAnn.