

Speaker 1:

The American Heart Association's mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. In our pursuit of that mission, we're having some amazing conversations along the way. These are the voices of the relentless.

Nancy Brown:

I felt both powerless and empowered at the same time. Powerless because the lack of clarity of what is happening, how long this is going to take, how the infection is spreading, how people will develop resistance, when a vaccine will be ready, when society can return back to normal, you can't feel powerful when there's so much uncertainty. Yet, I feel empowered because I know that we have so much to offer and to do that can have a tremendous impact on how people will live their lives in the future.

Nancy Brown:

Hi, I'm Nancy Brown Chief Executive Officer of the American Heart Association. My entire life has been devoted to health and wellbeing. I grew up in a family of medical practitioners. My grandfather was a surgeon. My grandmother was a nurse. My mother was a nurse. From the very beginning of time, being healthy and thinking about the health of others was always something that really mattered a lot in my family. Although I wasn't yet born, I always loved listening to the stories about my grandfather who actually ran a MASH unit in world war two, just like on the TV show MASH. He was in charge of a bunch of other doctors and surgeons who were caring for people. And so he saw the worst of what war and being at conflict can do to health, and I think for my entire life, this was something that really mattered to our family.

Nancy Brown:

My mom went back to nursing school when I was probably in about the seventh grade. She had had been in nursing school when she left the University of Michigan to marry my father, and then she had children and went back, and I remember like it was yesterday her practicing giving shots on grapefruits in our bathroom as she was getting ready for her tests. I also remember how passionate she was about caring for causes that helped other people, whether that was her service as leading Sunday school and nursery school classes that I was a part of, or whether it was going door to door to raise money for other organizations and visiting with neighbors, asking them to donate. That is really part of how I grew up. To me, it was what was expected. It was what you did. That is, I would stay, at the core of why today, when we see so much inequity and so much absence of health, that I am still passionate to do something about it.

Nancy Brown:

I think I share a lot of things in common with the people who depend on the AHA. First of all, I grew up in a small community. I wouldn't quite call it rural, but I would call it small. And I understand firsthand the difference between access to things when you live in a big city, and access to things when you live in a small town. Even now, many of my family members still live close to where I grew up and I visit there often, and you can see the difference in the health outcomes and the attitudes towards health because of what's available in terms of state of the art medical care for people who live in small towns and people who live closer to services. So I get it. When we read stories about rural hospitals closing and how difficult it is to find doctors and healthcare providers, I understand. I see this happening with my own circle of people that have been childhood friends and my own family members.

Nancy Brown:

I also have a family history of stroke. The same grandfather I mentioned who was a Colonel in the United States Army and ran the MASH unit, he had one of the very first carotid endarterectomies, where you're clearing out the plaque from the carotid artery, at the University of Michigan back in the nineties. And it didn't go so well. Some of the plaque ruptured and went to his brain and he had cognitive impairment and ultimately passed away from a stroke because of that disease, and his wife, my grandmother, died of congestive heart failure. On my dad's side, although my father lived to be 90 and a half years old thanks to outstanding medical care and a wonderful commitment to doing everything the doctors told him, his father died at the age of 60 of a stroke, and many, many people in my family who suffered, including my own sister who suffered a stroke from undiagnosed atrial fibrillation.

Nancy Brown:

This COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the social and health inequities in this country and around the world in a way that is tragic and unnecessary. I think that it's our obligation and an opportunity for us to highlight these differences as we continue on our relentless journey at the American Heart Association to make sure that all people have equal access to health and wellbeing. For me, that is what has to happen out of this. We have to do more, we have to do better. We have to seize this moment.

Nancy Brown:

I look at the challenge in front of me in leading the American Heart Association and being a member of my community as taking the opportunity to learn from the similar situations that I've been through before. And there is nothing like this global pandemic that any of us have ever experienced, but there are similar situations that have happened in life, when I have been in a position to influence the outcomes of an organization, and I would talk about September 11th, I would talk about the economic collapse of 2008, 2009. After 9/11, I was the Chief Operating Officer of the AHA, and in 2008, 2009, I actually became the CEO of the AHA the day the stock market dropped to 6,000 points. And I remember thinking to myself, "Welcome to your new job, Nancy. But you've got this." Because I think the most important thing is always to remember values, always to remember the foundational aspects of what makes an organization strong and what makes it great, and to bring it back to that in every decision that has to be made, in every very difficult financial scenario that organizations like ours and so many others are facing.

Nancy Brown:

Another thing that I think has prepared me for a moment like this is every single day, I know people are counting on the American Heart Association for hope, for inspiration, for the power of our science, the power of us utilizing our brand and volunteers in the community to make a difference for people, and all of that endures, it all stays the same. It's just a matter of ramping it up to serve at this moment. If we look at the things we're doing from a scientific standpoint to answer questions that must be answered so that society can get back to normal, I feel empowered by that. I feel empowered by the fact that people are looking to us to have answers on embracing the disparities that are being highlighted in this crisis. I feel empowered that consumers across the country and the world really are looking to the American Heart Association for answers.

Nancy Brown:

I know that I speak for all of us at the AHA that this is our moment to shine and to really amplify what we do well every single day. But for me, it is an intense focus, both on the business and the strength of

the American Heart Association, as well as thinking about how we unleash our assets to help. And so I'm spending a lot of time, of course, thinking about the future of the AHA, thinking about the present of the AHA, but also contributing to other important platforms like the World Economic Forum, as we're thinking about revitalizing the global economy and the global healthcare system. And so it's invigorating and exhausting at the same time, but I'm fitting in my physical activity. I'm so happy to have my, at least one of my two dogs lives at home with me, and she pops up every once in a while and makes an appearance on a Zoom meeting. But it's pretty intense.

Nancy Brown:

I think the American Heart Association plays such a critical role in helping people get to the other side of this. First of all, our message of hope and inspiration really matters to people. Our ability to help people have solutions that are allowing them to manage their lives at home. Whether that's information on eating healthy and physical fitness, to actual practical information on COVID-19, the symptoms, what to do if you experienced the symptoms. So we're playing a key role today. I know that our thought leadership will really matter in society, about thinking about what the new normal will look like. As we reset to a new future of the world, how will people engage with each other, how will people have the chance to experience the things that really matter to them? I see the AHA as playing a key role in all of that.

Nancy Brown:

It is hard not to be incredibly amazed, impressed, and thankful to all of the healthcare providers, the first responders, the doctors, the nurses, that have not only been a source of medical expertise for people who are suffering from COVID-19, but a source of comfort and inspiration to families and to patients themselves. We will never forget you and all that you have done to help people through this crisis.

Speaker 1:

Thank you for being a special part of the American Heart Association's Relentless Stories. If you enjoyed what you just heard, please press share, tell a friend and leave us a review. Your next episode is on the way. Up next, you don't want to miss the man who once had 23 million patients. Wondering how? Stay tuned.