



Janine and Paul are sharing their story as part of the comedian's campaign for Heart Saver New Zealand.

INSPIRATION

Paul's heart to heart

# I THOUGHT I'D LOSE Janine

THE 7 DAYS STAR RECALLS HIS WIFE'S LIFE-OR-DEATH MOMENT

It's no surprise a conversation with 7 Days star Paul Ego, one of New Zealand's best-known comedians, is a laugh a minute.

As Paul (51) and his wife of 28 years, Janine (50), sit together on the sofa at their Auckland home, the banter between the pair is relentless, peppered with jokes and laughs – and on Janine's part, a lot of eye-rolling and head-shaking.

"I sang in a band for years and that's how we met," Paul tells, while Janine sighs.

"Yes, it's true – I was one of his groupies," she laughs. "He was doing a gig for New Year's Eve down at Waihi. He was a long-haired yobbo."

But their conversation takes on a sober tone when the time comes to reflect on a traumatic event in their lives 20 years ago, where Paul almost lost his wife after she suffered a sudden cardiac arrest.

In true Paul fashion, though, he can't resist a few jokes to lighten the mood. "Why don't you tell the story and I'll do the sound effects?" he laughs to Janine, who begins to recall the day her life completely changed.

Twenty years ago, the couple had just bought their first house after returning from overseas.

"Paul was signwriting and doing stand-up then," Janine tells. "And in my administration job, we'd just undergone a restructuring process. I found myself doing three jobs, so I was very stressed at work. I wasn't overweight, I wasn't a smoker, I had no family history of high blood pressure."

"We had a stodgy meal of mashed potatoes and meat pies, and then we were watching TV," she continues.

Paul laughs as he interrupts, "Funnily enough, we were watching ER!"

"And then I started to feel heaviness," Janine goes on. "It wasn't pain, but like someone was sitting on my chest."

Putting it down to indigestion, Janine went upstairs to lie down, but upon feeling more breathless and panicky, she called Paul, who made the decision to call the St John Ambulance up the road.



## SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

- This serious condition affects 2000 people each year in New Zealand.
- Your chance of survival reduces 10%-15% every minute that defibrillation is delayed, while using an AED and CPR within 3 minutes dramatically increases your chances of survival.

Janine remembers two ambulance officers turning up and asking her questions when she took a turn for the worse.

"One of them said, 'Is your head OK?' and I replied, 'It's funny you should say that because...' But I didn't finish my sentence because I had some sort of seizure."

Paul recalls Janine's "eyes rolling back into her head". She had gone into a sudden cardiac arrest, requiring the ambulance officers to use a defibrillator to get her heart beating, before she could be rushed to hospital.

Janine's heart went into ventricular fibrillation, a life-

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threatening condition in which the chambers of the heart start quivering. Doctors also found a small blood clot.

"It's all such a blur," says Paul. "It was really scary. I thought she was going to die, definitely. It was completely out of the blue."

Paul admits it was a daunting time for the family as Janine recovered in hospital. He remembers thinking, "Is she going to wake up? And if she wakes up, will she be a vegetable?" But Janine just woke up like she'd had a nap! I was so relieved."

Janine adds, "Short-term memory is one of the first things to go when you suffer an incident like that. I'd ask a dozen times, 'What's happened to me?'"

So when Paul was approached by Heart Saver New Zealand to help get the message across about how to act during a cardiac arrest, he didn't hesitate to say yes. The comedian now appears in a series of videos that advise Kiwis of the correct way to give CPR and how to use a defibrillator (AED).

"We all think we remember the basics of what to do if you've found somebody or if someone collapses, but we don't," he says. "I've kept the videos brief because we all have short attention spans these days!"

The couple also assisted in having an AED put in their local

tennis club, which was used just four days after its instalment, when a man went into cardiac arrest. It saved his life.

"You couldn't have a better advert for getting one!" says Paul. "You hope that it never gets used, really. But when it does, it dramatically increases your chance of surviving."

Janine admits the incident hasn't made her live life any differently, although she says she's more aware of the family's diet, and especially that of sons Gabriel (17) and Isaac (12).

"I'm not one of those people who turn over a brand-new leaf," she says. "It certainly hasn't given me a complete personality change and we've always lived pretty healthily anyway."

"I think the best way to look at it is as a rare one-off. You can't always be looking over your shoulder. And in many respects, it was a really positive experience because it reinforces how many people care about you. There was a silver lining!"

Ciaara Pratt

PHOTOS: ROBERT TRATHEN • HAIR AND MAKE-UP: KATE SMITH