

**“All I can tell you is we got him back. They are going to try to airlift again. All we can do now is pray.”**

**— Dr. Ashburn**

going to try for London instead of Lexington.”

I think I hugged and kissed the doctor but again, at this point, I wasn't too concerned about my public actions. God had answered my prayer (Miracle #4). Tom was still alive and as long as there was life, there was a chance.

The helicopter team headed out with Tom toward the landing pad. I followed closely behind until I reached the end of the “safety zone” where I could only watch from a distance. I couldn't understand what was taking so long. Why didn't they start the engine? Tom didn't have much more time. Then it became horribly clear. They were pulling him off the helicopter and heading back toward the ER. He had coded again! They were actively doing CPR as he was rushed back into the hospital. As they went past me, I begged Tom not to give up. He probably couldn't hear me but — just in case — I wanted him to know I was there and I wanted him to fight.

We went back to our spot in the hallway and back to the sequence (charging, clear, zap). I sat down on the floor this time and just waited. I had reached a point of numbness. I didn't know what else to do or say so I just waited. A stranger approached me and asked if she could pray for us. I told her she could and she prayed the sweetest prayer for me and my husband. I knew in my heart she was baring her soul to God on our behalf and I was so grateful for her. I had seemed to run out of words so she was helping me pray. She helped me find a level of peace.

Dr. Ashburn came out this time. He said, “All I can tell you is we got him back (Miracle #5). They are going to try to airlift again. All we can do now is pray.”

We all came together as a group — hugging all around. Dr. Ashburn prayed as the ER personnel and air team got Tom

ready to go one more time.

I again followed Tom to the helicopter pad, telling him I loved him every step of the way. Again, I watched as they loaded his stretcher in the back praying that big, yellow bird would fly. This time the pilot put on his helmet, the doors closed, and the blades started to turn. I lifted my hands in the air saying, “Fly Baby Fly!”

After what seemed like another eternity, they lifted off — headed for London.

### **Dr. Patil told me I should call the family**

Family members jumped into cars and raced toward London. Phone calls were made to all those who were not in attendance so they could meet us there. God performed other miracles that day in making sure we all got to the hospital without hurting ourselves or others along the way, but that is a separate story.

The flurry of activity at the Knox County General Hospital turned into the flurry of activity at Saint Joseph London. The Heart Team was already assembled and waiting when the helicopter landed (Miracle #6). Dr. Patil placed a stint in the artery and then had to shock Tom's heart back into a life-sustaining rhythm one more time (Miracle #7).

While all this was going on, I was mindlessly answering questions for the wonderfully kind admitting nurse. She was so patient as I said, “I don't know” over and over. Tom and I have only been married four years, and we have never talked much about childhood or otherwise prior illnesses. I was pretty clueless on his medical history and terrified an omission on my part might prove to be fatal for him. Somehow, I got through it — apparently well enough.

Finally, Tom was brought into the Cardio Thoracic Unit (CTU) to be monitored 24/7 until he was

deemed less critical. Seeing him with the addition of a ventilator, a balloon pump and two IV stands full of fluids/medications was almost more than I could bear. Based on my brother's earlier bypass surgery, I knew those devices were all there to help Tom's body rest and try to repair its damage, but logic doesn't trump emotion. Two doctors (Patil and Talib) were giving additional medication orders trying to get his vital signs to stabilize at an acceptable level. I didn't know you could live with a blood pressure of 58/29 but apparently Tom can. At some point, Dr. Kavarana mentioned a VAD (Ventricular Assist Device) to buy time for a transplant. Dr. Patil told me I should call the family. Tom's chances of survival were no better than 50/50. Reality checks don't get much worse than this.

### **Tom was discharged on June 12 and had a second heart attack on June 13**

I spent the next 14 days watching his vital signs monitor. Tom's heart rate needed to be below 100. It wasn't. His blood pressure needed to be 90 something over 60 something. Far too many times it wasn't anywhere close. However, I did learn that the MAP (Mean Arterial Pressure) was almost as important as the diastolic and systolic numbers. If the MAP was 60 or better, Tom's organs were getting enough blood profusion to function. After the first 48 hours, that number was acceptable — most of the time.

When a family member watched him for me, I had to go through all the danger signs, so they would know when to call a nurse — if one wasn't sitting at the foot of his bed. CTU offers a one-on-one nurse-to-patient relationship for the most critical patients. Tom had that for 2 1/2

days until his unexplained fever forced them to move him to ICU. ICU nurses have to share their skills between two patients. There were times I didn't understand what was happening. There were times I was impatient, but they seemed to understand and not hold it against me. God bless them!

During his stay at Saint Joseph London, Tom had yet another episode of v-fib (calling for two more shocks), developed pneumonia and fought a raging sinus infection, which finally explained the 103 degree temperature once detected. Tom also underwent another surgical procedure to implant a defibrillator device that is designed to detect future dangerous heart rhythms and apply a shock to the heart in hopes of correcting the problem. He was initially discharged on June 12, had a second heart attack on June 13, and spent another week in the hospital.

Tom has been home now since Saturday, June 20, 2009 (Miracle #8). He seems to be improving every day. We have become regulars at the Barbourville Water Park, moving slowly but purposefully, around the walking track. Just how much strength will Tom be able to regain? Right now, we are uncertain but after surviving two major heart attacks, 34 electrical shocks, pneumonia, a raging infection and all this without the neurological damage that was expected by his doctors, a complete recovery doesn't seem too far out of the question. God has brought him this far, I have faith he will continue to bless Tom in his recovery.

No matter what God's plan holds for Tom or me in the near or distant future, we will always be grateful for his many miracles and the many angels he sent to protect us during those 22 days of fear and uncertainty. EMTs, paramedics, doctors, nurses, hospital volunteers, area churches, co-workers, family members and friends were all angels who touched our lives in so many wonderful ways. We will never forget their kindness and their willingness to do everything in their power to help in whatever manner they could. God bless each and every one of them.