

*An extraordinary story of faith, hope,
and the power of prayer*

WHEN *God* INTERVENES

Defying death once is amazing.

Twice? Incredible.

Four times?

That's nothing short of miraculous.

DABNEY HEDEGARD
A MEMOIR

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I scratched along my inner thigh, chasing the feather-like tickles dancing on my leg.

Then my arm.

My neck.

My stomach.

This allergic reaction—or whatever nonsense was attacking my skin—had bugged me for five months too long. Fatigued again, I slumped on my couch and mentally replayed the flurry of events from my foundation's tea earlier that afternoon: silent auction, seating arrangements, and those silly air kisses from women in spiffy hats,

which always made me uncomfortable. I never knew if my lips were supposed to graze their cheeks, or if my half-inch buffer between our face powder sufficed. (I remember my first air-kiss-gone-wrong, when I planted a good one on a well-known Palm Beach-er. She chuckled. My eyes widened in utter disbelief at my obvious mistake.) Either way, by four o'clock in the afternoon, my event-planning anxiety had dissolved the last of my energy, so I left my favorite donors sipping Earl Grey and escaped to rest for the remainder of the night.

I propped my feet on the couch and scratched across my belly, trying to chase away the tickles. In the silence of my apartment, I tried to nap. But my midmorning indigestion had progressed into a heavy weight against my lungs. The roll of fruit-flavored TUMS refused to calm the pressure.

Then it happened. One gasp followed by strained constriction—as if someone had popped my lung. I banged my fist to my chest to pound out some relief. Nothing. Sitting up straighter, I struggled to suck in air.

“I c-can’t breathe—”

My attempts to inhale turned to short breaths, and with each one, my sternum vibrated as if someone were pulling a string of gum-ball-sized pearls through my chest.

I fumbled with the numbers on the phone.

“Hello, 9-1-1; what’s your emergency?”

“I-I can barely b-breathe. I-I feel p-pressure on m-my chest . . . There’s . . . bumps—”

“Go to the emergency room.”

“What?”

“Go to the ER, or I’ll send an ambulance. Your choice.”

My fingers shook as I dialed my husband’s work. Jason made the twenty-minute drive home in ten. I heard the tires skidding on the blacktop seconds before the door flew open. He scooped me up into his faded, black Ford F-150. His confused expression quickly changed to mirror mine: panic.

“You’ll be fine . . . Everything will be okay. Breathe slowly.” He tugged the shoulder harness across my chest and buckled me in with shaking hands. “We’ll be there soon.” The car door closed with its usual deafening *bang*.

We cut across town to I-95. But the highway was packed. Of course, it was. We had hit rush hour. The cars surrounding us moved miserably slow. Jason swerved in and out of traffic—as I held my chest, swaying with each jerk—unscathed by Jason’s three-inch close calls with neighboring vehicles. For the first time in our marriage, I appreciated his Indy-style maneuvers.

He carried me through the automatic doors at Good Samaritan Medical Center and lowered me onto the seat in front of the dark-haired receptionist. My body slouched forward in an effort to ease the discomfort. I pressed both hands, fingers splayed, across my chest.

“It h-hurts. Wh-what’s happening?” I rocked repeatedly now, gasping audibly.

“I’m sorry,” Jason said, rubbing my back. “We’ll find out soon.” His body shook along with the bouncing of his knee. “*What’s taking so long?*”

The dark-haired woman turned and cackled, pushing her coworker’s arm, as if she just heard the joke of the day.

Jason interrupted her. “Hey! My wife’s in pain! When are you going to call on us?”

The dark-haired lady stiffened.

“I don’t have her paperwork.” She leaned forward. “Did ya sign in?”

“No.” He looked around.

She pointed to the corner. “She needs to sign in with the triage nurse first. Then I register her.”

Sign in? Of *course* you have to sign in. I helped raise money for this place; you’d think I’d know that.

With my shoulders hunched and chest curved to ease the pressure, Jason rushed me to the nurse. One mention of my symptoms, and she hollered into a phone. A buzzer sounded, and two large double doors opened. A team helped me onto a gurney and whisked me into the exam room, skipping my appointment with the dark-haired lady.

A swarm of people slapped my now-exposed body with twenty-some stickers with silver nubs and attached wires. I heard snapping noises. Then I felt light pressure along my chest and belly.

“We’ll know in a second,” I heard a thin blonde mumble to her coworker.

The EKG spit out a report. “It’s not her heart!” the blonde yelled.

I tried to suck in more air. My body convulsed. I dug my fingers deeper into the vinyl mattress. “Wh-what is going on? Can you f-feel the vibration in my chest?” I looked at each of them as I wiped tears from my face.

One grabbed my hand and started an IV. Another checked my blood pressure. The third finally turned to face me. “The doctor’s on his way, okay?”

The blonde placed her hand on my shoulder. “Are you pregnant?”

“W-we just f-found out. Last week. I’m six w-weeks.” I scratched my arm.

“You need a chest X-ray for an accurate diagnosis.” The blonde handed me a heavy, gray apron to drape around my waist. “This will shield your abdomen, but you need to sign a release.”

I decided to take the risk, signed the papers, and stood against a cold, square plate wearing the twenty-pound lead coat. *Lord, protect my baby.*

“Hold your breath. Don’t move,” the technician said and stepped out of the room. The machine made a jolting noise. The technician returned and removed the large film from behind me.

“The doctor will see you soon.” She rushed out.

Shaking still, I crawled back into bed with Jason’s help. He slid beside me, wrapping his arms securely around my

hundred-pound body. We rested in silence. Jason kissed my head. Over time, we'd forgotten how to communicate without setting each other off. His arms felt nice, though. Secure even.

Come to think of it, I couldn't remember the last time he had held me so tightly and meant it.