

Transformation Story – The Miracle – Steve & Lynn Schmidt

I was married with three children, had a good job, was in seemingly good health, attended a good church and had great friends. All-in-all, life was good. Then one day, while I was playing racquetball with a friend, it all came crashing down; I collapsed on the court. Approximately 32 minutes elapsed from the time of my collapse on the racquetball court until my own heart began beating again. Then, God did a miracle in my life!

Life Prior to the Miracle

Lynn and I met each other at Buhler High School and started dating after I went to college. We both graduated from Bethel College after which I worked at a CPA firm (Arthur Young in Wichita), and she obtained her first job as a nurse. We enjoyed our first five years of marriage getting better at our jobs, traveling together, hanging out with friends and being involved in Hope Mennonite Church.

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We had our first child in 1992 and moved from Wichita, KS to Hutchinson, KS where I had accepted a position as the chief financial officer for a regional restaurant chain known as Sirloin Stockade. While we were resistant to a move away from Wichita, it's clear God wanted us to be in Hutchinson. I enjoyed designing and constructing a house and we were both deeply involved with multiple ministries at South Hutchinson Mennonite Church (now Journey Mennonite Church). We had two more children and life was good. Our family of three boys had just finished first, second and fifth grade and were active in school and sports.

After ten years with Sirloin Stockade, I had the opportunity to join three other individuals to purchase the Sirloin Stockade franchisor in January 2004. Life was very busy and we made the decision for Lynn to leave her part-time nurse position to focus on volunteering and raising our boys. We enjoyed fitness so we took our boys on hikes and bike rides. I loved to bike, run and especially play racquetball. At 42 years of age, I was a picture of health with no prior history or any suspicion of health problems.

Lynn and I had a great marriage, a wonderful family, a growing church and THEN ... life changed! Much of what follows in my story is written from my perspective, but I have very little memory of it. From talking to Lynn, my brother and others familiar with the events surrounding July 12, 2004, I have put together the happenings of that miraculous time in my life.

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The Miracle

On July 12, 2004, at 6:20 am, I was playing racquetball at the Hutchinson YMCA with my friend, Todd Esau. After falling behind 0-4 in the first game with Todd, I suddenly collapsed to the floor. Todd initially thought I was joking. Soon he realized that I was not joking around this time. I had no pulse and was gasping for air.

Todd immediately called 911 and started CPR. He was later joined by another individual in two-person CPR. At approximately 6:29 am, the Hutchinson Fire Department arrived and applied an automatic defibrillator which subsequently gave me two separate electrical shocks in an attempt to restart my heart. This was after I was noted to have a life-threatening cardiac arrhythmia known as Ventricular Tachycardia. Subsequently my body went into a PEA (pulseless electrical activity) rhythm which means there is no pulse and no actual pumping of blood by the heart.

Emergency Medical Services personnel arrived at 6:30 am at which point I was intubated (had a tube inserted into my lungs to begin artificial breathing) and received medications to try and restart my heart.

After multiple electrical shocks and medications to restart my heart, my heart finally responded and started beating again. I had just experienced a medical event known as Sudden Cardiac Death. Approximately 32 minutes elapsed from the time of my collapse on the racquetball court until my own heart began beating again.

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The time in which I had no blood flow to my brain was unknown but we know the blood flow was not occurring normally. This is always a critical piece of information when determining whether possible brain damage may have occurred.

I was transferred to Hutchinson Hospital and was soon joined by Lynn and my father. I was not coherent or responsive in any appropriate way. Initial evaluation by the Emergency Room physician and a cardiologist led them to believe that I was having a heart attack and I was immediately taken to the cardiac laboratory. After a cardiac catheterization was done, my heart was determined to have normal blood flow and was pumping blood normally to the rest of my body, i.e., it was not a heart attack.

I was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit and evaluated by Dr. Mallonee, a neurologist, and Dr. Sourk, a pulmonologist. Laboratory tests indicated I had low potassium and magnesium and was dehydrated at which point I was given IV fluids to address these abnormalities. Dr. Mallonee and the ICU nurses noted I had whole body type tremors occurring in part due to a low body temperature or possibly seizures. I had a temperature of 90.8 degrees, which was well below the normal body temperature of 98.6 degrees. I was warmed up and given anti seizure and sedative medicines which seemed to help with the tremors. According to Dr. Mallonee, my body was “posturing” in ways that indicated possible severe brain damage.

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I had an EEG test to measure the electrical activity in my brain showing disorganized and slow brain wave activity. The EEG did not reveal any certain prognosis, good or bad, as to how or when I would recover. A CT scan of my brain was performed and interpreted as normal – good news!! Dr. Mallonee certainly felt potential for recovery, either good or poor, was possible. According to the medical literature, I had only a 20-30% chance of a good and/or meaningful recovery and about a 40-70% chance of being in a permanent vegetative state or coma. A better evaluation and probable long-term condition could be done within 72 hours after my hospitalization at which point they could determine next steps. In the meantime, the rest of my body seemed to be doing fine.

Many of my immediate family members and close friends were present or calling throughout the long days of July 12 and July 13. I’m told it felt very much like a family get-together with the obvious difference that everyone was very concerned, saddened, and anxious about my condition.

On the morning of July 13, Dr. Mallonee felt there was slight improvement in my condition. I was still unable to respond in any meaningful way either physically or verbally but I was removed from the ventilator without any problem. Upon Dr. Mallonee’s reassessment on the late afternoon of July 13, he felt that I had improved some more with regards to my body responses. He phrased his opinion as “guardedly optimistic” for my outcome.

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Our church had a prayer vigil for me on the evening of July 13. Multiple other prayer chains including Lynn’s Bible Study Fellowship group, several churches, nurses, physicians, and patients were praying for my recovery. God answered those prayers and many more soon thereafter. On the early morning of July 14 around 4:15am, the ICU nurse on duty reported that I began to open my eyes and was able to follow simple commands such as

squeezing her fingers and wiggling my toes. This was approximately 46 hours after my collapse at the YMCA. I asked where Lynn and the boys were and thereafter began a marvelous and miraculous recovery.

Dr. Mallonee was ecstatic by these developments, in fact, he shared that he himself had awakened sometime during that same night and had said a prayer for my recovery. I had an MRI of the brain and another EEG done. Dr. Mallonee reported that the EEG was remarkably changed from the first exam and was “normal.” The MRI showed no significant problems. By evening I was more conversant, yet had difficulty with my short-term memory.

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While I was showing signs of recovery, the doctors had not yet determined the underlying cause of why I had collapsed and gone into a coma. I was conscious and relearning how to eat and walk but I had no memory of what had happened. On July 15, the doctors recommended I be transferred to Dr. Ashok Bajaj, an electrophysiologist and cardiologist in Wichita, for further evaluation. People told me that I continued to ask lots of questions about what happened and request continual prayers for next steps. My memory was beginning to improve but I have no recollection of being in Hutchinson Hospital.

I had an ultrasound of the heart done revealing I had a condition called Asymmetric Septal Hypertrophy or Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, which is too much muscle in the center part of the heart, i.e., I have a BIG heart (literally). This condition is the most common cause of Sudden Cardiac Death and is found in one of every 500 people in the general population. It can potentially cause electrical disturbances in the heart either at rest or with exercise. The electrical “disturbances” result in an excessively high heart rate (over 200 beats per minute) which can only be brought back to normal by an electrical shock to the heart. I was advised to have an implanted, automated defibrillator on July 19, 2004 which was placed without a problem.

Steve's Reflections in Light of the Miracle

Wow! Never did I expect that I would experience dying and coming back to life until the actual “end of life” when I would wake up in heaven, not back on earth! I guess God was not done with me yet, so I continue to look forward to seeing how He will use me for whatever time I have left.

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After my collapse, I have no recollection of any part of the week until Saturday, five days later. At that time, I remember being with my family and lots of visitors. Thanks to many friends who came to visit and were in prayer for me. I know that God used all of the prayers to perform the miracle of bringing me back to a meaningful life.

In the days after coming out of my coma, I repeatedly asked Lynn and others: “What happened?” and “Why did it happen?” Although I do not fully comprehend the reasons for what happened, I know that I have a defibrillator implanted to constantly monitor my heart and “shock” me back to life if my heart doesn’t behave itself. It makes me a little nervous not knowing when the next “shock” will come, but that’s really no different than life itself; we can never predict what and when a life changing event will occur.

What are my memories of July 12? Did I see any bright lights? Did I see heaven? Did I see Jesus? No to all of these. I always thought if something traumatic happened to me, that it would change the direction of my life. Although it has not changed the direction of my life, it has helped me more clearly focus on what’s important. I have focused on a better balance between family, church and work. I have a more positive attitude around my family, friends and co-workers.

The more time passes from the events of 2004, the more I have the ability to look back and see how God has worked and continues to work through me and through others. I make the best of each and every day God has given me. I don't just assume that every day is going to be a "normal" day. I have a greater focus on strengthening relationships and on matters that have long-term significance. I ask myself:

- Is the work I'm doing the best use of the gifts God has given me?
- Am I wisely using the time and resources He has entrusted to me?
- Are the relationships I'm building God honoring?
- Am I being a good husband?
- A good father?

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Every action and word is viewed from the point of being a light for God.

It has been encouraging for me to see God's perfect plan and how He prepared Lynn for July 12 and the following months. Who would have ever known that by Lynn obtaining a nursing degree, later being a coronary care nurse, and then working with the same doctor who diagnosed my heart condition, that God would be giving her the understanding she needed for the days following July 12.

Lynn's faith in God was unwavering and I know her faith would have allowed her to endure and be strong even if I had not recovered. I believe her story is equally as important as mine.

Lynn's Perspective

God sent me His presence the Monday morning of Steve's collapse from three of my friends. Each woman stopped what they were doing at home and came to the hospital to pray with me, talk to me, cry with me, and put their arm around me. God's timing of each lady's arrival was impeccable, just when I felt myself slipping, the next one would show up to encourage me. They were significant in pointing me to God and keeping me properly focused.

At 5pm, Satan's lies were creeping in. He was prowling around like a lion telling me, "Steve's not going to make it. God won't help you. This is too much for you to handle." I gathered three friends around and we went to a quiet room to pray. I found strength and calmness as they prayed for Steve and I. That same calmness enabled me to sleep four hours that first night at home.

Tuesday was filled with a lot of visits from family and friends and some of Steve's tubes were removed, but he still was not making any purposeful movement. I went to bed around 11:30 p.m., again planning to be at the hospital for Dr. Malloney's 6am rounds. I was awoken Wednesday morning at 4:23 a.m. by Christine, a nurse from Hutch Hospital. Steve had woken up, opened his eyes and was following commands!! PRAISE THE LORD! God is good! He is faithful! He is the Great Physician! I praised him for five minutes!

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It was great to talk to Steve, to see him interact with the boys, to answer his endless questions of what happened and what the next step would be. He was the same old Steve, witty and thinking logically.

A lot of people have said that I had amazing strength. How did I do it? Was I in shock? Was I just putting on a happy face? The answer to the last two questions was: "No. I was not in shock and I did not just put on a happy face." Over the years, I have developed a much closer relationship with Jesus Christ. Through the study of His Word and prayer, I have come to a place in my life where I know that my God is big enough to get me through anything.

I used to be plagued with fear, worry, and doubt, but now I rest solely on Jesus. A favorite verse is Philippians 4:13 - "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who gives me strength." I depended on that strength for this trial and others. He showed me that He will provide when we trust in Him. For it was not by my might or by my power, but by His Holy Spirit that I was able to go on.

Living Life to the Fullest – Day by Day

Life goes on and we continue to do our best for Him each and every day. I have medications I need to take, my physical activity is limited and I can't do the same things I used to do. BUT ... I can still do many of them. I am thankful for what I can still do. God has allowed us to share our story with church groups and many individuals, so we pray His miracle in our lives has a lasting impact on many of those around us.

We continue to do our best for Him each day and pray our lives and experiences are a light to Him! We know life on this earth is full of challenges and perfection will only come when we join Him in eternity. Praise God for what He has done AND will yet do in our lives on earth!