

Back
From
Code Blue

By
Cathy White

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This book is written in honor of
My husband, Harry,
My father-in-law, Harry, Sr.
(who passed away in 2019 at the age of 102),
And my son, Harrison.

It is also in honor of those of you who live life the way these men do,
setting examples for others of compassion, kindness, friendliness,
leaving smiles in their wakes, and making the world a better
place than it was before they arrived.

In the pre-dawn hours of July 23, 2009, life as we knew it came to an abrupt halt. It turned in a direction that would bring to mind, for most of us, the phrase, “Life is indeed stranger than fiction.” “Harry’s Summer Adventure of 2009,” as we have come to call it, is the story of the days, weeks and months that followed that fateful day. It is a story of challenges, fortitude and forging on, of faith, support and survival; and mostly of the importance of friendship, family, positivity, and faith in God. If this story helps just one person to become more peaceful, more hopeful, more certain of his or her faith, more appreciative of the blessings of life and how precious and fleeting it is, or to become a better person, a more attentive spouse or parent, I will consider my purpose in sharing this story to be fulfilled. I have taken some creative liberties with names and details, and done a bit of paraphrasing, in order to preserve everyone’s privacy. I have, at times, drastically simplified the medical jargon to make things more understandable. The few details I have changed are minor and they don’t change the story itself.

Friday, July 31, 2009 9:35 a.m.

God Saved Harry this Morning

Last night, after hearing from the nurse that Harry had taken a turn for the worse, I told Harrison that I was just going to sit with Daddy for an hour or two. When I got to the hospital, I was shocked at how bad he looked.

After a while the doctor told me it would be better for me if I weren't in the room, so I went to the waiting room. About 1:30 a.m., I heard the announcement:

“Code Blue, CICU, Bed 4 ... Code Blue, CICU, Bed 4 ...”

I was painfully aware that it was ... *Harry's bed*...

Twenty minutes later a nurse came to get me and said, “Mrs. White, we've been giving your husband CPR for twenty minutes now, and I'm sorry, but it doesn't look good. We are taking him in for emergency surgery, but his chances are not good. I think you should come with me now, so that you can see him alive for the last time and to say good-bye.”

So I did just that. I accompanied the gurney downstairs to the OR, keeping my eyes on the big, strong angel in blue scrubs who was straddling Harry's body, keeping his heart going. Everyone around me kept assuring me that they would do everything humanly possible to save Harry's life.

I called Harry's parents and brothers, and called my parents and brother. My mom was already at our house with Harrison. The rest of us all huddled around watching the clock. After a half hour, a nurse came out and said, “We have a pulse!” Another hour after that, the nurse came back and said that Harry was holding his own, that the surgeon had found and stopped the bleeding, and was checking to make sure that he had gotten it all. Another hour later, the surgeon came out to speak with us. He said that Harry is in extremely critical condition, and that it will be touch and go for at least three days. He cannot close up the incision yet, because Harry's organs are so swollen from the trauma of the bleeding and CPR compressions. He will need many subsequent surgeries to complete the closing of his abdomen. Right now, Harry looks ... *awful*. I am never queasy, but when I saw him two hours after surgery, I almost passed

out. He was unrecognizable because of all of the swelling and bruising on his face. Even Harry's brother, Bill, an ER doctor, was shocked and shaken at Harry's appearance. Bill and I wouldn't let Harry's parents see him ... because he looked so bad.

When he finished speaking with us, the surgeon had tears in his eyes. He hugged me and said, "God saved your husband tonight."

I can't begin to describe how I feel right now. Of course, I am frightened beyond description. And, seeing what Harry's poor body has gone through breaks my heart so badly—it's impossible for me to stop thinking about what that battered body means and what he has endured. The thought of having to tell Harrison that his father died tonight ... the worst feeling I've ever had.

Keep the prayers coming. Harry's road to recovery will now be very long and extremely difficult. I know he will make it. He is strong and healthy, and we know he "wants to go home," but, he needs all the prayers we can say for him.

Cat

There is much to be shared about this evening.

Every day since the surgery that Harry had the first night he was in the hospital, a week prior, his vascular surgeon would tell me that he was concerned about a large hematoma that had formed in Harry's abdomen as a result of the iliac and femoral bleed. He was concerned about the hematoma rupturing and mentioned that to me every day. It was one of the things that I kept to myself.

On the evening of Thursday, July 30, around 10:45, I tucked Harrison into bed. For the entire forty-four days that Harry was in the hospital, Harrison slept in my room on Harry's side of the bed. The morning that the paramedics took Harry to the hospital, they took his T-shirt off and used it to wipe the sweat from his chest before they put the monitors on him. When we found the shirt crumpled on the floor that first evening, Harrison picked it up and smelled it and said it smelled like Dad. So, I folded it and put it on the bedside table and it remained there for Harrison to smell every night before sleep until Harry finally came home.

After kissing Harrison good night, I turned off the light, closed the door and went down the hall to my office to post the update for the day.

"If anyone can make it through this journey, it is Harry. Your emails are going all over the country, to friends of Harry's. EVERYONE is praying and praying for his survival and recovery. He is a man respected, admired and loved and thousands are pulling for him."

~RL

"I woke up this morning feeling sorry for myself because I didn't sleep well and have a headache. Then, I read your email and your tragedy puts everything in perfect perspective for me. I am numb with sadness for you. I won't stop praying, praying, praying...."

~DB

"After reading your email this morning, I was overwhelmed with the thought that God wasn't saving Harry, He was trying to take him because He has a very special place for Harry—in His loving care and right next to Him. It is Harry who fought hard to come back to be with you and Harrison and to do more good works here on earth."

~MM

"I don't even know where to start. I cried when I read your email, I'm crying now. I can't begin to imagine what you are going through. I'm praying for my friend who inspires me to be a better man."

~DC

"I ... I don't have the right words.... You know I am here for you and praying so hard. I am tortured by this latest turn of events, so I cannot begin to imagine how you feel. This is ... Oh, I just don't even know what to say...."

~VB

"Our prayers will bring Harry through this; I just know it. He is a tough guy, always has been and his spirit is not yet ready to leave this world."

~RF

About the Author

Cathy Grewe White was born in Richfield, Minnesota in 1954, coincidentally in the same hospital, and in the same year as one of Harry's four brothers. When she was eight, she moved with her parents and brother, Rick, to Arcadia, California where she grew up and attended Arcadia High School. At USC School of Dentistry in 1976, she met Harry as he was completing his orthodontic residency.

Harry was born in Black Eagle, Montana, then moved to Minnesota with his parents and four brothers, Rolly, Bill, Bob and Jim. They then moved to the San Fernando Valley in California, where Harry's father worked as Vice President of Western Airlines in Los Angeles. Harry attended Chaminade High School, then went on to Stanford University, earning a degree in Honors Humanities. He attended dental school at the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center in Portland, and returned to Southern California for his orthodontic education. He spent the summer of 1974 as a Naval officer working as a dentist for the U.S. Indian Health Service, living and working on the reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota.

Cathy loves to cook, entertain and travel. She is an avid football and baseball fan. She has a passion for architectural and space design. She loves creative crafts and enjoys sewing, knitting, jewelry making and scrapbooking. She has been a member of the Mensa Society since 1985.

While Harry was practicing orthodontics, he enjoyed teaching at USC and giving board certification courses to other orthodontists throughout the U. S. and Canada. In 1985, he earned his private pilot license. A talented athlete, he played baseball at Stanford University and has enjoyed playing several sports since his Stanford days. He won many tennis tournaments over the years, and now plays golf and pickle ball. He is a certified scuba diver and also enjoys biking and hiking. He joins Cathy as an avid baseball and football fan. Harry especially enjoyed the years of coaching Little League, flag football, golf and school baseball while Harrison was in middle school and he proved himself to be an exceptional, inspirational coach. Harry continues to be active in Stanford Alumni activities, helping plan and facilitate events at reunions. Harry does a great job as the White Family social chairman.

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