



by Linda Weatherly

January 16, 2008 . . . It was only a check-up with our new doctor. My husband Tony had been coughing for years. Our previous doctor had always said "just a touch of bronchitis." But this doctor wouldn't settle for that diagnosis. He ordered a stress test and it showed that indeed, the coughing indicated much more than bronchitis. Tony had major heart problems that needed immediate attention.

Friday, January 25, 2008—Tony entered the hospital for a heart catheterization. During the procedure, he had a heart attack on the table. Tony had two arteries blocked 100% and a third blocked 70%. The surgeon wanted to operate right away but the heart was not strong enough. Tony was admitted to the hospital so that his heart could have a couple of days to get stronger before surgery. Two days later, on Sunday, January 27, while speaking to close friends who had come to visit, Tony began weeping and said to them, "I don't want to die."

Well, at 6:30 p.m. on that day, Sunday evening, January 27, 2008, Tony did "die." His heart did stop beating—3 times! The "Code Blue" alarm was sounded.

There are many details and many miracles in the story that follows, but, as the family recalls them, here is an outline of the events that began that Sunday evening.

During the day that Sunday, January 27, 2008, seventeen visitors came to see Tony. He was in good spirits—trusting God—and glad to be getting everything "taken care of."

Our daughter Angie stayed with Tony that evening while our son David and I attended services at our newly formed fellowship, Grace Place Church. I had been very reluctant to leave, but Tony was doing fine and encouraged me to do so. He said that as long as Angie was there with him, he would be fine until I returned. We were not prepared for what happened next . . .

Tony's cardiac arrest came at 6:30 p.m. and the "Code Blue" alarm was sounded. Angie immediately began to pray as the medical team rushed in. She didn't call me right away for fear of how I would react to this news. After about 15 minutes, Angie made a 1-minute phone call to me and simply asked that I have all the congregation pray and that I come to the hospital immediately. As everyone began to pray, my son David and I left for the hospital, not knowing what to expect. Tony had seemed fine when I left him. What could have happened in such a short span of time?

As David frantically drove his car at high speed to get us to the hospital, we were stopped by a Michigan State Trooper. David immediately called out to him: "Code Blue. Code Blue. My Dad's dying." The trooper asked which hospital he was in and immediately escorted us to the hospital entrance.

David and I ran as fast as we could to reach Tony. Just inside the hospital, David grabbed a wheelchair for me and we went running down the halls.

By the time we reached the hospital room, the medical team had lost Tony's vital signs 3 times. Angela was in the room praying and, according to the doctor, each time she began praying harder, they would get Tony's vital signs back again. All of his children were with me around his bed—Laura, David and Angela—talking to him and helping to hold him still while they fought to keep him alive. Finally, when they were able to stabilize him, Tony was rushed immediately to the Operating Room.

As I arrived in the Surgical Waiting Room, I saw thirty-three wonderful friends and relatives there waiting to pray with me, including several area pastors. I told someone, "Darn that Tony. His heart's desire was that all the churches and ministers would come together, but he didn't have to do it this way!"

At this point, there was only one course of action to keep Tony alive. The doctor came in to report to us that the surgeon would try and open up the completely blocked main artery, but this would be an almost impossible task, as the inside of the artery looked like "cottage cheese." The doctor said the surgeon would try his best to insert a stint. We began to pray. We knew that God specializes in the "impossible" things.

At that moment, we felt that we should call Dr. Charles Green in Louisiana, our lifelong friend and respected pastor and leader. We would ask him to intercede and pray for Tony's life to be spared. We all listened on someone's speaker phone as Charles prayed a powerful prayer. As we agreed together with him, he asked that "the surgeon would have no trouble at all inserting the stint." **Well, it happened exactly as Charles had prayed.** The doctor reported to us that the surgeon successfully inserted **two** stints into the 100% blocked main artery. I called Charles to give him the good news and he said something to me that would help me in the forthcoming days. He said, "Praise God. We have the beginnings of our miracle." Little did I know that the "miracle" would be made real to us again and again over the next three months.

One of the attending nurses who had helped during Tony's cardiac arrest earlier that evening, came over to comfort me. She said, "Listen to me! He will be just fine. If he survived this, he can survive anything. It wasn't his time to go. When God saw him, He said, 'What are you doing here? You're too early. Go back down.'" We owe so much to God--He heard our prayers; but we also owe many thanks to the doctors and nurses who worked so hard to keep Tony alive.

Three days later—it was Miracle Morning! Tony's breathing tubes were taken out and he was conscious again! Although extremely weak, he was happy to be alive—talking and joking—not realizing the trauma that he had gone through. His family was there, telling him that he was doing fine—when, all of a sudden, he remembered his "near death experience." He said to our son, "David, did I die?" (We hadn't mentioned it to him.) He began to vividly remember "floating" above and seeing the people working on him during the cardiac arrest. David confirmed to Tony that, on Sunday, he had indeed lost vital signs and had been dying. Later, the doctor who was there said to me in bewilderment, "You know . . . your daughter . . . I don't understand it . . . but on that Sunday evening, every time I would hear her praying louder, your husband would blink his eyes and "come back" to us.

Praise God! What a wonderful impact Tony's experience has had—on everyone who has heard about it and prayed for him around the world. So many of the hospital staff came into his room, prayed with him, asked about his faith, and stood in awe at the miracle they witnessed before their very eyes.

The following month was a period of continued stabilizing of Tony's heart and body as he readied himself for the necessary heart surgery.

Friday, February 29, 2008—Tony entered the operating room again—this time at 8 a.m.—for triple by-pass heart surgery. So many family members and friends waited and prayed for good news. But problems seemed to prevail. The surgeons said Tony's heart was the worst they had seen in all their 30 years of practice. The surgery was complete, but Tony was on a heart/lung machine—the heart muscle was in extremely bad shape—not holding stitches—and the bleeding would not stop. One of the surgeons called the family together to ask if they should continue to do everything they could to save him—even to the point of implanting an artificial heart. We answered, "Of course!"

Well, we prayed—and we again called our friend Charles Green to give him the less-than-favorable status. He was praying continually with us and we treasured his support.

Tony's chest cavity was covered, but left slightly open because of the bleeding. He was given only a 50/50 chance to live. The lung specialist dropped by and could not give me a good report. She said, "We'll just have to take it hour by hour."

Saturday, March 1, 2008—I went in to Intensive Care and could not believe my eyes. Tony's face and entire body was so swollen that I hardly recognized him. There were so many machines in that tiny room and a nurse was stationed there with him 24 hours a day. At 1 p.m., one of the surgeons informed us that he was taking Tony back to the Operating Room. Back to the Operating Room!! What more could they do? He was dying! I felt that any more trauma to his body would be the last. But then I remembered what Charles Green had said: "We have the beginnings of our miracle." Family and friends once again joined together in prayer that the bleeding would stop. And we waited . . .

Two and a half hours later, the doctor emerged with a smile on his face. He sat down beside me, smiled, and casually said, "Well, I don't see anymore bleeding. He should be o.k." Wow! More of our miracle has come around. Just at that time, my daughter Laura's cell phone rang. The ringer was an anthem of praise—It was "How Great Is Our God"—the song that I'd been singing every day since January 25.

I immediately called Charles Green again—this time with a good report! He said, "The Miracle Man is back. Tell that man that I love him. When this is all over, we'll meet down here in Louisiana, go to a restaurant together, and sit around and talk about the goodness of God."

Wednesday, March 5, 2008—The surgeon said Tony's heart is much less inflamed. He closed his chest, took him off some of the medicines, and began to wake him up. On March 9, Tony began whispering to us, asking a multitude of questions. He was happy to be "all fixed now" and said to the surgeon, "Dude, good job!"

Wednesday, March 12, 2008—Tony awoke in good spirits, but had been complaining of a "popping" in his chest. When the surgeon came in to check, it was just as he feared—the breastbone was not mending back together. On Friday, he took Tony back to surgery to stabilize the breastbone, but could not close it all the way. The breastbone was fragmented in three places and there was an infection in his chest. Plastic surgeons would be called in to disconnect the pectoral muscles and reposition them as "flaps" across Tony's chest.

Saturday, March 15, 2008—My 3-year-old granddaughter Emma was at her home when, all of a sudden, she exclaimed, "Granddaddy gonna get better; Granddaddy gonna get up; Granddaddy gonna go home." (I think God's been talking to her.)

Thursday, March 20, 2008—Plastic surgery day. Tony awoke in great spirits and ready to get this last surgery over. The surgery began at 4 p.m. in the afternoon and was completed after 8 p.m. that evening. All went well, and we rejoiced that another part of our "miracle" has been fulfilled. "How great is our God"—again and again and again.

Friday, March 28, 2008—Tony was released from the hospital and transferred to a health care rehabilitation facility. He was still unable to walk without assistance and needed lots of physical therapy.

Friday, April 4, 2008—During the early hours of the morning, Tony was re-admitted to the hospital with difficulty breathing and a very low oxygen level. Tests showed that there was a fluid build-up in his lungs and steps were taken to drain the fluid. During the next few days, treatments were performed on Tony's lungs and everything possible was done to eliminate the excess fluid that had built up in his body.

Thursday, April 10, 2008—Tony returned to the health care facility feeling better than ever. He continued to improve, getting more mobile as each day passed by.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008—Tony was released to come home!! He was still very weak, but so happy—playing with his dogs—sleeping in his own bed—relaxing on the couch.

Each day since that time has truly been a blessing—for Tony—for me—for our family. We treasure each moment that God has given us and live each day to the fullest—knowing even more clearly what truly matters in life. We simply have no words to adequately thank family and friends for their prayers and all they have meant to us during this trying time. We will forever sing, "How Great Is Our God." He has truly been with us each day as He continues to heal "The Miracle Man."