

## Miracles Part III

“We learned later,” Linda said, “That while we were waiting for an ambulance, the pilot was attending a church service. He was at a revival and his beeper went off. At first he thought he wouldn’t answer it. It was such a good service. Then he decided he should answer his pager. But it [the delays] all worked out because as we were in the ambulance turning into the airport we saw the plane was just coming down the runway. The plane and the ambulance both arrived at the airport at the same time.”

Les continues, “We took off and we hit the storm. There was rain, sleet, snow, and hail. It was 8pm. The temperature was 80 degrees at home. It was 30 degrees in Cleveland.” Those differences in temperatures were causing a storm – a big storm. This was Linda’s first time flying in an airplane.

Severe weather caused traffic controllers to direct the pilot to land in Akron, Ohio, 45 minutes from the hospital. Linda feared that Les might not live through yet another leg of their journey. The pilot refused to go to Akron, deciding to fly 20 miles out and onto a different approach to Cleveland. Barely a minute from the runway the sky suddenly opened up and the clouds cleared. “It was just like God’s hand came down and cleared away the clouds,” says Les. “Then right after we landed, it just closed up again.” A police officer, sent to the airport to provide an escort to the hospital, later told the Blevins that he had no idea how the plane managed to land. The officer said as he was driving to the airport, he could hardly see the road through the driving rain.”

“How the Lord just moved on everything, it was amazing,” Linda said as recalled that time. “Everything was just timed beautifully. It was a real miracle.”

Les Belvins received a new left lung on April 8, 2000. The operation went very well. Dr. Malcolm DeCamp, the Louisville, Kentucky, native in charge of the clinic’s lung transplant program, later told Les that when he removed his left lung, it was small enough to be held in the palm of his hands (a normal lung is the size of half your chest). The doctor said the lung was heavy, like concrete. It was that stiff and dense. A normal healthy lung is like fluffy sponge, like angel food cake with a million tiny air sacs. Les’ right lung, while in better condition but still affected by silicosis, was left in place.

“I woke up about two days later. When I finally woke up, I said, ‘Is it over?’” Les was asked what his very first thoughts were. He laughs. “I was just glad to be there!”

Les doesn’t know anything about the donor. He does know that the man in the same room with him was also recovering from a transplant. He was the man who received the same donor’s heart. The two men never really talked, but indeed, have a shared connection.

Linda says, “After the transplant, Les was in the hospital for 20 days. There was setback after setback after setback. He had to learn to walk again three times.” But Linda’s faith was never shaken. “I knew the Lord didn’t bring him this far to take him away now.” She says, “Even the public relations girl at the hospital in Cleveland -- she said to me, ‘It sounds like you *do* have a miracle!’”

Not long after the operation, Les’ breathing capacity increased from 14 percent to 50 percent. Dr. DeCamp explained to Linda, “Since we only replaced one lung, I’m not expecting him to get to 100 percent. He should be well enough to breathe without bottled oxygen, walk without gasping for air, and spend time with his children and grandchildren just like any other grandpa would. The most important thing is, he’ll have a huge increase in the quality of his life. I’d love to see him to be able to go back to work. But as he later told Les, “I didn’t put a new lung in you so you could go back to the mine.”

“Over there [at Cleveland Clinic], they tell us, ‘If you live the first six months, you can expect to live about 5 years.’ We get newsletters, though, and some people have lived 9-10 years.” As of the last report, Les is doing very well. He recently returned from a check-up in Cleveland and says, “Everything was looking good. My new lung is working at 90% capacity and my old lung is at 50%.” Les takes 28 pills a day. “I was on 48. This is medicine I’ll be on for the rest of my life.” He was asked about side effects from all this medicine. “I have trembles. That’s it. So far that’s all.”

Les was asked what he would like people to learn, to know, from his experience. His answer was three-fold.

“A lot of people are not organ donors because they’re afraid that when the doctor sees their driver’s license, he won’t work on them, thinking that just one body could help save so many lives. They think he says, ‘I’ll lose this one, but I’ll save maybe 20 other people.’ That’s not true. The doctors want you to know that they’ll work hard to give everybody *every* chance.”

“Also, a lot of people think, ‘I don’t have money. They give organs to a rich person.’ And that’s not true.”

Finally, Les wants the miners to know and understand this: “The coal miners, they used to think that nothing could be done [to help them]. A lot of them just won’t pursue it. But we fought for it [compensation], and we’ve set a precedent. I want them to know this. And I’ll do anything I can to help.”

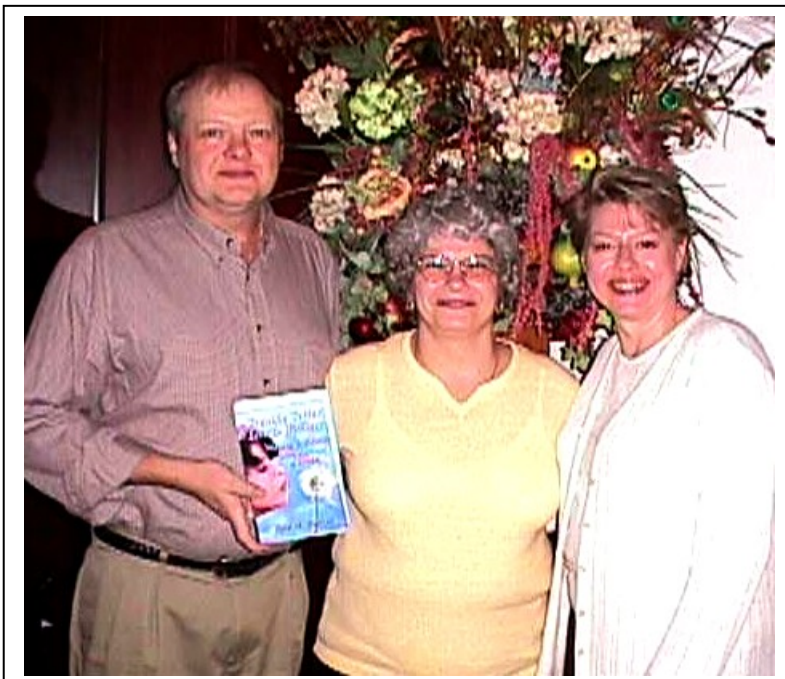
Breaking barriers, keeping the faith, helping others, and having so many of the experiences that Leslie and Linda have had is amazing. But in September, 2000, with the help of a new lung, Leslie Blevins did something very common, yet truly wonderful. Another miracle took place as he, a proud father, participated in a special family event. Les walked his daughter, Lynn, down the aisle to meet her groom. It is well known that loved ones may tend to shed a tear or two as a bride enters the church and marches down the aisle. But Linda says, on that day, “There was not a dry eye in the church. It was a beautiful wedding, and everybody knew what it meant.”

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Taken from *Breathe Better, Live in Wellness: Winning Your Battle Over Shortness of Breath*

by Jane M. Martin

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Les and Linda Blevins, and  
Jane Martin in Charleston,  
West Virginia, March 2003