

# My Miraculous Story: Are You A Praying Person?

by Dave Combs

On January 18, 2023, a day forever etched in my memory, I experienced a life-altering bicycle accident. It occurred while I was leisurely riding along my local greenway, enjoying the serenity of nature. However, fate had a different plan for me that day, as an unfortunate series of events unfolded.

Regrettably, I have no recollection of the incident itself. The entire episode, from the moment I embarked on my bike ride to finding myself in the emergency room at Baptist Hospital in Winston Salem, North Carolina, remains a blank canvas in my mind. The only source of information about the ordeal is the activity app on my trusty iPhone, which diligently tracked my bike ride in tandem with my Apple Watch and Heart Watch app. These technological allies provided a glimpse into the mystery that had befallen me.

According to the data captured, approximately 20 minutes into my ride, my heart rate abruptly plummeted from 100 to 42, while my activity level vanished into thin air. My doctors and I deduced that I may have lost consciousness, potentially due to dehydration. The physical evidence discovered—mud smudging my helmet, jacket, pants, and bicycle—suggested that I simply tumbled to my left, caught off guard, fracturing my third rib and striking the left side of my head with such force that a contusion formed on my forehead, courtesy of my protective helmet. Astonishingly, my Apple Watch's activity logs indicated that I lay motionless on the ground for a staggering two hours. I had unknowingly chosen a sparsely traveled section of the Greenway, where no passersby witnessed my misfortune or came to my aid.

My awakening from this prolonged unconscious state came in the form of a phone call from my loving wife, Linda. Concerned about my delay in returning home, she dialed my number, hoping for reassurance. The only response I could muster was a feeble utterance, "I'm trying to make it." It was by the grace of God, accompanied by some unseen celestial guardians, that I managed to rise from the ground, remount my bike, and pedal the 3.5 miles back to the safety of my humble abode. Covered in mud, as pale as a ghost, and afflicted with total amnesia, I stumbled into our kitchen, where Linda immediately grasped the gravity of the situation. She promptly dialed 911, and the emergency medical services were dispatched. I have no recollection of the subsequent ambulance ride to the hospital; the entire episode remains a blank page in the book of my memory. The astonishment expressed by my doctors was palpable as they marveled at my ability to traverse such a distance and find my way home after being unconscious for two hours. It was undeniably a miracle—a testament to divine intervention.

X-rays and a head CT scan conducted at the hospital confirmed the presence of a subdural hematoma and a small brain bleed on the left side. Thankfully, the bleeding did not persist, providing a glimmer of hope amid the fog of uncertainty. I spent a night under observation before being discharged the following day, feeling surprisingly well. However, the enigma surrounding the events persisted, as my memory of the incident remained elusive.

In mid-February, a scheduled follow-up CT scan revealed a disconcerting accumulation of blood on both the left and right sides of my unhappy brain. At that time, I displayed no other symptoms, but fate had one more cruel twist in store for me. On Sunday morning, March 12th, as I stood in our kitchen, I

suddenly collapsed. Acting quickly, Linda managed to prevent me from striking my head on the counter or floor, but in the process, she severely injured her back. Fear and panic gripped the room as she dialed 911 once again, initiating a disheartening déjà vu experience. A subsequent head CT scan confirmed the presence of additional blood pooling on both the left and right sides of my brain.

In the early hours of March 13th, I found myself undergoing emergency brain surgery. The skilled surgeons performed a burr hole and employed a rubber tube to extract blood from my left side. Over the next 24 hours, a total of 200 cc of blood was painstakingly removed. Two days later, they replicated the procedure on my right side, extracting an additional 100 cc of blood. Following the surgeries, I was transferred to the specialized brain trauma Physical Therapy (PT) unit at the Sticht Center within the hospital. There, I received intensive physical therapy for three hours each day, aiming to counter the extreme weakness, fatigue, and impaired balance that plagued me. Initially, I struggled even to rise from my bed, but with time and unwavering determination, I made slow progress. However, even after reclaiming fragments of my former self, I remained unable to play the piano—an instrument that had brought me immeasurable joy. Not even Rachel's Song, which I had written 42 years ago and played thousands of times, would dance off my fingertips. Then, like a sudden afternoon thunderstorm, an unexpected setback struck on Tuesday night, March 28th. I developed aphasia, robbing me of my ability to articulate intelligible words, while simultaneously being plagued by profound muscle weakness. It was during this trying time that my brain surgeon approached Linda, sharing a potentially life-changing solution: a recently developed procedure known as an MMA (Middle Meningeal Artery) Embolization. Unable to voice

my consent, Linda selflessly made the decision on my behalf. The surgery was scheduled for mid-day on Thursday, March 30th, but fate had a surprise in store.

Early on that fateful Thursday morning, my night nurse roused me from my slumber, bearing the most joyous news I could have hoped for. "You've been moved up," she proclaimed, "and the surgery is now scheduled for 7 am." A surge of excitement coursed through my veins. My wife was hastily summoned and, upon her arrival in the surgery waiting room, I had already been whisked away to the x-ray lab—a space adorned with state-of-the-art fluoroscope equipment where the surgery would be performed. In a remarkably brief span of 46 minutes, the skilled surgeon skillfully navigated my right femoral artery and strategically placed seven specialized coils within branches of my two MMA's, four on the right side of my brain and three on the left.

And here lies another miracle interwoven into the tapestry of my story. As I felt the doctor removing the sheath from my femoral artery, I summoned all the strength I could muster and inquired, with surprising clarity, "Hey, Doc, are you done?" His affirmative response echoed through the room, filling my heart with joy. "Yes, Dave, I am, and it went perfectly. I could not be more pleased. No more leaking," he declared. To my amazement, he had granted me permission to wear my beloved Apple Watch into the operating room, so I seized the opportunity and requested, "Can I call my wife?" His reply was a resounding "Yes." I raised my wrist, activated Siri, and spoke the words that would forever mark a turning point in my journey. "Hey Siri! Call Linda Combs." In an instant, her voice resonated from the waiting room down the hall. With unwavering strength and clarity, I conveyed a message that carried the weight of a thousand

prayers, "Linda, I'm a brand-new man!" Never before had I experienced such overwhelming happiness. Miraculously, my strength returned, and my balance was restored almost instantaneously. I spent one night in the brain surgery ICU before receiving the inconceivable news of my discharge on Friday, March 31st—a testament to the remarkable strides I had made.

My path to recovery began at home with physical therapy, gradually progressing to outpatient sessions at the comprehensive rehabilitation center within Baptist Hospital. And now, as I pen these words, I stand before you, having completed my arduous journey through physical therapy, approved once again to take the wheel and resume driving. Though restrictions remain—no flying, no lifting weights or straining—I find solace in the fact that the worst is behind me. During my last visit with the neurosurgical team, the CT scan results were favorable enough to warrant a three-month interval before my next appointment. While my recovery journey persists, I am grateful for the progress I have made. I can once again grace the piano keys with my fingers, free from the shackles of pain and debilitation. The headaches have subsided, and my strength and stamina have returned, albeit not without their occasional reminders of the trials I have faced. Each day, I count my blessings and offer up my gratitude to a higher power. The power of prayer, woven through the fabric of my story, has been a source of unwavering strength and solace.

In closing, I wish to express my everlasting gratitude to the countless individuals who stood by my side, offering their heartfelt prayers throughout this harrowing ordeal. I will forever cherish the memory of the Baptist Hospital staff, two of whom—on separate nights—answered my question, "Are you a praying person?" with an emphatic "Yes I am." Without hesitation, they

extended their hands, intertwining their fingers with mine, and uttered the most exquisite and sincere prayers for healing that my ears have ever heard. One was a humble man tasked with tidying my room, and the other, my compassionate night nurse, whose name echoed the beauty of ancient scripture. Moreover, when Linda approached the surgeon slated to perform my third surgery, expressing her intentions to pray for him and requesting his prayers for me, his response was immediate and resolute, "I already have been." These remarkable encounters, among many others that graced my hospital stay, serve as a testament to the divine presence that guided me through the darkest of times. I am humbled and honored to share these stories, my personal testimony, with each and every one of you.

*Dave Combs*