

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT A HEART LIKE MINE

“If you want to read a book with heart—written from true, emotional depth—this is the one.”

—Cecil Murphey, author and co-author of more than 100 books, including *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* and the *New York Times* best-seller, *90 Minutes in Heaven*.

“Pain never touches just our bodies. From the dentist’s drill to the surgeon’s scalpel, pain and sickness stick their uninvited noses into our deep places. Cindy Scinto has lived long in valleys none of us hope to ever see and shares one pearl of great price that all of us need—hope. For all who suffer or who hold the hand of one suffering, this book can be strong stuff. But then, most good medicine is.”

—Dave Swartz, author, *Dancing With Broken Bones*, *The Magnificent Obsession*, and *Embracing God: Drawing Closer to the God Who Loves You*

“Cindy Scinto truly has the heart to write this book—not only her new physical heart, but her spiritual heart. This is evidenced throughout these pages as she takes you along on her journey through over fifty heart procedures, some bringing her close to death. She had questions, yes, and sometimes even anger and resentment at the seemingly unfairness of the turn her life has taken. Ultimately, however, the reader is drawn into her acceptance of God’s will and the peace she experienced at every juncture. No matter what you’re going through today, *A Heart Like Mine* will cause you to hunger for more of God’s presence in your life.”

—Donna Clark Goodrich, author, *Healing in God’s Time*, and *A Step in the Write Direction—the Complete How-to Book for Christian Writers*

“*A Heart Like Mine* has been a great inspiration to Pastor Bob in this last message series. We, as a body, would like to thank you for writing your book and for bringing your words here to Mt. Spokane Church.”

—Mt. Spokane Church
Mead, Washington

“Impacting and filled with profound, scriptural insight and spiritual depth gained through years of severe testing, Cindy writes *A Heart Like Mine* for every person who has ever wondered about God’s will and suffering. A thought-provoking read for the serious Christian!”

—Dr. Robert V. Smith, Senior Pastor, Mt. Spokane Church
Moody Bible College Instructor, Spokane, Washington Campus
Chaplain, Spokane, Washington Fire Department

“I really enjoyed reading and sharing this book. What power in the hope we have in Christ alone. Your story becomes His story for us to gently walk alongside and see, if only for a moment, what few others have known: His heart through yours.”

—Kena
Phoenix, Arizona

“It is truly inspiring to read this book because Cindy has written from actual experience, not just theory or preaching, and you can feel her pain, understand her searching, and follow her journey of ‘Why me, God?’ to ‘How can I use this to help others?’ This book will help you understand our life trials and how to deal with them!”

—Becky
Liberty Lake, Washington

“I just finished this book yesterday and WOW. I laughed, I cried, I pondered, I examined my own walk with Christ. This book paints such a visual experience of the author’s journey to understanding God’s will. It is well written and an easy read, loaded with profound scripture, and yet her personality shines through. All I can say is thank you, Cindy, for sharing. I have given two copies away as gifts and kept one for me. Several people on my Christmas list will be getting this book.”

—Laura
Mesa, Arizona

“I liked your book so much that I ordered three more for friends. We have two friends with serious illnesses. One just had both of her kidneys removed and the other may have terminal cancer. Amazon says they are sold out and don’t have a source to get more. You should send them a bunch!”

—Dick
Hayden, Idaho

“Wow, you did a most excellent job of writing and sharing your spiritual and physical journey! I finished the book in one day—you have a story that needed to be told. God definitely gave you powerful words to express what you have learned about Him and getting through suffering. Your book blessed me and I know God has plans for it to bless many more people. Thank you for finding time and answering God’s call to write the book.”

—Carol
Bend, Oregon

“How wonderful that you could share with us from such very personal struggles. I have sent a book to two nieces who are struggling with cancer and have had great positive feedback from them. We have all been inspired by how the Lord is leading you as we all fight the same emotional feelings in our personal battles. Looking forward to your next book.”

—Virginia
Spokane, Washington

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Finding God's Will for Your Life

CINDY VALENTI-SCINTO

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—Cecil Murphey, author and co-author of more than 100 books, including *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* and the New York Times best-seller, *90 Minutes in Heaven*.



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This book is dedicated to my heart donor, Danielle—my “angel on earth.” Although I never knew you face-to-face, I know your very essence. Each time your heart beats in my chest, I am reminded of the life you gave so I could live.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

—John 15:13



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Acknowledgments

FIRST OF ALL, my husband, John, deserves the utmost recognition for his unwavering dedication to holding up the proclamation “in sickness and health” as he takes care of me day after day, never stopping once to complain. I would not be here without his love, faithful help, encouragement, wisdom, and support. I love you.

And my son, Jonathan: You had to persevere through entering your teen years worrying your mom might not be alive when you came home from school each day. Much was delayed or missed due to my constant illness. I love you for being a caring, loving son who always found a way to cheer me up. I never will forget the first time I was in the ICU and you had your dad read Psalm 86 to me. You thought I would like how it spoke of God fighting for us and helping the needy. You are the best son anyone could grow up with!

The doctors and staff my life depended on and still does—I never can find a way to properly thank you all: special thanks to Dr. Canaday for believing in me and never using the word *psychology*, Dr. Chilson, Dr. Icenogle, Dr. Sandler, Dr. Sestero, Dr. Carol Wysham, Dr. Danko Martincic, who believes in nurturing a transplanted heart, Sacred Heart Medical Center staff, the nurses on 6-South and 6-North, ICU nurses, Carole Fenkner from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Dr. Stegmann, Dr. Boehmer, the staff at the cath lab in Sacred Heart—especially dear,

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sweet “Carol” and big, bad “Dave,” the staff at Spokane Cardiovascular Services, the paramedics with American Medical Response, and the ER nurses at Sacred Heart Medical Center who were there to usher me back to earth!

My heartfelt thanks, admiration, and appreciation go to Donna Goodrich for her incredible proofreading skills as she edited the first edition. But more importantly, Donna, you are my friend, mentor, and a godly woman who has taught me much.

Pastor Bob Smith and Pastor Steve Williams: You each took this book and have spoken volumes of wisdom and knowledge through the teaching series. “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15 KJV).

In memory are my dad, Joseph Valenti, who always encouraged me to write, and my brother Charlie, who was there for me when I needed him.

Charlotte, Danielle’s mom—you have provided the completion for this book. I love you.

Thank You, God, for allowing all these people to have a hand in my life. You, my Father in heaven, started this journey and You will bring it to completion, in Your time.



Foreword

WITH MORE THAN thirty years as senior pastor of a large church, and as many years serving as chaplain for the local fire department, I regularly encounter people faced with a variety of challenging situations. Few with whom I have dealt have been tested as dramatically and severely as Cindy Scinto and her family.

The impact of Cindy's story is not to be found only in the life and death struggle of her failing physical heart and related medical difficulties. The penetrating power of this book is revealed in the testimony of her spiritual discoveries. It is the development of a spiritual heart—a heart that by faith has learned to rest in a God who proves Himself real in the unexpected storms of everyday life.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

—Ps. 139:14-16 NIV

The Hebrew word for “ordained” means to form, fashion, shape, or frame human activity. It is to plan or purpose a situation. It relates

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to something or someone being predetermined or formed according to a divine plan and purpose. Biblically, it is often used of potters who form their creations.

A Heart Like Mine is the experience of a young wife and mother as she learns to embrace her days as ordained by God. Cindy's unforeseen and seemingly never-ending physical trials have turned her world upside down. This is a thought provoking account of a journey in understanding God's will for our lives in the midst of extreme difficulties.

Through God's Word and prayer, Cindy has gleaned timeless truths about a God who can be trusted even when our own hearts prove to be broken and flawed. This is a revealing portrait of each of our lives to one extent or another. It is a compelling call to recognize the human heart as fatally spoiled by sin. This book challenges readers to seek remedy in Jesus Christ and the spiritual transplant He alone can provide.

Biblically sound and well researched, Cindy writes *A Heart Like Mine* for every person who has ever wondered why bad things happen to good people.

—Dr. Robert V. Smith
Senior Pastor, Mt. Spokane Church
Moody Bible College Instructor, Spokane, Washington Campus
Chaplain, Spokane, Washington Fire Department



A Note from the Author

“I AM SO out of control!” And I love the way that sounds. But don’t misunderstand—I am in no way reckless, dangerous, self-destructive, crazy, or anything even close. I am simply so out of control of my life and circumstances that I live in an absolutely peaceful and joyful way.

The trials I have experienced the past seven years allow me to write this book from firsthand experience. The list you are about to read illustrates how much I suffered in a short period of time. So when I say I have been broken and depressed, crushed and bewildered, and that I know what suffering is, I speak the truth. But it also should help you understand, as you read this book, that giving God complete control of my life did not happen without a battle of my will.

Here is a list of the major heart-related medical procedures and surgeries I endured from September 2001 until this writing in 2009. It does not include the myriad of problems and issues with doctors, appointments, nurses, travel, insurance, and finances. (A glossary of the medical phrases below is on page 173.)

September 2001: First heart attack. Heart angioplasty, stent in main artery, clear left artery

October 2001: Brachytherapy and stent (two separate angioplasties in one day)

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- December 2001: Heart angioplasty, diagonal artery stent
- January 2002: Heart angioplasty
- February 2002: Heart angioplasty, main and left artery
- February 2002: Open-heart surgery, double bypass, complications, two surgeries in one day, critical condition
- July 2002: Heart angioplasty
- August 2002: Traveled to New York City, heart angioplasty, main artery ballooned, two stents placed, two angioplasties in one week
- September 2002: Heart angioplasty
- October 2002: Heart angioplasty, four stents are 50 percent under-deployed, one is blocking the main artery
- October 2002: Heart angioplasty, rotablation, brachytherapy, anemic, blood transfusion
- November 2002: Attempted cardiac ablation, rescheduled for December
- December 2002: Ablation and pacemaker
- January 2003: Main artery 90 percent blocked, ballooned/rotablation
- January 2003: Traveled to San Diego, heart angioplasty
- March 2003: Heart angioplasty
- April 2003: Surgery, clean out scar tissue, re-cut sternum bone and put back together
- June 2003: Heart angioplasty to find 98 percent blockage in middle of main artery
- June 2003: Heart angioplasty to clear out blockage and another stent placed
- July 2003: ER visit—severe tachycardia
- August 2003: Heart angioplasty
- October 2003: Heart angioplasty
- December 2003: Surgery in Pennsylvania—mini thoracotomy to inject FGF-1 Growth Hormone, experimental surgery
- February 2004: Heart angioplasty, main artery 99 percent blocked

A Note from the Author

- February 2004: Heart angioplasty, rotablation and brachytherapy
March 2004: Heart angioplasty
May 2004: Heart angioplasty, partial occlusion of artery—no intervention
August 2004: Heart angioplasty, artery 100 percent occluded—no intervention
September 2004: Heart angioplasty, two blockages in main artery—two more stents
September 2004: Heart angioplasty, two blockages in main artery—two more stents
October 2004: Heart angioplasty
December 2004: Heart angioplasty
April 2005: ER, went into cardiac arrest two times, almost died (read about my experience with death in Chapter 1)
April 2005: Heart angioplasty, pre-heart transplant
July 2005: Heart transplant!
January 2006: Cytomegalovirus (CMV) detected, only treatment is chemotherapy
February 2006: CMV returns, back on chemotherapy
May 2006: CMV returns, go on a stronger chemotherapy, in hospital four weeks
October 2006: CMV returns, in hospital four weeks, then on chemotherapy at home for three months
November 2007: Broken right leg and knee
December 2008: Double abdominal hernia repair needed due to scarring from operations and a broken sternal wire

If you made it through this list, you can begin to understand why I titled this book *A Heart Like Mine*. But keep in mind, I am here to encourage you to see that God gives us all a portion of faith—enough to make it through the toughest of trials and to emerge triumphant.

—Cindy

Here are three anchor verses God gave me early on in my illness.
Use these to steady yourself as you find God's will for your life:

Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good.

—2 Chron. 19:11 KJV

Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

—Neh. 8:10

Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction.

—Job 36:21



Introduction

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, my heart ached for the lives lost in New York City. After all, that was my home—the place where I grew up. A week later, my heart broke once again—emotionally and physically.

Unremitting pressure and pain in my chest sent me to my family doctor. After three appointments and two emergency room visits, I was admitted to the advanced cardiac care unit of the local hospital. As I sat on the edge of a sterile hospital bed, I questioned why they had admitted me for heart problems. There was nothing wrong with my heart. I stared pensively at the flyers on the bulletin board describing discharge instructions after open-heart surgery.

I had no idea looming blockages in two of my coronary arteries were threatening to take my life.

At forty years old, I never had thought of my heart. Life was grand. I confidently checked off *no* for all heart disease risk factors on the doctor's office intake form. My diet was healthy, my cholesterol levels were perfect, and my lifestyle was tailored to an athletic regimen.

I had developed diabetes as a child, but all my life I was diligent about taking care of my health. I visited my doctor once every six months, where he reiterated his assessment: "You are healthier than patients I see who are not diabetic."

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When I applied for life insurance, I was given the normal monthly rate instead of the higher rate given to people with diabetes. My exam, only a few years before my first heart attack, proved me to be in outstanding health.

All this was lost when I was inducted into the world of chronic heart disease. A permanent relationship with emotional and physical pain and disability emerged from this encounter.

The first procedure left me with a metal stent in my main artery, holding it open against the pressure of further assault. This was the start of a contentious battle to regain the vibrant health of which I had been robbed. The path I was constrained to follow threatened to dismantle my faith and unravel my plans.

I often fought to divert God's will for my life and stray from His delineated design. Now I know I wouldn't change the past and I feel privileged to have walked His perfectly designed plan.

In his book, *Dancing With Broken Bones*, David Swartz explains, "For many of us, spiritual growth sometimes means going down a path we would much rather detour around."¹

There is no ending until we meet a new beginning.

In the Beginning

I HATE WATCHING everyone go by while I'm stuck in here. I want my life back. Angry thoughts spilled over, accentuating my already depressive mood as I stared out the living room window. Almost four years of heart attacks, surgeries, procedures, and endless medical treatments had left me disabled and despondent—sentenced to lie incapacitated on an overused couch. Joggers running past, women pushing strollers, and elderly couples taking leisurely walks reminded me of the cruel confinement heart disease had forced on me. I was angry at the world outside and the people who paraded past, living their lives uninterrupted.

Resentment caused me to hate people I didn't even know. *Look at them out there. Don't they know how lucky they are?*

Watching out the front window day after day was like being a specimen in the glass tank of a science lab. The multi-colored pills and capsules I took every few hours became nothing more than the doctor's attempt to find a way to prevent another heart attack. I was sure they prescribed many of them out of desperation. No one knew what to do anymore. Three cardiologists actually refused to treat me—they were too scared they would run out of options. The only choice left was to keep me drugged so I couldn't laugh at a good joke. Laughing would be too hard on my heart. It didn't stop me from trying.

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When visitors came, I tried to cover up my foul mood, complaining about the deepening indent in the couch where I sat. Joking was a way to make things better. I didn't want people to worry about me. Even though I laughed with them, secretly I was afraid to die. Thinking how pitiful my life was, I sunk deeper into the hollowed out cushion.

One afternoon, I realized brooding wasn't doing me any good so I thought some lunch might lighten my pessimistic mood. With feeble efforts, I pushed up from the couch, leaning as if an earthquake were swaying the floor beneath me. I could feel the skin stretch on my badly swollen legs.

My steps were careful—I was afraid too much pressure would rip open my ankles. Getting to the kitchen, I found leftovers in the refrigerator from dinner the night before. The plate of food was unappetizing but I picked at it with my fork. It was hard to eat anything without gagging.

Each time I swallowed a miniscule forkful, I had to run to the bathroom and throw up. I gave up on keeping down food and put the plate in the sink.

“Why do I feel so bad? Why was today different?” I hoped the sick feeling would go away.

I pressed my fist into my chest, hoping to relieve the squeezing pressure, but the symptoms persisted and crushing pain traveled from my heart up into my neck. *Not another heart attack? Not another grueling ER visit?*

Going to the ER had become insanely mundane. Ominous blockages came often, making the threat of a heart attack seem routine. *Maybe I'll call someone for a ride.* I had a bad habit of *not* calling 911. One side of me hated the embarrassment of needing emergency help while the other side wanted to deny the critical situation. I knew I could die if I asked a friend to drive me the twenty-one miles to the hospital instead of calling for an ambulance, but I remained indignant.

I hated to think I was weak or sickly.

The palpitating heartbeats pounded up to my head as if I had run full speed and stopped abruptly. This turned my stubbornness into anxiety and fear. Panic swept through my body like the lingering burn of a honeybee's sting.

In the Beginning

I grabbed the phone and dialed 911.

“What is your emergency?” the operator asked without any emotion.

“I think I’m having a heart attack.”

Her voice was expressionless as she verified my address and told me the paramedics were on the way. An empty loneliness came over me. I wanted her to say more, to tell me it was going to be OK. Silence, dotted by the clicking of her keyboard, lingered through the telephone.

Feeling dejected, I hung up.

What do I do now? Sitting on a chair and waiting seemed nonsensical. How will the paramedics get in? The front door is locked.

My hands grabbed onto the walls to steady myself as I started toward the downstairs entryway. After a few steps, weak, wobbly knees gave out and I fell to the floor. It felt as if an elephant were sitting on me.

I crawled the rest of the way to the landing and slid down the steps until I was able to reach up for the doorknob. The lock released with a clicking sound.

My exhausted body slumped with relief and the walls of the foyer towered above me as I glanced up from a curled position. *Oh, God, please don’t let me die.*

Moments later the door opened and two paramedics stepped in with their gear. Their arrival brought relief. I knew they were in charge of my failing life.

Strong arms lifted my flaccid body off the floor and sat me on the bottom step. I looked up into the paramedic’s face and a gentle expression stared down at me as he hooked up his equipment, placing monitors on my chest. Shortly after he turned on the portable EKG machine, erratic beeping blared.

The paramedic’s thoughtful looks quickly disappeared. He was unable to measure my blood pressure, and heartbeats sketched erratically across the EKG screen. A routine call quickly had turned into a race for life.

Two more EMTs rushed up to the house and I watched them lift a bright yellow gurney onto the outside stoop. After some commotion, they leaned me against the hard, plastic board. It was an awful, insecure

feeling as they carried me out to the front yard, my body limp and unsteady.

One of the paramedics started an IV in my arm. Hanging my hand over the edge of the gurney, I stroked the cool grass. It was good finally to be outside.

I hazily gazed up at the bright blue sky. *What is all this for? I only need a ride.* And if something was really wrong, what about all those neighbors walking and jogging down the street? Where were they now that something terrible was about to happen? It felt like dying was an imminent reality and I wanted someone to be there, someone who could recount what happened to me that sunshiny day in April.

Soon it was quiet and all I heard was the distant traffic from the main road. Paramedics hurried around like voiceless workers, wrapping up things for the ride to the hospital. Three of them lifted the gurney onto a stretcher and after I was hoisted into the ambulance, loud barking broke the awkward silence as my dog, Jackson, bolted out of the house. He was my hero—my constant companion during the dreary days. I worried he might be lost outside after we left.

Jackson ran for the vehicle, jumped in, and planted himself next to me. His presence made the cold, antiseptic ambulance affable. I wanted him to stay with me, to curl up next to me so I wouldn't be alone. But I knew he had to get out.

Backed against the ambulance wall, he was intent on protecting me and he growled at the attempts to remove him, snarling and biting at the paramedics. I could hear the deep rumble in his throat, fair warning before his teeth snapped at each hand trying to reach him.

"We can't get him out!" one of them frantically complained.

"Tell him to chase the cat and he'll run into the backyard," I offered weakly to the paramedic in the ambulance. *Oh, please don't leave him behind, all alone.*

Finally, one of the EMT put on thick gloves, reached in, and gently grabbed him. He took Jackson into the house, quickly closing the front door after him. I could see Jackson staring dejectedly out the window as the ambulance's back doors were slammed shut. The sunshine disappeared and darkness fell on me as we pulled out of the driveway.

In the Beginning

The ambulance driver took off abruptly and the continuous rumble of road noise droned loudly. I couldn't hear anything else. The EMT continued to check my blood pressure and monitor my heart rate. He had no expression and said nothing to reassure me. I looked into his face and hoped he would smile or offer some comforting words. Nothing.

The stretcher was thin and hard and I wondered why it was made to be so uncomfortable. I tried to lay my hands across my stomach but I was too weak to keep my arms from sliding down. I feebly reached across and locked my fingers together to keep them from hanging. I felt as if I were lying on the wing of an airplane and the unsteadiness was about to toss me into a free fall.

Every time I thought I would vomit, dry heaves wrenched me into spasms and my hands would slip, sending my arms down to flagellate like the robot when he warned of danger on *Lost in Space*. I wanted the ride to come to an end.

The ambulance finally came to an abrupt halt at the hospital, where we were met by waiting ER personnel. Doors opened and for a moment I felt the warmth of sun on my face, only to be robbed of its brilliance by fluorescent lights in the emergency room hallway.

I looked up at the plasterboard ceiling tiles racing past as I quickly was wheeled into an examination room. Nurses and doctors ran in and within seconds I was being hooked up to a myriad of machines and monitors.

A nasal cannula was placed on my nose and the nurse turned on the oxygen. I hated the whiff of plastic burning through my nostrils with the gushing of air. It would be nice if you could pick a scent—anything besides that acrid, artificial smell.

Once all the machines were hooked up, beeping and high-pitched alarms sounded like an out-of-tune marching band. My heart beat furiously and sent a wave of sharp pain into my neck and right arm. Although I was still conscious, I felt like I was slipping away. I didn't know if it was the medicines being pushed through IV lines or the overwhelming nausea that was paralyzing me.

Slowly, the room became a blur. Screaming sounds from machines and panicky voices from personnel faded. The muted scene became as if I were watching through an old glass pane, wavy and rippled with age

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Nurses and doctors raced to work on me.

"She's coding!" one nurse yelled. "She's not breathing and we don't have a pulse!"

Her alarmed look flashed briefly before me.

Although my lifeless body was being assaulted by attempts to start my heart back up, I wasn't concerned. I was still, placid and unable to do anything. It was like I was outside my body, looking down. Even though a steady calmness held me from fear, one thing was sure to me: I knew I was dying.

Watching from above the exam table was like hovering over a movie set as the actors played out a scripted scene. I was there, but in a mystical way I never had felt before. Because I was weightless and inert, none of the treatments being done had any effect on me. I felt no pain. I felt no fear.

Behind me was a powerful presence of pure white; not simply a bright light, but a pureness beyond feeble words found in any language. I was drawn to this backdrop, wanting to hold onto the motionless entity. It was omnipotent. I knew I was in God's presence. He was right there behind me, watching as if we were both producers monitoring the actor's parts.

I spoke to Him, inaudibly to anyone in the room or me. My thoughts were sufficient for both of us to communicate.

"Lord, please don't let me die here in this ER all alone. Please, Lord, save me."

Somehow, He assured me it wasn't time for me to go.

I took a gasp of air and regained consciousness. Harsh sensations of the real world smacked me out of the tranquil visitation. My body wriggled, and I felt my arms twist and contort. Cardiac seizures further threatened to take my life.

Alongside the exam table were doctors, nurses, and the hospital chaplain. *Something bad must have happened for the chaplain to be standing there with his white collar and prayer stole.*

"We thought we were going to lose you, young lady," one of the nurses chimed at me. She continued to pump medications through the IV lines.

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WHERE TO FIND CINDY AND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HER ON THE WEB:

Website:

<http://www.aHeartLikeMine.com>

<http://www.cindyscinto.com>

Blog:

<http://www.cindyscinto.blogspot.com>

MySpace:

<http://www.myspace.com/lovelifetogo>

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/cindy.scinto>



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Please post feedback about this book to:

http://www.cindyscinto.com/contact_me.html

Not online?

Cindy Scinto

P.O. Box 863

Spokane Valley, WA 99016-0863

Watch for Cindy's next two books in the *Heart Like Mine* series: *A Heart Like Yours*, *Understanding God's Will for Your Life* and *A Heart Like His*, *Living God's Will for Your Life*