

What People Are Saying About *A Heart Like Yours*

A Heart Like Yours is a resounding encouragement for those of us without even half of the maladies that Cindy Valenti-Scinto has dealt with. After this read, I walk a little more grateful for so much that I take for granted and thank God everyday through my hardships. This is his way of sanctifying our purposes.

—**Bryan Duncan**

Christian Music Hall of Fame singer/songwriter and author

All who live on this fallen planet of ours will suffer to some extent. Cindy Valenti-Scinto, however, has suffered more serious health issues than any ten people I know put together. She and Job could have some interesting conversations! Yet her story is a joy-cocktail of hope, encouragement, and the hard lessons of learning to trust in God no matter what comes. Her book *A Heart Like Yours* is just what the doctor ordered for anyone walking through a dark time or a difficult medical challenge.

—**Lynn DeShazo**

Worship leader, Integrity Music songwriter, and author
of *More Precious Than Silver: The God-Stories*
Behind the Songs of Lynn DeShazo

A Heart Like Yours by Cindy Valenti-Scinto is deeply inspirational—both medically and emotionally. It's a riveting, unforgettable story of overwhelming triumph. Her books give a whole new significance to the sound of a beating heart.

—**Julie Garmon**

Guideposts Magazine

Some are born strong. Some derive strength from adversity. Some find strength through faith, and some, a very few like Cindy Valenti-Scinto, define it!

—**Lyle Hatcher**

Author of *Different Drummers*

As with the first book, this one has the reader jumping from encouraged to joyful to disturbed (over Cindy's treatment) and back again. It's a really engaging ride that I found both engrossing and informative. If I ever get a serious illness, I want Cindy on my side!

—**Christy Scannell**

Author of *Secrets from Lulu's Café* series

I love a story of character, courage, and the indomitable human spirit. Cindy Valenti-Scinto's newest book doesn't disappoint. Not only does the author have something to say, but also she says it in a way that commands attention from the first page to the last. Her book is motivating, inspiring, and, yes—entertaining. I marvel that someone who lives so close to death can be so full of life.

—**Cynthia Siegfried**

Author of *Cancer Journey: A Caregiver's View from the Passenger Seat*

Cindy Valenti-Scinto has a heart for sharing her experiences of God's grace and power in ways that will move your heart to want to hear more stories and to discover what God might have in store for your life. *A Heart Like Yours* is extraordinarily easy to read and sympathize with and exciting to follow. This trilogy is a must-read for everyone who has ever wondered.

—**Mark Wheeler**

Pastor, Lidgerwood Presbyterian Church, Spokane, WA

A Heart Like Yours is a book of inspiration from an angel living out her days on this earth the best way she can with the situation she has been dealt. And in doing so, she is giving and offering many people hope! Her books will surely outlive her time on earth. What a blessing we all hope to fulfill!

—**Dick "Lefty" O'Neal**

Author of *Dreaming of the Majors, Living in the Bush*

Often we take the heart for granted. It's a mindless assumption that our heart will work, day in and day out. In this book, Cindy Valenti-Scinto not only expresses the value of a heart but also she knows first-hand the fear of losing one. This touching and, yes, "heart" felt story will bring you to your knees while guiding you upward to a stronger faith.

—**Cindy Sproles**

Author and Editor, www.ChristianDevotions.us

This story rips your heart out ... again and again, just like the transplant teams who have, over the years, cracked open her chest to keep the author alive. A riveting ride from emergency rooms to the throne of God.

—**Eddie Jones**

Co-founder, Christian Devotions Ministries

Author of *The Curse of Captain LaFoote*

Cindy has a God-given gift to turn intensely personal experiences into soul-stirring, spiritual lessons. Once again she has captured into words the profound love of God. I have personally observed her seeking to live her days on earth as a vessel chosen by the Master to endure overwhelming physical challenges. With penetrating Scriptural insights, this book is sure to leave readers challenged—deeply challenged to surrender whatever trials God asks them to endure into His loving care.

—**Dr. Robert Smith**

Chaplain, Spokane Fire Department
Pastor, Mt. Spokane Church
Instructor, Moody Bible Institute

Readers of *A Heart Like Yours* will find genuine spiritual encouragement and through spiritual life lessons, be able to grasp and attain a deeper appreciation for who they are in God's sight. Cindy's passion, as only an Italian New Yorker can have, is to bring hope to everyone she encounters. She gladly shares her life story with open abandonment. Enjoy as you read and see your own life through similar eyes and then apply the lessons learned to your circumstances. You will be blessed beyond measure!

—**Pastor Steve Williams**

Senior Pastor, New Life Church
Spokane Valley, Washington

"A *Heart Like Yours* is a resounding encouragement for those of us without even half of the maladies that Cindy Valenti-Scinto has dealt with. After this read, I walk a little more grateful for so much that I take for granted and thank God everyday through my hardships. This is his way of sanctifying our purposes."

—Bryan Duncan, Christian Music Hall of Fame singer/songwriter and author

A Heart Like Yours

Understanding God's Will For Your Life

CINDY VALENTI-SCINTO



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This book is dedicated to my son, Jonathan. I want you to understand how much Psalm 86 meant to me as I lay in intensive care fighting for my life. Your choice of scripture was an injection of courage into my failing strength.

Psalm 86, a prayer of David

Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord,
for I call to you all day long.
Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you.

You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.
Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy.
When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me.

Among the gods there is none like you, Lord;
no deeds can compare with yours.
All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord;
they will bring glory to your name.
For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever.
For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.

Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God; ruthless people are trying to kill me—
they have no regard for you.
But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,
abounding in love and faithfulness.

Turn to me and have mercy on me; show your strength in behalf of your servant;
save me, because I serve you just as my mother did.

Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame,
for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

May these words help all who read them to understand God's will
for their lives.



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Foreword

FRIENDS INFLUENCE OUR lives, and I learn a lot from watching my own friends and how they “do life.” At times, my friendships have fallen into the category of deep and abiding, and those friends have changed my life, my faith walk, and how I do ministry. Two such friends are the author, Cindy Valenti-Scinto, and her husband, John.

When I first met John and Cindy, Cindy was on crutches with a broken leg. I started up a conversation with them, and we haven’t stopped talking and learning from each other since then. After all, they are Italian New Yorkers—*especially Cindy!*

It is amazing to see how John and Cindy have handled the unbelievable onslaught of health issues and bad news. Walking alongside them is an honor. Their remarkable inner strength has highlighted the power that comes from living in Christ.

We all struggle with the “whys” of life. Then the “how tos” rise up, and the clear sailing we thought was ahead is mired by fierce storms. John and Cindy have encountered storm after storm and move forward profoundly against the worst conditions. I watch as Cindy suffers more than most can comprehend or imagine but still presses on with her faith intact. She’s not morally better than others; she doesn’t have a secret source of spiritual juice; and she doesn’t have superhuman powers from

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the planet Xenon, but what Cindy has is peace, joy, and trust in the Rock—Jesus.

John and Cindy's circumstances, choices, and character have allowed me to reconcile many incongruent aspects of my own faith and launched me to a bolder belief in prayer. I crave their resilience and resolve. They have caused me to challenge and exhort our church family to greater depths of faith and fellowship in a culture where distractions abound, excuses are encouraged as cover, and failure is expected.

Cindy has illustrated who God is and has thrived in the midst of difficulties—not faltered. I am a better person for seeing her journey.

Readers of *A Heart Like Yours* will find genuine spiritual encouragement and, through spiritual life lessons, be able to grasp and attain a deeper appreciation for who they are in God's sight. Cindy's passion, as only an Italian New Yorker can have, is to bring hope to everyone she encounters. She gladly shares her life story with open abandonment. Enjoy as you read and see your own life through similar eyes and then apply the lessons learned to your circumstances. You will be blessed beyond measure!

—Pastor Steve Williams
Senior Pastor, New Life Church
Spokane Valley, Washington



Acknowledgments

PAM HESTER, THANK you for enduring my special needs and offering delicate yet firm resolutions for constant problems. Your sense of humor is paramount to any nurse I ever have worked with. (Some have come close.) Your love, friendship, and concern, rising above the professional limitations, comfort me like a warm blanket on a cold night.

Dr. Danko Marticinic, you're the first physician ever to use the word "nurtured." When we first met, that was the emphasis for a heart transplant patient—that the heart and the patient were nurtured. You softened my transplanted heart.

Dr. Yates, ah, the unwilling, unbeknownst primary care doctor for heart transplant patients, you took on the job and do it well. Thank you for being the main man!

Kay, I am so glad you came back from Montana. When I come to the office for a check-up, your smile makes me feel safe and loved. Never go away again!

Dr. Icenogle, a man known worldwide for his amazing ability to save lives. You literally saved mine twice. For that, there is no way to thank you. I look forward to knowing each other in heaven. Don't forget to bring the teacup birdfeeder with you!

Dr. Sandler, inventor of the most powerful Russian hugs ever. When you hug with your arms, you're hugging with your heart. Even though I can make the veins in your neck pop out with frustration, you always love me. I love you, too.

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Dr. Smith, the dermatologist with a sick sense of humor—you did a great job with my face. Shhhh ... don't tell anyone what you and Dan did—they'll never know!

Dr. Canaday is, as always, the man behind the interventional cath award extraordinaire. Please don't ever retire. If you do, I'll find you!

Dr. Coats, the sweet, humble, gentle, gray-bearded brainiac. Never underestimate how much you have done for me. I really wouldn't have lived much longer without your smarts and ability to care.

Dr. Wysham, like a sister with my best interests in mind, you have tolerated my pushing the limits. Thank you for always being open to techniques beyond textbooks.

Dr. Grim, my feet are happier because of you. Anytime you want to have a laughing competition, bring your best jokes!

Dr. Stegmann, your brilliant mind and incessant will to further the benefits of FGF-1 are why I am still alive. I will make you proud!

I'm afraid my failing memory may have left out doctors, nurses, or other medical personnel who have been part of the tremendous effort to keep me alive. Know that you all are important and precious to me.

Claudia R. from Rathdrum Calvary Chapel: On June 23, 2002, you handed me a small piece of paper that I still carry:

Cindy, this verse is for you: "When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'"

—John 11:4

Thank you for making this verse my life verse.

Too many people suffered so I could get this book finished. I learned a lot about time, deadlines, people, boundaries, and love. I also learned about the sacrifices a writer makes—especially when commissioned by a big God to get something done. Be sure the skies will fall down and the earth will loose from its orbit once you begin the task. But remember, God is still the one who holds it all together.

And John, my husband, once again you supported me in all ways—even replacing the broken lock on my office door. Thank you for eternity.

Last on this list: my anonymous benefactors. You are not anonymous to God. He sees you and will bless all you put out to this world in his name. *Beerlahairoi!* Thank you.



A Note From the Author: Health Update

IN BOOK ONE of this trilogy, I provided a list of my heart-related procedures and surgeries, from my first heart attack to the time of publication. The list is a “hard, long read,” as Bryan Duncan, Christian Music Hall of Fame singer/songwriter, observed. His hit song, “A Heart Like Mine,” was the inspiration for its inception.

After my recent health challenges, I decided to illustrate how the chronological documentation of my medical history actually began when I was ten years old. My parents raised six children by birth, and numerous foster children joined our sanctuaried home. Each had their own challenges, but I was targeted from when I was small to carry the legion of health issues that have streamed through my years into adulthood.

The list of doctors I visit on a regular basis is absurd:

- The *podiatrist* works on an ingrown toenail and orthopedic inserts for a plantar fascia strain from misaligned feet.
- The *cardiologist*—of course and always
- The *dentist*? Haven’t seen him enough!
- The heart transplant *thoracic surgeons* “own me,” as they affirmed after the transplant.

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- The *hematologist* keeps track of antibody issues and iron deficiencies.
- The *allergist* tries to lessen the effects of multiple chemical sensitivity.
- The *endocrinologist* chases blood sugar levels and watches for kidney failure.
- The *infectious* disease docs have their own challenges in keeping me from viral assault.
- The *immunologist* still is trying to figure out what is causing my immune system rebellion.
- The *neurologist* keeps me awake after diagnosing sleep apnea and narcolepsy.
- The *nephrologist* makes sure my kidneys are getting along well.
- The *gastroenterologist* has to be sure I have no additional problems with digestion and Cytomegalovirus.
- The *gynecologist* visits occur often after cervical cancer.
- The *orthopedist* checks bone density and helps with broken bones. (I tend to break bones.)
- My *primary* doctor—an unsuspecting, sweet man—acts as the liaison and record keeper for the entire group.

These physicians are nameless, but they are real doctors. I see them all—often.

I like to say, “This too shall *continue*.” Sound negative and hopeless? It’s not. I can hear the offers, the methodology of herbs, liquids, powders, pills, drinks, tonics, and products to cure me—or the assessment of my spiritual state, revealing the need for a healing place; room; conference; or particular man, woman, or clergy.

What would God want me to do? He’s a big God; he knows what I need. Physical evidence of suffering while remaining in God’s love is more powerful and real than the sparse evidence of suffering removed by request.

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But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!

—Jude 20 MSG

And the list begins ...

1970, July—NY	Diabetes, age ten
1982, May 23—NY	Married (in sickness and health...)
1982, July—NC	Carpal Tunnel in wrists begins
1984, July—NY	Gallbladder/Appendix removed
1988, August—NY	Thyroid removed, Graves Disease
1989, January—AZ	Hand Surgery, Right Median Nerve Release
1989, March—AZ	Hand Surgery, Left Median Nerve Release
1989, December—AZ	C-Section Delivery
1990, January—AZ	Hand Surgery, Right Trigger Thumb Release
1990, June—AZ	Hand Surgery, Left Trigger Thumb Release
1991, July—AZ	Hand Surgery, Right Middle Finger Trigger Release
1994, June—AZ	Right Foot Surgery—Heel Spur
1994, December—AZ	Hand Surgery, Left Ring Finger Trigger Release
1996, August—AZ	Hand Surgery, Right and Left Pinky Finger Trigger Release
1999, November—WA	Partial Hysterectomy, Uterus Removed
2001, July—WA	Hysterectomy complete, Ovaries Removed
2001 to 2006—	The list in book one details surgeries and procedures from September 2001 to October 2006, which included thirty-two angioplasties, a double-bypass open-heart surgery, a thoracotomy, a heart transplant, and so on. To list them again here would be exasperating.

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So let's continue with the events up to the time of this book's publication. Take a deep breath.

2006, June—WA	Broken Sternal Wire Replaced
2006, August—WA	(32) Yearly Heart Cath
2007, July—WA	(33) Yearly Heart Cath
2007, November 13—FL	Broken Double Tibia Plateau—Right Leg
2008, August—WA	(34) Yearly Heart Cath
2008, December 16—WA	Double Abdominal Hernia Repair
2009, July—WA	(35) Yearly Heart Cath
2010, June—WA	(36) Yearly Heart Cath
2010, July—WA	Basil Cell Carcinoma Skin Cancer removed from left lip and face. Hole the size of a dime; eighteen stitches
2010, October—WA	Basil Cell Carcinoma Skin Cancer removed from tip of nose. Hole the size of a dime and deep; ten stitches

This is not finished; the list in book three will reflect what continues to happen as the Lord keeps me here on earth.

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.
In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33 KJV

As the Bee Gees sang:

I can think of younger days when living for my life was everything a man could want to do
I could never see tomorrow but I was never told about the sorrow

And how can you mend a broken heart?
How can you stop the rain from falling down?
How can you stop the sun from shining?
What makes the world go round?
And how can you mend this broken man?

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How can a loser ever win?

Please help me mend my broken heart and let me live again.¹

My heart has been broken physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I have a new physical heart; I also have a new spiritual heart, but it can be broken again.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

—Psalm 34:18

God will continually save me. And I know that in heaven, there will be an entire wing for broken hearts.



Introduction

WITH APOLOGIES TO the announcer for TV's *Dragnet*: Ladies and gentlemen, the stories you are about to *read* are true; only the names have *not* been changed to protect the innocent.²



When I was a little girl, my five older sisters and brothers monopolized the family television. This forced me to watch big-people dramas rather than cartoons and kiddy shows. I learned to enjoy shows like *Dragnet*—one of my favorites. The opening music, deep announcer's voice, and serious warning grabbed my attention. I'd nestle into a crowded, lumpy, velvet couch for an intriguing episode, the dark family room becoming a cave with only the square glow of a black-and-white television visible.

Although Sergeant Joe Friday and the cast did a fantastic job methodically investigating crimes, the stories were not true. Deep-voiced closing announcer lines ended the show.

The chapters ahead of you recount painful and joyful events from the new life forced on me after I was befriended by heart disease in 2001. I didn't have a choice. The channel could not be switched for happier or carefree scripts.

All true? Yes. Accurate? Of course.

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Stacks of torn notepaper, stained napkins, scribbled observations written on the backs of hospital menus, and an array of scroll-like material I used to record my thoughts and happenings are stuffed in folders. I frequently add recalled memories to them. When I sit down to write, each morsel finds a place in a chapter. The notes are transcribed to Times Roman twelve-point on my computer screen and saved in appropriate electronic folders.

Exaggeration would lessen the power each event had on my life and my family's lives. Creative license, which writers use to color scenes, could make the book more intriguing. But I don't need either method. In fact, I struggle to recall and share the intimate details my mind chooses to forget, much like a book shelved after a disappointing run on the market.

That family television, its black-and-white tube mounted in a dark wood, paneled box, had a manual channel changer. The white, painted numbers from two to thirteen circled the round, difficult-to-turn knob. Youngest siblings, usually me, were commanded to change the channel picked by whoever claimed control—usually the eldest in the group.

Similarly, when watching my life's scenes pass, it's like dialing to those requested channels as I craved the fun kid shows that momentarily flashed on the screen.

When I wake up each day with thirty pills to take, infusion sets for insulin pump therapy to change, plans for medical care to be made, phone calls to insidious insurance reps to be dialed, doctors appointments to be scheduled, and rigid food and exercise routines to keep, I want to change the channel and pick a new show. But this is it. This is my life, and my job is to live it well.

When life begins, everyone is innocent. As we grow, the experiences and people we encounter change us to another channel. Static interferes with God's original plan. The show changes directors and a new, unwelcome script is handed to us.

God provides a way to protect each of us and make us innocent again. Finding the channel for your life is the first step. Then you have to read the script and get into character to understand his will.

May the words in this book and the meditation of my heart point you to understanding his will for your life (see Psalm 19:14).

CHAPTER 1

There's a Snake in My Boot

AFTER A LONG trip visiting family, it was good to be back at work. The small, elegant, historical home that housed the offices of The King's *High Way* Ministries was more than fifty years old. It sat on a road lined with towering, established trees, whose branches created a canopy of green in summer and brilliant colored displays in fall.

Upstairs bedrooms provided administrative offices, while the downstairs living room, kitchen, parlor, and dining area made for workspaces, a reception area, and a comfortable sitting room to read or visit. It was welcoming for visitors and a cozy place to work.

My office was the uppermost bedroom, with a window opening out to a massive oak tree. I loved the scent of Lake Coeur d'Alene that drifted in every afternoon when the wind changed direction. This part of Idaho, only twenty-one miles from my home in Washington, possesses grand outdoor scenery and ample natural resources.

Lunch was often at my desk. There was plenty of work and never enough help, as it is with most small businesses. My first day back, I continued the banquet of summer fruits with cantaloupe and cottage cheese for lunch. Nothing compared to the fresh memory of enjoying a ripe, sweet peach harvest with family back in South Carolina. Considering too much potassium is bad for my heart, I relished one or

two peaches a day and turned down offers from my sister to indulge in peach pie, peach cake, peach preserves, and peach iced tea.

The last bite of dripping, sweet cantaloupe mixed with salty cottage cheese ended my brief lunch break. Graphic elements blotted the computer screen as I continued working on a book cover design. The screen blurred a bit, and I squeezed my eyes, trying to focus. Then I glanced up at the window and inhaled the fresh breeze, noticing its fragrant scent.

Sick feelings brought me back. My stomach swayed as if I were on the lake not far from my office, riding waves born by winds from an incoming storm. With trembling hands, I attempted to grip my chair arms, but shaky fingers barely made contact.

Something is wrong. I've felt this before.

Mixed with panic was the dread of letting coworkers know I needed help. No one would understand; there were so many possible causes, and I didn't want to waste time and strength trying to explain. I grabbed my purse, threw in my cell phone, and gathered up my lunch container. When I stood, my legs wobbled with tingling sensations pulsing through my muscles. The wall provided support; I leaned momentarily to get my balance back.

"Don't let them see me," I begged the Lord. "Help me get home."

"Nancy, I'm leaving early," I said as she passed me on the way to the restroom. Her office was next to mine. "Seems like I have a stomach flu or something. I can finish the book design from home."

"Are you OK, honey?" she asked.

"Yeah, just think the trip wore me out more than I realized. I'll be fine."

The staircase to the first floor warped like an animated illusion as I concentrated on making my way down without falling. With no equilibrium to balance my steps, I grabbed hold of the thick wooden banister to steady myself.

Lori, the receptionist, was at her desk. Her big smile beamed with brightness against the meager light from the front window. Transplanted to the Pacific Northwest, her Texas roots boasted a big personality year-round, regardless of the Northwest's lack of ample sunshine.

"Where ya going?" she chimed.

“Oh, I’m going home. Just feeling a little sick. Don’t worry, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Making it quickly past her, I darted out the front door and headed for my van. By then, the tingling sensation and weakness were running throughout my body. Accelerated steps brought on by my attempt to flee suspicion made it hard to stay balanced.

My van’s driver’s side was opposite the front of the building, shielding my drunk-like posture. Once I unlocked the door, I flopped my purse on the passenger seat, hoisted myself in, and snapped the seatbelt around my body. The click assured me I was safe—for now.

I headed out the main road and towards the freeway. If I planned it right, I could get home and call Pam, my transplant nurse. *Maybe it was my blood pressure. Maybe I need a medication change.* I knew it wasn’t that simple.

Thoughts nagged at me, but I had to stay calm. *Stop, focus on a plan.*

My Bluetooth earpiece pressed snugly against my ear. Watching the road and trying to dial my cell phone was dangerous. I didn’t care—I had to reach my husband, John. I managed to dial his number.

“John, it’s me. I may be having a heart attack, so I’m heading home. It should take me about twenty minutes. You can drive me to the ER once I get there.” *Heart attack? Why did I say heart attack?*

“I am on my way to the bank in Liberty Lake,” he clamored. “Where are you?”

“On the freeway. I’m having a hard time breathing, and my legs and arms are tingly. It feels like a heart attack.” I was weaving in and out of the lanes, trying to keep my van steady as the speedometer pushed eighty-five miles per hour.

“I’m gonna call Pam,” I said. “You go to the bank. Meet me at home.”

I hung up the phone before John could respond. *He knows the routine. Just another heart attack.* I dialed the transplant office, glancing between the phone and the road to watch where I was driving.

“Transplant office, how can I help you?” the receptionist answered.

“This is Cindy. Please get Pam,” I responded. The call went through right away.

“This is Pam.”

“Pam, I’m pretty sure I’m having a heart attack. I’m on the freeway over in Idaho, heading toward home. John will drive me to the ER. I was

at work and began feeling like I have in the past—chest pain, shortness of breath—and this time I have that weird tingling in my legs and arms.”

“Well, I can’t tell you what to do,” Pam answered. “But if you want to come in, you can.” She sounded a bit exasperated.

“Pam,” I moaned, “you know I don’t come in unless something is wrong. I absolutely hate the ER. I hate the treatment and the process. I’ll call you when I get there.”

I hung up the phone. Tears blurred my vision. *Why do I always have to explain? Why do I always have to defend myself?*

My thoughts returned to getting home. But before I reached the Washington state line, I instinctively slowed and pulled over to the shoulder. Heavy weight pushed on my body like excess gravity crushing me with its force. *I can’t drive anymore—this is dangerous.*

John’s cell number was still in my recent call list. It was easy to punch the number. He answered immediately.

“Hey—where are you now?” he asked.

“Stateline. I’m not going to make it home. I don’t want to call 911 on the freeway.”

“Can you make it to the Liberty Lake exit?” he replied calmly, clearly trying to keep me on track. “There is an urgent care off the freeway. I can meet you there.”

“Yes, I can. I’ll see you there.”

I floored the gas pedal and abruptly entered the freeway. *Maybe a State Trooper will see me speeding and pull me over. I could get help then.* The numbing sensation in my hands separated the steering wheel from my grip—but I managed to veer right and get off at the Liberty Lake exit.

I hated that exit. It was against a hill of traffic from the downtown area, and the urgent care clinic was on the left. Two directions of traffic whirred by, creating blurred lines in my already diminished sight. *There are too many cars. I can’t make it across.*

Flushed and breathing heavily, I concentrated on the traffic traveling north. But whenever I saw a break and turned to look left, the southbound traffic would be blocking my way.

I was trapped. “Oh, Lord, please make an opening in the traffic,” I prayed aloud.

There's a Snake in My Boot

I decided I would inch up until the nose of my van was jugged out far enough to cause someone to hit me. *I'll do whatever it takes to get help.* “Lord, please don’t make me do this. I don’t want anyone to get hurt,” I added.

As I prayed, I contemplated how far to pull forward and what impact I would have on the car that hit me. When the traffic didn’t clear and I felt my heart pounding in my chest, I decided to pull out. As I did, just enough room cleared between the two directions of traffic so I could make the left safely. From there, I drove erratically to the urgent care clinic, pulling up at the front, where John was waiting.

We entered the doors, and I collapsed against the counter. “I think I’m having a heart attack, and I am a heart transplant patient,” I announced through gasps of breath. They rushed me into a room, and the nurse called to the receptionist to dial 911.

The paramedics arrived quickly and began asking questions and preparing an IV. There were four of them. One stuck EKG leads under my blouse, trying to be delicate. And the other, a curly-haired EMT with a gentle look, had to cut off my sleeve to get an IV started.

“Hey, that’s my favorite blouse!” I said. “Everyone says I look good in yellow.”

He looked at me, stunned, and I smiled to relieve his tension.

“I’m only kidding,” I said. “Guess it’s more important to save my life.”

I always like to joke—even through an emergency. It makes me feel better and lightens the caretakers’ load.

Once I was hooked up and vitals were taken, they readied the stretcher for me. “Oh, here we go again. Can I just ride in the front?” I giggled at the absurdity.

A large, out-of-place, sloppy-looking woman in an EMT uniform pushed through the men. “OK, get her in the back,” she said. She carried a clipboard with my medical records, which John had retrieved from my purse. (I always carry paperwork for times like this!) She made me nervous—scared even.

As they lifted the stretcher into the back of the ambulance, I looked at John, beckoning him to join me. He looked back at me, bewildered. The EMT got in beside me and the doors were closed.

A Heart Like Yours

Then she started the questioning. “I see you are a diabetic. What made you become a diabetic at the age of ten?”

“I don’t know. Does anyone ever know?” My breathing was labored—my mind was on getting to the ER as quickly as possible.

She forced two aspirins down my throat. “Chew on these. Now, let me see, when did you develop arthritis? And when did your dad get heart disease?”

Her questions made me angrier. She was supposed to be monitoring me, not interrogating me.

“I don’t know why you are asking me all these questions,” I said.

Two more aspirins were shoved down my throat. I gagged.

“Just answer my questions,” she said.

She’s like a wanna-be doctor or something. She’s like a psycho. I heard the driver ask her about my vitals.

“Oh, she’s stable,” the crazy EMT lady replied. “Take your time.”

He replied with relief, “Good, I’ll shut the lights and take it easy on the freeway.”

No, I screamed in my head. Don’t take it easy—I could be dying here.

Time stopped running, and the sounds of the roadway drummed out the EMT’s incisive questions. Her mouth kept moving. I watched it. I wanted her to stop.

Then she stuck a cannula in my nose and said she was measuring my CO² levels. That made it harder to breathe. I thought I would die right there. I felt the ambulance slow down to exit and then actually stop at a stop sign.

Is he crazy? This is an ambulance. I could be dying, and he’s stopping at a stop sign. This is a nightmare or a dream or I am hallucinating.

Two more aspirins were shoved down my throat. The burning sensation from the acidic tablets traveled from my esophagus to my stomach. It mixed with the chest pain to create a holocaustic furnace. I jolted to get up, but nothing happened.

Did she strap me to the stretcher?

We arrived at the ER, and I was pulled out of the ambulance and wheeled into the hallway. I glanced down and saw no straps holding me back. I tried to pick up my head to see where I was, but nothing

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