



Christmas Miracles Continue to Confound and Delight

Every Christmas, Dr. David Steinberg, an oncologist at the Lahey Clinic Medical Center in Burlington, Massachusetts, lifts the spirits of other doctors and nurses [with a recitation of the year's miracles](#). In 2003 it was Brandon Connor, whose tumor suddenly disappeared on the eve of his surgery. Doctors discovered a tumor growing near his spine while he was still inside his mother's womb. Five weeks after his birth, doctors brought the bad news to his parents, Kristin and Mike Connor: Brandon had neuroblastoma, one of the deadliest forms of childhood cancers.



Surgery risked paralysis, so the Connors waited, hoping that the tumor might recede as they sometimes do. Not with Brandon. When he turned two, the surgeons scheduled Brandon for surgery. The night before the surgery was scheduled a final workup revealed no tumor, no mass, only some fatty tissue.

Kristin said, "It was a miracle. It was surreal to us that this could possibly have happened." The doctors had a ready explanation: The neuroblastoma had "committed cellular suicide."

There was Tim Kaczmarek, age 48, who had a mechanical pump installed in his chest after emergency quadruple bypass surgery following a massive heart attack. The pump would remain in place until he was strong enough to undergo a complete heart transplant.

After six weeks, Kaczmarek's heart function had recovered to the point where the pump was removed. The doctors didn't call it a miracle, just "unusual." Said Dr. Robert Kormos, who runs the artificial heart program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, "It's relatively unusual to see a patient like him recover from a major heart attack. It was a pleasant surprise to find that he had enough cardiac reserve to be able to heal and have a good, functioning heart."

Kaczmarek had another answer: "It's a miracle. You can't believe something like this happens to a person and you're still here to talk about it."

Young Stacy Perrotta discovered a strange lump in her abdomen, sometimes sticking out like a golf ball. It didn't hurt or bother her, and when she pressed on it the lump would pop back in. So she just let it go. A week before a routine doctor's checkup, however, Stacy mentioned the lump to her mother, who arranged for a scan that revealed a large tumor. When the surgeons removed the tumor, it was the size of a softball and diagnosed to be a desmoplastic small-round-cell tumor, which gave Stacy one chance in five of surviving. At the time, the leading surgeon, Dr. David Korones, a pediatric oncologist, thought: "Oh boy. This is not good. This is going to be tough."

Two years later, Stacy remained cancer-free and was named to the Children's Hospital's list of "Miracle Kids." Now in high school, Stacy is heading for a nursing degree. The doctors were hard-pressed to explain it. Dr. Herbert Benson, a professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School, did his best: "Many times we, as physicians, are surprised at how well a patient will do. I believe that medicine has



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to leave the door open for belief and self-care to add to the awesome contribution to healing that drugs and surgery can do.”

When it was time for Tracy Hermanstorfer to deliver her baby, she went to Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was Christmas Eve and [during delivery her heart stopped](#). “She had no signs of life. No heartbeat. No blood pressure. She wasn’t breathing,” said Dr. Stephanie Martin, a maternal fetal medicine specialist at the hospital. So they delivered her baby by Cesarean section and the baby, according to Dr. Martin, “was basically limp, with a very slow heart rate.”

When the doctors told Tracy’s husband, Mike, he said, “My entire life just rolled out.” But then they worked on the newborn and suddenly, miraculously, the baby came to. A minute or so later, so did Tracy. Said Dr. Martin, “We did a thorough evaluation and couldn’t find anything that explained why this happened.” Four days later, the family — Tracy, Mike and newborn Coltyn — went home.

Oscar Tasker was born [with such a serious heart defect](#) that his only hope was a heart transplant, but the wait for a new heart was 100 days. To keep him alive doctors installed an artificial heart. During the agonizing wait, Oscar’s heart healed itself. The lead doctor had a ready explanation: Those 100 days of waiting were enough to allow his heart to “rest and recover.” He also credited a higher power: “Someone up above must be smiling down on Oscar as his heart has begun to work on its own. All of this transpired in time for the Taskers to take Oscar home with them, just in time for Christmas.”

Thomas Jeglum was working as a telecommunications tower climber last June in Allentown, Pennsylvania, [when he fell from “coffin height”](#) — 50 feet — and suffered such severe injuries that he remained in a coma for months. Doctors prepared his partner Regina for the worst, as only 10 percent of people wake up after falling from such a height. After two months, however, Thomas woke up and began recovery in earnest. In December they made plans to get married — on Christmas Day. Regina said, “It’s amazing. Now he is awake and getting better every day.”

The world asks, “How can these things be?” Hearts start working again all by themselves. A cellular switch clicks on. There was a faulty diagnosis. Diseases have their own personalities, certain “biologies.” The victims are “lucky.” The cancer cells commit “cellular suicide.” People have a “natural capacity to heal.” And so on.

The world asks. Faith answers. The carpenter from the plains of Galilee gave, and still gives, [the best answer of all](#): “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

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