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Rahel Wells

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Walking Miracle

By Rahel Wells

I AM A MIRACLE. A LIVING, WALKING MIRACLE.

While this is true for all of us in ways that we will only learn in heaven, my life is a story in which the miracles are clearly visible.

Five years ago, doctors feared I would die on the operating table. Today, although I am still on blood thinners, I am full of energy and very much alive. Five years ago, I was told I might never walk again. Today, I walk approximately five miles a day, and recently hiked a 20-mile trail in eight hours. Five

years ago, I was told I would definitely never run again. In the last year, although I cannot run every day, I have run two 5K races.

May 22, 2015 — It all began with a game of lava tag on a large playground in Berrien Springs, where I often took my youth group for supper and Bible study in the spring and summer. Lava tag involves staying off the ground and on other objects, and we had played this favorite game of mine many times at this playground over the years. I was “it” and chasing one of the youth. Part of the park has a long platform that used to connect to another platform with a wobbly bridge. The bridge had broken, so we played that we could hop

▼ Rahel Wells, here with her husband, Bill, was told she would never walk again.



All photos courtesy of A.C. Curtis

to the “lava” (ground) at that point and then back up on to the platform. The youth did so, and I was right behind him, almost able to tag him. However, at the end of the platform was a board about one foot tall that used to be part of the bridge. I was in the process of hopping over it as I had done many times before. This time though, my left foot caught in a small gap under the board and my momentum carried me forward over the board while my foot stayed in place, shattering my tibia with a loud crack. I landed face down on the ground. As people crowded around and called 911, I was in shock. When I moved my upper leg, my lower leg did not move with it, so I knew it was serious.

The ambulance took about 15 minutes to arrive, and I was taken to the hospital in St. Joseph, Michigan. Because it was a holiday weekend, not many were on duty, but they took an x-ray and told me that I was ninth in line for surgery. I was on high levels of pain meds, glad it was “just a broken leg” and not too worried. But what no one knew at that point was that in shattering my tibia, the severely broken bone had also severed and mangled the main artery in my leg, the femoral artery. If the bone had broken through the skin, I might have died from so much blood loss (**Miracle #1: most people with this injury would have already bled out and died by this point in time**). As it was, compartments in my leg were filling with blood, cutting off nerves (I still cannot feel much of my lower left leg), and blood was not getting to my foot.

When the only surgeon on duty came out of surgery, he looked at my x-rays (**Miracle #2: he was board certified in Trauma, or I would have definitely lost my leg**), and thought that I likely had vascular damage. After a CT scan, I was taken immediately into emergency surgery to try to save my life and leg, making late night calls to other doctors and nurses (**Miracle #3: ten years ago, the procedure they did on my arteries and veins was not even invented yet**). My surgery lasted all night, and the doctor told my friends and family who waited that **they were close to losing me — and would have if the surgery had to be longer (Miracle #4)**. In addition, one of the nurses told me later that she knew I ate a whole-foods plant-based diet (I still do!), because there was no other way that my arteries and veins could be so clear and that was likely what saved my leg!

In that first surgery, the doctors took my saphenous vein, the largest leg vein, and turned it around and attached it to my femoral artery at my hip, threaded it along the outside of my leg right under the skin (to avoid nerves), and attached it to a viable smaller artery in my ankle, totally bypassing my knee. This meant that my body had to increase the capacity of other veins over time to replace the one that was taken (**Miracle #5: God has created our bodies able to do this**).

After a week of hoping and praying that the vein graft would take, I had so far escaped amputation (**Miracle #6: 70 percent of people with this injury lose their leg**), and the doctors were able to do a second surgery to repair the shattered tibia with many plates and screws. I then faced another two-and-a-half weeks in the hospital, three months of bed rest, followed by many months of using a wheelchair, then a walker, and finally my own legs for balance with physical therapy all along the way. When the accident happened, I had just finished teaching a summer intensive class and moved to a new apartment (**More Miracles: I didn't have to take time off work, and my new place was able to fit a wheelchair, unlike the previous one**).

I am so grateful to God for the healing He has done in my life! While I can't do everything I did before the accident and still face pain on a daily basis, **I am able to hike and backpack and swim and cross-country ski, all of which have taken on new joy in light of thinking I would never be able to do them again (More Miracles)**. In addition, God blessed me with a husband through all of this, as I never would have gotten close to him if we had not lived in the same neighborhood, and he came over often (as a friend at the time) to keep me company during my long bedrest.

The vein graft that saved my leg will not likely last my whole life, but I am seeking to live as healthfully as possible to prolong its duration. Since my accident, I have backpacked and hiked hundreds of miles, including a through-hike of the John Muir Trail. God willing, I am planning to section hike the Pacific Crest Trail with my husband over the next few summers, along with many other outdoor activities. I am a miracle. A living, walking miracle. ■

A. Rahel Wells is associate professor of Hebrew Bible, Andrews University Department of Religion and Biblical Languages.

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