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Surviving Tragedy

By Chad Koenen

To say David and Sarah Edmunds life was turned upside down last winter would be an erroneous understatement.

When the family rallied around David following his triple bypass surgery in February, they were still coping from the after affects of Sarah's massive stroke which left her in a coma from late September to the end of October.

Both in their early 50's, the lifetime of traumatic experiences jammed into a five-month crash course, could have left the family struggling with much more than a big medical bill and road to recovery.

A cattle and crop farmer north of Starbuck, the time away from work could have meant a lost year in the field and a quick sell-off of all the animals on the farm. Such a move would almost be expected given the circumstances, but what the family wasn't counting on was the unyielding support of friends, families, and the entire community for not only one family tragedy; but two.

"We kind of got blessed," said Sarah. "God has been so good to us."

When Sarah was rushed by helicopter to the University of Minnesota Hospital in late September, David began a dual residency of sorts, splitting time between Sarah's bedside, the family farm, and taking care of their 12-year-old son Clinton. With so much swelling of the brain, David said his wife was put in a medically induced coma from September 29 to approximately October 25.

While in the medically induced coma, David said there were times he wondered whether his wife would ever wake up. But just five or six days after doctors took her off the medication keeping her in the coma, David said his wife began to open her eyes and slowly came out of the coma.

As her road to recovery was in full swing, and just one week after a very successful benefit for Sarah raised money to defray some of the medical costs, the family was hit with more bad news, David needed open heart surgery.

After suffering from chest pains off and on for quite some time, David went into the doctor on February 11 to see what was wrong with his body. With heart disease running in the family, both David's father and uncle had heart problems, he wasn't surprised when doctors said there was something wrong.

Following a variety of tests, the doctors expressed a grave concern over the state of his heart. An emergency surgery was scheduled to insert a stint on Friday, February 13, at the St. Cloud Hospital. But not even the doctors knew the extent of the blockage of David's heart. Once doctors began surgery, David said they quit before ever inserting the stint; instead opting for a triple bypass surgery.

David said he had one artery each that were 60 percent, 80 percent, and 100 percent blocked. He even had two arteries apiece that were 90 percent and 99 percent blocked.

Another emergency surgery was again scheduled for the following week with David staying in the St. Cloud Hospital the entire time.



David Edmunds talks with a bystander as one of his fields north of Starbuck is planted by Farm Rescue. Edmunds got help from Farm Rescue after he had triple bypass surgery in February.

Photo by Chad Koenen

Following a brief stay in the hospital, David and Sarah returned home to find that neighbors had taken the initiative to help with the daily chores. While planting wouldn't need to be done for a few months, the cattle on the farm needed daily attention, something he could not provide. David said a group of three farmers took turns doing the daily chores on the farm, which provided some much needed relief.

"It kept life as normal as it could," he said.

While his neighbors and friends were pitching in with help, David said he couldn't help but wonder if everything was getting done correctly. Throughout the first few weeks he was at home, David said he would often peer out the window and wonder if the neighbors were taking care of the often done, but often forgotten intricate chores.

"Your mind is thinking, did they do the right stuff," he said.

The help continued this spring as neighbors helped him prepare the fields and get the tractors ready for spring planting. In addition to the area help, David said he is grateful for all of the contributions by everyone, an organization named FarmRescue came to his aid.

Predicated on helping farmers who have suffered a major illness, injury, or natural disaster, plant or harvest crops, the Jamestown, N.D., based organization came to Starbuck last

week to help David plant 100 acres of soybeans. David said he applied to the organization based on the recommendation of a friend and was chosen based on the events of the past few months.

Due to a quicker-than-expected recovery, and with the help of friends, David said having FarmRescue at his farm last Sunday and Monday was beneficial, but may not have helped him as much as other farmers in need.

In fact, David said there are farmers who are injured to the point they cannot do any of their daily chores, making FarmRescue a viable option. For those people, David said having something like FarmRescue, “that’s a big benefit to them.”

Today, David said he and his wife can do nearly every activity they could prior to the tragedies. Though he cannot lift heavy objects, meaning he needed help filling the bins on the tractor this spring, he is able to drive tractor and helped quite a bit with planting.

While their health is continuing to improve, David said without the generosity of all of their family and friends who helped with the farm, benefit supper, and overall support, much of the success they are enjoying today wouldn’t be possible.

“The Lord has blessed us and taken care of us beyond what you could imagine,” he said.

And with the crops in the ground and the continued improvements of their health, the blessing continues.