

A Symbol of Hope

The redbird has long been a sign of hope in our family. The symbol started many years ago when I had just started law school, and my father, then 50 years old, suffered a massive heart attack. The doctors said that a heart attack of that magnitude would have killed 97% of men instantly, but because my mother is so astute and took my father to the hospital at the first sign that something was unusually wrong with my non-complaining father, the massive part of the attack occurred in the intensive care unit. The doctors sustained his life even though the prognosis was grim. My airline flight back to Evansville was the first one available, and mom and I stood vigil at the intensive care unit through those long days and nights as they at first gave him only hours to live and then days.

In our shock and grief, mom and I went home only to bathe and change clothes. It was perhaps the third day, when the doctor was still saying he probably had only days to live, that something changed our paradigm. As my Aunt Vickie came to the hospital to give us a short reprieve, we went to mom and dad's home, a mile away, where my stoic and strong mother broke down and cried in my arms. I will never forget it. She did not know what she would do without my dad; she did not know how she would make it even one day without him. After we held each other, I suggested that we take a short walk through our beautiful backyard. It was cold and crisp outside with a perfect peacock blue sky. A snow had fallen through the night. It was a wet snow that hung, thick and plump, on every branch of each of the 100

trees in our backyard. As we walked and prayed, I looked up at that gorgeous sky and there against the bright blue sky, on a completely snow-covered tree, was the most brilliantly-colored redbird I had ever seen. The contrast in the vividly red bird, the bright blue sky and the glistening white snow branches was unbelievable, even as I remember it today. It stunned both my mom

and me, and we could not help but think that it was a sign that ALL would be well.

Miraculously, and to the complete amazement of all the doctors, my dad survived the five days, the first year and now more than thirty years hence. We are grateful every year for the gift of his life and for the symbol of hope that pulled us through a very dark time.

My father had none of the trigger causes of a massive heart attack. He was not overweight; he never smoked cigarettes nor drank alcohol. He was a tirelessly hard worker and had owned his own business, with my mother, for most of his adult life. The doctor surmised that, although he always appeared calm and in control, he may have internalized the stress that is inherent in owning and running your own business. One of my many lessons, from this time period in my parents' lives and my life, was that life itself is unpredictable, and we really cannot know what lies ahead. It has helped me to help others plan for their wishes in their estate for their ultimate passing from this life. I learned that we all need to start now to plan to get our affairs in order.



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