

Walking After Paralysis

One Step at a Time



With the family togetherness and warm memories that the holidays bring, most people find themselves looking forward to this special time of year. Roger Lamoureux, 64, a resident of Plano, was no different. But when “Fa la la la la” turned into a life-changing fall in 2011, this season came to represent something entirely different to him: **A miracle.**

Late on the evening of December 15, 2011, Roger got up in the middle of the night to use the restroom. While in the bathroom, he passed out and awoke with his head jammed between the toilet and the wall, pinned there with no ability to move the rest of his body. His wife, Marilyn, rushed in after hearing the commotion. Roger asked her to call 9-1-1 immediately and while he was waiting for help, he took stock. He knew that he couldn't feel the rest of his body.

What Roger didn't know is that he had developed severe cervical spondylosis – essentially badly herniated discs and bone spurs that were compressing his spinal cord – a condition for which he'd had no

noticeable symptoms. While using the restroom, he fainted and fell, resulting in a spinal cord injury.

Dr. Rebecca Stachniak, a board-certified neurosurgeon on the medical staff at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Plano, a 368-bed acute care hospital, immediately recognized the severity of the case. “Roger had very severe spinal cord compression. He had a complete spinal cord injury that would leave most people quadriplegics for the rest of their lives,” she noted. “Less than one percent of people with these diagnoses ever get strength or sensation back, and fewer will be able to walk again.”

Dr. Stachniak prescribed heavy doses of steroids for Roger before operating on his spinal cord, creating the optimal circumstances for surgery at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Plano to help his central cord syndrome, the injury that caused Roger's quadriparesis. Without surgery, Roger would be confined to a bed for the rest of his life, only able to move his head back and forth a little.

Spinal Surgery

Dr. Stachniak and surgical nurses at Texas Health Plano took Roger to the operating room, hoping to perform a miracle. Roger's initial injury was to his C4 to C7 vertebrae. Dr. Stachniak decompressed vertebrae C3 through C6 from the front, then turned him over and performed a laminectomy to stabilize the back of Roger's neck. Completely freeing his spinal cord, she cleaned bone spurs compressing the spinal cord from the front and the back, a delicate operation because of the spinal cord's sensitivity. She then placed hardware to ensure that compression didn't happen again.

“This kind of surgery is delicate and dangerous,” noted Dr. Stachniak. “I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to have the right team dedicated to Roger's case. I was blessed to be surrounded by talented professionals, a whole team of people at Texas Health Plano from operating room nurses to the pulmonologists to physical therapists and more. This is what it's like to feel fortunate at Christmas.”

Dr. Stachniak gives credit to two physicians on the medical staff at Texas Health Plano specializing in pulmonology, Dr. John Hughes and Dr. Michael Blackmon, and the skilled nurses in Texas Health Plano's Intensive Care Unit for providing Roger with the kind of care required to help in his successful recovery.

This kind of patient-centered care sets Texas Health Plano apart. Having the latest technology, including neuromonitoring, microscopes, and microneuro instruments helps surgeons like Dr. Stachniak conduct complex cranial and spinal operations. Being one of the top providers of minimally invasive surgeries in Collin County for more than 15 years, the hospital has a reputation for the kind of experience and credibility

patients count on. Add to that the Magnet Recognition Program Award from the American Nurses Credentialing Center, a designation earned by the nursing staff for the second time in 2012, and Texas Health Plano is a top choice for patients needing spine or neurological surgery in Collin County and surrounding areas by providing quality care right here at home.

“Last December, it was hard to see that I would be in the position that I am in today. But Dr. Stachniak and the therapists at Texas Health Presbyterian Plano have been fantastic. I have nothing but high regard for these folks.”

Marathon, Not a Sprint

It wasn't long before Roger was able to wiggle his toes and fingers, indicating electricity was running to his extremities and his damaged nerves were firing again. It was a hopeful sign.

“Dr. Stachniak warned me that this was a marathon, not a sprint,” remembers Roger. I knew that I was committed to as complete a recovery as I could have and that I would do whatever it took to get there.”

Roger doesn't remember much of Christmas 2011. He spent 12 days in the ICU at Texas Health Plano – a far cry from where most people want to be during the 12 days of Christmas. For this vice president of sales for a food company, his life had a fast pace full of work, travel and family. With Marilyn, his high school sweetheart and wife of 46 years, he has two children and four grandchildren. Roger describes those post-surgery days as “gloomy,” but promised himself he would do whatever it took to make a complete recovery.

A little inspiration was provided along the way. Roger was moved to a local inpatient rehabilitation hospital and there met a gentleman who had also suffered a severe spinal cord injury – a man who walked into Roger's hospital room and showed him that his own hard work had paid off.

“For me, it was reinforcement that you can get better and that there is hope,” said Roger.

“When you think you're in your darkest moments, when you're trying to get yourself to do anything at all – I looked at him and his story. He was there for about the same amount of time I was, and there he is, walking by.”

A Christmas Miracle

With time and inpatient rehabilitation therapy, Roger made significant strides, in more ways than one. Walking first with a walker and then a cane, Roger and his therapy team celebrated each small milestone as one he might never have seen. Step after step, Roger walked more steadily and was able to go home using a walker, which he has since discontinued using all together, needing just a cane now to get around.

“For the most part, I'm up and about, traveling on my own throughout the house. We go shopping, we go to dinner. We're not limited or confined,” said Roger, who also returned to his job, this time working from home. A year later, Roger and his family are planning a very different kind of Christmas, one filled with family and thankfulness for even the smallest things.

Dr. Stachniak reflects on Roger's case as a Christmas miracle.

“At Christmas, you think about the things you can be thankful for, and I count Roger as one of mine,” she said. “It's a rare thing to see someone who is a complete quadriplegic get his ability to walk again. This is a wonderful miracle. He is such a good man with a fantastic family.”

Roger couldn't be more grateful to his neurosurgeon and the entire team at Texas Health Plano. “They put me back together again,” he said.



Dr. Rebecca Stachniak, a board-certified neurosurgeon on the medical staff at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Plano



Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Plano, an affiliate of the faith-based, nonprofit Texas Health Resources system, is a 368-bed acute care hospital and recognized clinical program leader, providing technologically advanced care to Plano and surrounding areas since 1991. The hospital's services include cardiovascular services, oncology, orthopedics, neuroscience, pediatrics and women's services. Texas Health Plano has a dedicated neurosurgery program that offers minimally invasive brain and spine surgery. Patients have access to advanced medical technology for their surgical procedures, which may reduce hospital stay and recovery time. These medical advantages, combined with the Magnet Recognition from the American Nurses Credentialing Center, makes Texas Health Plano a top choice for patients needing spine and neurological surgery.

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