

Just One More Day

By Michael Groetsch

As I drive home in a torrential downpour, I can hear the shrill of emergency sirens in the near distance. I look in my rear-view mirror and then to my right and left, but see nothing. It is Thursday evening and the heavy rainstorm brings my hectic day to a dismal close.

My wife Barbara had called me at the office earlier in the day and invited me to go to a movie. "Sorry, Barb, can't do it tonight," I responded. "I still have a lot of paperwork to do and a couple of clients to see before I leave. You and the kids go without me. Give me a rain check and we'll go together next week." Without a second thought, I hung up the phone.

The summer rainstorm grows more intense. A heavy gust of wind makes my small car sway to the right as trees dance to the violent rhythm of nature. Less than two blocks from my home, the sirens grow louder. Within seconds, there is complete silence. I immediately dismiss the possibility that the sirens have anything to do with my family. After all, I reason, emergencies are always at someone else's home. They always take place in someone else's family. Maybe it's the elderly woman who lives down the street. Perhaps it's simply a police officer chasing a speeder.

As I turn the corner near my residence, my cell phone rings and my oldest son's phone number appears on its screen. Before I can respond, I look up through the heavy rain and see red and blue lights flickering ahead. I can see two police cars and an ambulance parked directly in front of my home. Perhaps they are at the wrong house. They probably have the wrong address. My wife and children are at the movies. It must be a mistake. It must be my neighbor next door. My body becomes numb. My heart begins to pound in my chest like a pile driver.

I bolt from my car and frantically rush into the foyer of my home. My son, Jeremy, meets me as I enter. He is visibly upset. He is crying hysterically. His words are almost inaudible. As he regains some of his composure and fights back his tears, he sobs and speaks.

“It’s Mom. We were getting ready for the show. She was putting on her makeup and began to have chest pain. A few minutes later, she fainted. I called 911. I think she may have had a heart attack. The paramedics have been working on her for about 15 minutes. She’s going to be all right, isn’t she, Dad? Please, tell me that she’s going to be all right.”

I feel a sense of dread come over me as I try to reassure him that everything is going to be fine. She’s only 55- years old, I reason. She’s only 55- years old.

I can hear the muffled voices of strangers as I walk towards the bedroom. Barbara is on the floor at the foot of our bed. It is apparent that she is unconscious. She is wearing the blue dress that I bought her for our anniversary, the dress that makes her glow.

“I still don’t feel a pulse,” one paramedic yells with a sense of urgency as another performs CPR. “Try the defibrillator again,” he demands. “She’s still not responding.”

As I stand paralyzed by the thought of losing my wife, a police officer places his arm around my shoulder and ushers me into the kitchen. He tries to comfort me with well-meaning words that sound rehearsed. He has obviously been through this before. I can hear Jeremy’s sobs coming from the den. I feel overwhelmed with anxiety. I feel nauseated and light-headed. I feel like I’m in a bad dream. This is really not happening. Things like this don’t happen to my family. It always happens to someone else.

A couple of close friends arrive and offer their assistance and support. I become particularly alarmed to see a priest enter the foyer and walk towards the bedroom. Who called a priest, I wonder? Why do we need a priest?

My other sons suddenly appear and begin to plead with me. “Please, Dad, don’t let Mom die. Please don’t let her die. What would we do without her?” Their cries produce a howling sound that seems to come from deep inside. I hold my children. I cuddle them. I want to reassure them. But why is there a priest in the bedroom?

As I enter the area where the paramedics are trying to revive my wife, the sight of them standing up while speaking quietly as she lies motionless on the floor terrorizes me. The priest reaches for my hand and gently suggests that we go into another bedroom. “I am so very sorry,” he says in an empathetic tone. “Your wife has passed. She is now in God’s hands. You can take comfort in knowing that I was able to give her the last rites before she died. If there is anything that I can do to help you with the arrangements, please let me know. I would like to relieve you of some burden. I am so very sorry, but it was God’s will.”

My legs become weak and I fall to the floor. I wail like an infant in search of its mother. I didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye. Had I agreed to go to the movies, I would have been here. Maybe I could have saved her. I could have told her how much she was loved. If only we could have just one more day together, just one more day. Things would be different. I would no longer take my family for granted.

The alarm clock buzzes – at first as an intruder, then a welcome presence. The bright morning sun penetrates the bedroom curtains. I emerge from a deep sleep hearing the soft tone of my wife’s sweet voice. I smell the soft scent of her body lotion. She sees tears running down my face. I suddenly realize that it was only a bad dream.

“Honey, what’s wrong? Why are you crying? Did you have a bad dream? Everything is fine. I’m right here with you,” she says reassuringly. “Hey, it’s Friday. How about taking the day off from work and we can go to the movies with the children,” she suggests.

“It’s a deal only if you wear my favorite blue dress,” I respond.

“What’s going on?” she asks. “You have never agreed to take a day off like this before.”

“It’s just one more day, my love. It’s just one more day.”