

## **A special letter**

It was Friday evening, May 20, 1983, when I saw a 66-year old minister at the request of his son. The son was an intensive care unit nurse at Lutheran Hospital, back when it was still on Fairfield Avenue in Fort Wayne. The minister was having unstable chest pain, or what we called pre-infarction (pre-heart attack) angina.

I had been in town for less than a year, and although I thought I was a well-trained cardiologist there was very little experience under my belt. I admitted him to the hospital and planned to perform a heart catheterization on him Monday. But he became unstable early Monday morning and had to be rushed to the catheterization lab for an emergency coronary arteriogram, which is when we found multiple critical blockages in his coronary arteries.

The only good option back then was to recommend emergency, open-heart surgery. After inserting an intra-aortic balloon pump to help stabilize him, he was rushed to surgery for a quadruple bypass. After a rocky week in the hospital, he made a full recovery without sustaining any permanent heart damage.

He was a very special man who had spent many years of his life in Third World countries teaching Christianity to thousands who did not know of Jesus Christ. His son practiced nursing for years but was also inspired to become a missionary. In 1996 the son moved his wife and two daughters with him to Uzbekistan in central Asia, after he became part of an international interdenominational mission agency.

I still remember the minister giving me updates on his son when he came in to see me for routine appointments. These encounters were always very special for me, as he would always tell me he was praying for me to bring good health to all my patients. He had many stories and anecdotes that inspired me and kept me smiling the rest of the day.

I usually saw him several times per year, and he continued to do very well for the many years. But eventually, age began to catch up with the minister as well as with his lovely wife. In 2010, his wife died at the age of 92. His love for her was only comparable to a fairy tale. The last visit I had with this special patient was July 30, 2010. A year went by and he had no more checkups, nor was there any contact with him. I presumed his heart had finally given out and the Lord had taken him.

Fast forward to August 2016, six years later, when I received a letter from his son. I'd like to share with you excerpts from the letter. "Dear Dr. Kaminskas: Back in 1983 we met when I was working nights in the ICU as a registered nurse at Lutheran Hospital (Fairfield). Late one Friday afternoon in May, you stayed late in your office to examine my father, Curt Claassen. You asked him to be admitted to the hospital the following

Sunday for an arteriogram on Monday. The following Monday morning as you did the arteriogram, you allowed me to be in the room. You stopped the procedure to tell me, 'We need to get your dad to surgery immediately! Who do you want to do the surgery?' I chose Dr. Schatzlein, and within a couple of hours dad had four bypass CAB surgery. Before, and even as he was wheeled to the operating room, the elders of my parents' church came to pray and anoint him with oil, for healing. Because of your expertise, the rapid surgery and God's goodness, Dad never did have an infarct. He recovered well, was diligent in his exercise and continued to serve at First Mennonite church in Berne for a number of years. Dad is now nearly 98 (on Sept. 28), and still living in Berne, at Swiss Village retirement center. He plays hymns on the piano every day and radiates his love for God.

"Mom passed away in 2010 from congestive heart failure, at the age of 92. Dad's hearing and sight are failing, but this doesn't seem to affect his joy! I have often wanted to write this letter to let you know that Dad has done well all these years, and to once again thank you for your kindness, expertise and your faith, which led you to help our family that day back in May, 1983! May God's loving presence and blessings be strong in your life and family! With thanks," the son's signature.

I smiled for days after receiving this letter. Over six years had gone by since I had last seen him. I had no idea the reverend was still alive. I thank God for the opportunity to be a physician and for all the blessings that have come by being in this profession. Praise the Lord!

*Dr. Dave Kaminskas is a cardiologist at Lutheran. He serves as treasurer of the Dr. Jerome Lejuene Catholic Medical Guild of Northeast Indiana ([www.fortwaynecma.com](http://www.fortwaynecma.com)).*

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