

Cynthia Widlitze

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Photo: PAIGE HENDERSON

Sometimes, life can change in a moment. For Cynthia Widlitze, it changed in 16 minutes. Hers is a story of hanging on to life by a thread, a brief helicopter ride that saved her life and the purpose she found following that harrowing experience.

She now refers to that helicopter ride, the circumstances which preceded it and those which followed, as her “medical adventure.” And what an adventure it has been.

The Mandeville-based sales coach, motivational speaker and author relays her story like a thriller with unexpected twists and turns and the decisions along the way that led her to where she is today: inspired and inspiring, rooted in reality, steadfast in faith and committed to the power of storytelling, not only her own, but that of others with powerful messages to share.

When she was 37, Cynthia and her husband, John, welcomed a son. Five months after his birth, she learned that her heart’s mitral valve was leaking excessively, necessitating open heart surgery. At that time, the anticipated survival rate of the surgery was 50%. She beat the odds.

Fast forward two decades. After a 30-year successful career in bank sales management, Cynthia made the decision to move to independent sales consulting and coaching. Just a few months after



launching her business, she required a second open heart surgery, and over the next few years, eight additional procedures for treatment of a pseudoaneurysm and atrial fibrillation. Her physician ultimately recommended a third open heart surgery.

Cynthia and her husband researched alternate options, which led them to a specialist in Houston.

When the surgeon entered the room, he said, “First, I have to tell you, I believe in God.” He then asked the couple if they could pray together before sharing details of the planned procedure, which would mark the fourth time her femoral artery would be accessed via her groin. This would be followed by an overnight stay and anticipated healing of a few months to a year.

Alas, that was not the case.

Two weeks later, the incision point began bleeding profusely. In the emergency room, Cynthia was advised that her femoral artery had ruptured, necessitating immediate blood transfusions and medevac to a trauma center 35 miles away.

The two paramedics/flight nurses on that flight recognized that their patient was just minutes away from bleeding to death. They took turns applying pressure to the incision point, utilizing their entire body weight plus sandbags for added weight and pressure. Cynthia described the pain as excruciating, and recalled thinking that if she could just close her eyes and go to sleep, she would get through the pain and awaken after the emergency medical care was completed.

However, the paramedics knew that it was critical that their patient remained awake, directing her over and over: “Stay with us!”

“In that critical moment, God gave me the strength to stay awake,” she says.

The vascular surgeon who provided emergency care credits the paramedics with saving Cynthia’s life. A home health nurse provided post-op care, but 11 days later Cynthia returned to the emergency room with a fever of 103 degrees due to sepsis. During that hospital stay, she advised the nurse of a horrible headache. The next thing she remembers is waking up with her head half-shaved and staples in her skull due to a brain bleed. In all, she would undergo seven surgeries before her release to a medical rehab facility, where she spent five weeks learning to walk, read, write and speak again, followed by extensive

in-home occupational and physical therapy.

“Prior to my medical adventures, I had often wondered what God’s plan was for me,” she said. “I’ve heard people say that they heard God, but have come to realize it’s more of a feeling. As I navigated recovery, I felt that voice telling me that I should share my story, of those who prayed with me to the many people who were praying for me via numerous prayer chains, I felt the power of all that faith. At no time did I feel like I was going to die.”

If you ask the medical professionals who treated her, they will tell you Cynthia is a walking miracle. If you ask Cynthia, she’ll tell you that the greatest miracle was the work of the paramedics Brandon Thornton and Jean Huhn, the angels who refused to allow her to surrender.

She and John took the pair to dinner about a year after that flight, which the duo call “The longest 16 minutes of our lives.” They told the Widlitzes that in the 15 years they have been first responders, this was the first time someone had followed up to express gratitude to them.

Stunned by this revelation, and driven by the voice she continued to feel, Cynthia committed to sharing her story of faith and miracles. She has spoken at churches and retreats, to business organizations and at medical conventions. Many of the medical professionals who have heard her presentation echoed the sentiments of Brandon and Jean, saying they rarely get to hear the stories from the patients’ perspectives once care is relinquished to medical facilities.

That revelation has inspired Cynthia to write a book in which she will share not only her story, but those of others who have experienced their own moments of clarity and purpose after faith has led them through the most difficult of challenges or significant changes of perspectives.

“God left me here for a reason,” she says. “If my story or any of the stories compiled in my upcoming book touch just one person or change one life, there is no way of knowing the impact that might follow. What matters is that those stories can pave the way for others who need to hear the messages.”

It all begins with one moment.



To learn more about Cynthia and to share your story, visit <https://16-minutes.com>.