

Miracle

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Family and friends lined the hospital halls to pray.

Thanks to social media, prayers spread across the nation. "Prayer warriors," they called themselves – more than 2,800 of them – began to post their thoughts and prayers on a Facebook page, "Prayers for Zach Short."

Assaria resident Lori Blake received a text from a friend the day Zach coded in the hospital, asking for prayers. "Zach needs your prayers right now," it read. "I will never forget that day," she said. "We all stopped at work and prayed."

Tragic accident

Zach, 25, tells the story from his kitchen table at the farmhouse where he grew up, alongside Jodi and their 2-year-old daughter, Brynlee. Nearly a year has passed since the farming accident that occurred in a soybean field not far from the Saline County town of Assaria.

He has never imagined being anywhere else – or doing anything else – but farming, carrying on the family tradition as a fourth-generation Kansas farmer.

Zach attended Hutchinson Community College, where he met Jodi. They married in 2012, and Zach joined the family business, farming alongside his dad, Chris, and brother, Matt.

The newlyweds moved into the farmhouse on the family farmstead. His parents, Chris and Lisa, moved into Assaria. Daughter Brynlee was born in September 2013.

Everything, it seemed, was going perfectly.

Until Oct. 25, 2014.

"We were in a really weedy soybean field," Zach recalled, noting that he and farmer John Tinkler were custom harvesting for an area farmer.

When Zach and the crew came back from lunch to begin cutting, Tinkler already was unloading the grain cart into the semi. No one noticed that the grain cart's auger was touching a power line.

"We all hopped in our machines and started cutting soybeans," Zach said. "It probably wasn't within a couple minutes of cutting (John) gets on the radio, saying his tractor is on fire."

He asked someone to bring the service truck and fire extinguisher. Then Tinkler bailed out of the tractor, never touching any metal.

"He didn't touch a single step of the tractor," Zach said, adding that if he had, it might have killed him.

Zach, the closest to the service truck, stopped his combine and ran to the fire. He couldn't find the fire extinguisher, so he went to inspect the fire more closely, high-stepping the hitch and grabbing the grain cart's ladder with his left hand.

"The second I touched it, I couldn't get off it," he said. "It is 7,200 volts when it surges. I don't know what it is before it surges."

"With that much volts, people usually die because you can't get off it," Zach said.

The current pinned him to the grain truck for at least 30 seconds.

Mysterious shovel

Maybe it was just happenstance.

Not long before the accident, a friend, Tyler Ash,



Tanner Colvin/Salina Journal

Participants of the Tri-Rivers Fair Benefit Color Run toss different color corn starch into the air at the start of the 5k race on May 2. All proceeds from the race went to help Amanda Hoeh Janzen, who has breast cancer, and Zach Short, who was injured in a farm accident, with medical bills.

HOW TO HELP

Assaria resident Lori Blake said the Zach Short Fund is still open at First Bank Kansas in Salina. Meanwhile, a GoFundMe page has raised more than \$60,000. For more information, visit, <http://www.gofundme.com/supporttheshorts>.

"I said, 'I don't think that's our shovel,'" Zach said.

Yet the family's farm hand and shop mechanic, Les Ferm, of Roxbury, said he might as well throw it into their truck bed. Ferm didn't give the shovel a second thought until that afternoon in the soybean field.

Ferm, who had pulled up near the fire, could see what had happened. He tried to warn Zach, but Zach didn't hear Ferm's screams. Then it was too late.

"I could hear the snapping and cracking," Ferm said.

In all honesty, Ferm figured Zach was gone. Flames were shooting from his body. But he still tried to figure out a way, with a service truck full of metal tools, to pull Zach off the cart. Ferm couldn't touch him himself

or he'd get shocked. Then he remembered

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BY THE NUMBERS

On average, 325 people die and 4,400 are injured each year because of electrical hazards, according to data published by the National Safety Council. Electricity ranks sixth among all causes of occupational fatalities.

The leading cause of fatal electrical incidents while on the job is contact with power lines, both above and below ground.

"I will never forget that day. We all stopped work and prayed." –Lori Blake

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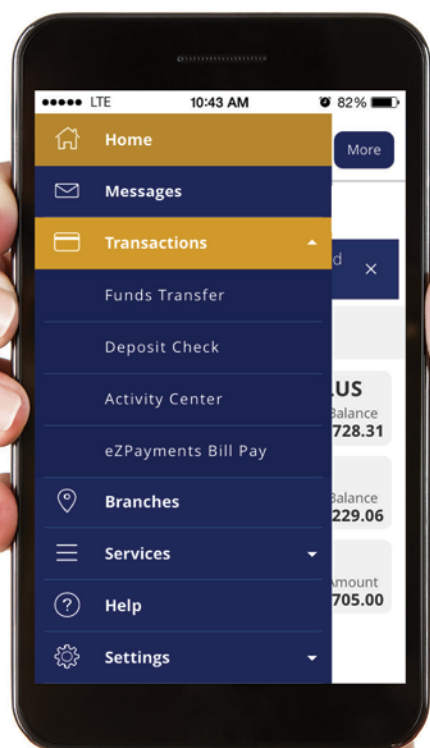
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