

Miracle

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the shovel. He hooked it on Zach's shoulder and pulled him off the cart. Zach fell to the ground.

"I thought he was dead right here," Ferm said, adding that Zach wasn't breathing. "Then I dragged him away from it. Then he started breathing."

Ferm put out the fire on Zach with his hands.

"He's Zach's guardian angel," Jodi said of Ferm.

"He saved my life," Zach said. "The wooden shovel - we were so lucky we had that. I think it is kind of a sign that it was there."

Close calls

There are plenty of reminders of that October day. Zach can still hear the snapping from the electrical surges. The charred spot at the field still won't grow anything. And there are the scars from the accident - which he's not bashful about showing - as well as his amputated legs.

He remembers a split second of pain and seeing a white light. Then, for weeks, everything went dark.

In an induced coma in a Wichita hospital, he dreamed a lot - about the people who came in and out of the hospital room. He recalls talking to his deceased grandfather in one dream.

For Jodi, however, the first days were tense. Zach was in critical condition. Doctors weren't encouraging.

"The doctor came out and said, 'We have done all we can today, and we will move forward tomorrow if he makes it through the night,'" said Jodi. "I said, 'What do you mean if he makes it through the night?' He said he was very sick, and I lost it."

It seemed like the end was near again on day three when Zach coded for nine minutes, his heart stopping and his kidneys not functioning.

"He couldn't breathe, and they were using a bag to pump air and keep him alive," Jodi said of Zach, who was on a ventilator. "They made me make a decision. I told them, 'Don't shut him off. His brain is still there.'"

Doctors called everyone into the room to say their last goodbyes.

"God must have done some work that night," Zach said.

The medical staff started taking water off his lungs. As the night progressed, his kidneys began working and his levels began to go back to normal.

"The next morning, his lungs were half empty and the doctor said he hadn't seen anything like this," Jodi said.

Prayers

The Short family always lends a hand when folks need it, said Gypsum-area farmer Justin Knopf.

"Everyone in the community thinks so highly of the Short family, just all they do for neighbors and their approach to farming and being a part of the community," Knopf said.

Knopf said that when he heard about the accident, his first thoughts were of a Scripture passage from Matthew, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them."

Using the CB call signal 10-4 to make it easy to remember, he and his family set their clocks for 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., stopping wherever they were to pray. Other farmers across the area joined in at the same times.

"We all stopped the combines and tractors and prayed for Zach, that the Lord's will be done and He perform a miracle and leave Zach here to be with his wife and daughter," Knopf said.

"Harvest is a busy, intense time; you hardly stop and eat," he added. "But here was a community of folks who believe in prayer - who care enough about family - to stop their harvest operations, stop whatever they were doing in the field ... for several moments and pray. For me, that is a powerful testament to people's faith and also the care that everyone has for this family."

That's just what folks around here do: When someone is in need, they lend a hand and they pray. They prayed for his countless surgeries and every other step along the way.

"The night he was dying, the whole hallway inside the burn unit was filled with family and friends praying," Jodi



Photos by Aaron Anders/Salina Journal

Zachary Short visits with Les Ferm, Short Farm Machanic Worker, and close family friend in the machine shop outside of Assaria.

said, adding, "People were waiting for the call the next morning (that Zach had died), and they never got it."

Donations pour in

Fundraisers were organized across the Southeast of Saline school district, which encompasses Assaria, Gypsum and a few other rural towns in southeast Saline County.

A bucket passed around at a home football game just days after the accident raised \$650. Food benefits brought in thousands, as well as a GoFundMe support page, which is up to \$63,000.

Assaria's Lori Blake, who is on the local school board, along with Alex Weller, owner of Exit 14 restaurant in Gypsum, and a few other school district residents, organized a spaghetti feed and auction at the school.

Green Bay Packer Jordy Nelson signed items to be auctioned off at the event. But residents donated items from their hearts, as well, Blake said.

"What was different from other auctions, there were real ag-centered items," she said, adding that someone even auctioned off an hour-and-a-half of hay grinding.

Weller said he served more than 700 meals that night. In all, with a donation from a hospital foundation, they raised about \$70,000.

Weller, a lifelong friend of Zach's, said he rented a house with Zach while attending Hutchinson Community College.

"He is the only reason I passed my freshman year of college," he said, explaining with a chuckle, "He made me go to class."

Prayerful homecoming

For months, the extended Southeast of Saline community sought news of Zach's recovery. Zach's mom, Lisa, along with Jodi, kept fellow prayer warriors updated daily on Facebook.

That includes his continuing journey back to health. Zach spent 20 days in a coma. He underwent about 20 surgeries, which included one to partially amputate both legs. Doctors battled to save his left arm and worked to heal the burn wounds.

It had been a long journey from hospital beds in Wichita and St. Louis. Finally, on Valentine's Day, Zach came home to a crowd of family and friends, many holding "Welcome home" signs.

Hundreds lined the street leading to the farmhouse, Zach said.

It was what they had been praying for, said Blake.

"Zach is a testament of what can happen through that collective prayer," she said.

The support through it all, whether providing meals, helping with the farm work or, of course, praying, has been amazing, Jodi said.

"We are just thankful we are in the community we are in," she said. "In a community like this, it's like everyone is close family."

Long row to hoe

Zach's journey is far from over, Jodi said. He continues to do physical therapy. Five days a week, they travel to Newton, where he goes into a hyperbaric chamber to heal stubborn wounds from the skin grafting.

It's been a rough journey, Jodi admitted.

"Even when we came home, it was like bringing home a newborn baby for the first time," she said. "You have to do everything yourself, the things the nurses did all the time."

But through every step, "I just stuck with God, kept my faith," Jodi said.

There are bad days - days where he gets more

There's more to the story. See video at hutchnews.com.

frustrated, Zach said. He can see, from the farmhouse window, his family rebuilding used Case combines, one of the farm's businesses.

"God, what am I going to be able to do?" Zach said he has asked. "Why did this happen to me?"

His family is always there to bring him back up, he said. And there are plenty of good days.

In August, Zach was fitted for new legs. On his first attempt, he stood up and, largely without help, walked. As the days go by and his skin gets thicker, he hopes to wear the prostheses longer.

"He is doing amazing," said Jodi. "Nothing is stopping him. God is so good."

"I know I still have a long way to go," said Zach.

However, he said he has been told that while he will have some limitations, he should be able to again climb into a tractor.

That's the ultimate goal, he said, reflecting that's saying a lot "when you're not supposed to live."



Zachary Short gets to enjoy life back on the farm with his wife Jodi Short and daughter Brynlee Short at their farm outside Assaria.

"They said I was supposed to be on dialysis the rest of my life, too," he said.

Incredibly, his internal organs are fine, Jodi said, adding that, as T-shirts worn by community members point out, Zach is nothing "short of a miracle."

Kansas Agland Editor Amy Bickel's agriculture roots started in Gypsum. She has been covering Kansas agriculture for more than 15 years. Email her with news, photos and other information at abickel@hutchnews.com or by calling (800) 766-3311, ext. 320.

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