

*"Life, Light and Love Beyond Covid," is the story of a vibrant young woman's struggle for her very life against Covid, and then a debilitating stroke. Follow Kelly's challenging recovery and see God's love revealed as her journey unfolds.*

**Life, Light and Love Beyond Covid:  
Kelly's True Story of How God Grants us "Hope for Miracles...Always!"  
By Tim Pleacher**

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# LIFE, LIGHT AND LOVE BEYOND COVID

KELLY'S TRUE STORY OF HOW GOD GRANTS  
US "HOPE FOR MIRACLES...ALWAYS!"



TIM PLEACHER

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## Chapter 1 – “Hope for Miracles...Always!”

### Despair

I’m sure the Doctors and nurses didn’t intend for me to overhear the horrifying details of Kelly’s condition. But it couldn’t be helped, I was there, and could scarcely believe what I was hearing.

Kelly was intubated and on complete ventilation. My wife of 39 years was on full life support as I watched the machine breathe for her. Tubes were everywhere. Through IV’s she was sedated to avert her suffering, and on paralytics to inhibit her movement. Kelly’s death seemed imminent.

Discussion ensued about her being “proned” again. It was clear she was not expected to survive the risky procedure of turning her over while ventilated. Hospital staff discussed the lung damage from the Covid; how it had caused infection and scarring that were likely irreversible. Kelly had already received two large puncture wounds to her face from her first proning. A part of me was thankful I had not witnessed it; and I could only imagine what other damage was occurring.

Questions were raised about her vital signs and reflexes. “What is her heart rate and blood pressure? What is the percentage of oxygen in her blood? Does she have any eye movement? Is there any response to pain stimulus? Does she have *any* reflexes?”

Panic gripped my heart as they spoke.

At one point I asked a Doctor how much pain she was feeling? He told me “None,” and went on to explain, “It would be inhuman if she were feeling pain at this time.” He said Kelly was on Fentanyl, which was much stronger than morphine. He assured me that the drug, “Would not allow her to feel the pain, or even realize what is happening.”

I was grateful to hear those words.

A few days more and the conversation turned to the need to wean Kelly from sedation. They said the weaning might enable her to "Come Around." An event they hoped would happen in less than 2 days' time. I wondered what pain she would endure if she did...."Come Around?" In my mind I understood the need to find out if she could improve; but in my heart I certainly did NOT want her to feel ANY pain.

While not officially allowed to visit during the first 21 days of Kelly's Covid quarantine; I was in the hallway outside her room, in the offices, and on the phone. I was provided with updates on her condition; and required to give approvals for life threatening procedures. I was eventually asked if I wanted to add, "Do Not Resuscitate," as part of Kelly's orders. I spoke to family, and we reluctantly decided to add those distressing words.

This could not be happening. Those first days of Kelly's hospitalization were a nightmare from which I could not awake. Constantly in a cold sweat, a darkness grew within me.

But there is: "Life, Light and Love Beyond Covid!"

### A Look Back

"Slowdown will ya?" I grumbled to Kelly as we shuffled down the boardwalk that evening in Wildwood. I wanted to take in what we could see of the ocean waves being struck by the light from the shops we passed along our way. The sea breeze was gentle and perfect. It tugged at me to linger on the boardwalk. But Kelly was in "go" mode. I sensed that she wanted to get back to the hotel in time to tuck her baby Granddaughter Javaya in for the night.

It was June of 2021 and we had taken the family to Cape May New Jersey on our first family vacation in years. During our days there Kelly was riding a bike up and down the boardwalk, swimming in

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the ocean, and fishing with me from the docks. She was utterly carefree; her conversation was casual and filled with joy. On that summer trip Kelly relished complete freedom of movement and wonderful vibrancy. No one would ever guess she was 59.

But four months later, by the mid-morning hours of October 3, 2021 the Covid she contracted had struck her down. Our world was transformed. Kelly began a horrifying 80 day hardship, confined to the Hospital fighting for her life. And I began a saga of another type! Mine, a journey in search of God, and a life I never knew.

### A Story to Tell?

Most certainly! There is a miraculous story to tell.

It's the story of our loving miracle working God. The story of a courageous 59 year old woman's struggle for her very life; first against Covid, and then against a debilitating stroke. It's the story of a dedicated hospital staff; and an account of the month's long turmoil felt by family and friends. But it's also the depiction of how a wife's love, and God's grace, can rescue a man adrift in his self-serving ways.

My name is Tim, and I will try and bring the story of my wife Kelly's battle to life.

Kelly would spend 17 days on full ventilation. She would spend 43 days in the Intensive Care Unit, and a record 80 total days in the hospital. While confined she would suffer a debilitating stroke, and would endure numerous life threatening complications. Kelly would be near death several times during her stay!

Could God perform the many miracles necessary to sustain Kelly's life? I pray that you are intrigued and will join me as I tell her true story. Along the way we will come to know God's love, witness Kelly's courage, and be inspired to draw closer to God.

*Tim Pleacher*

My wife's battle against Covid and stroke rocked our world. I pray the account of the miracles God accomplished through her healing will touch you, and that your faith will increase. When you read how His love swept me off the empty path I was walking; I pray you will be encouraged. God's loving nature as our creator, and our savior, is revealed in the lessons the journey teaches. May you receive hope as you read!

Kelly's story is a testament to how much God loves us. No matter how dreadful the situation, no matter the distance we stray, He loves us! We may not understand why trials come; or why it seems there's no hope. But when we seek Him, even in our darkest hour, He is there. In our most desperate moments we can speak to the **living** God, and He will answer. Then, when we continue in faith, we will feel his love; a love that is personal and intimate. This is the true story of Kelly, God's precious daughter, and how He grants us:

"Hope for Miracles...Always!"

### Breath

I will try to keep the events in chronological order. But like most stories, this one too will be full of flash backs, fast forwards, and cut ins. With that in mind, and this is a bit of a spoiler alert; I need to fast forward to day 74 of Kelly's 80 day hospital stay.

For 73 days; either through a ventilator, a trach collar, or a nasal cannula the precious oxygen required to sustain Kelly's life had needed to be "forced" into her lungs. But when I entered her hospital room the morning of December 14, 2021 there were no tubes sticking from her mouth, neck, or nose! She was standing there, at long last breathing on her own! I had to look 10 times to be sure I wasn't hallucinating!

At that precious sight, the air in my own lungs fled and I nearly collapsed. I was flooded with excitement, and my heart raced as I



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wept. Artificial oxygen was no longer being pumped into Kelly's lungs. She was finally bringing real air into her lungs **on her own**. I was awestruck and immediately began to thank God. I nearly dropped to my knees. In the past 73 days I had felt his love, I had witnessed His healing hand at work. I knew Kelly's story was amazing; but it took that moment for me to realize the scope and breadth of the miracle playing out before me.

Looking back, Jeremiah 51:15 comes to mind. "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding." By God's healing power Kelly was breathing once again!

That verse has since been etched in my mind. I comprehend now how life itself comes to us only through God's love and grace. That it is only by Him, and through His will, that we breathe at all. The gift of life hasn't come to us through some medical science breakthrough! But life itself is granted to us by the love God graciously bestows.

Her room was full of people that morning; the evidence of God's healing was on full display. Seventy three days prior I was living on the fringe of Christianity. How was I living now? I had obviously changed, but to what extent?

Kelly's courage is at the heart of this story! But how God's forgiveness, and a wife's awesome love, combined to transform Tim's life are part of the tale as well. When we flash back to a bit of my testimony you will have cause to harbor contempt toward me, as my shortcomings will be evident. But please, oh please, don't let that stop you from reading. Because the miracles God provided, and the strength of Kelly's character, are unquestionably worth reading about!

## A Crisis Swiftly Came

Friday night found Kelly and I up later than usual. We were talking and laughing well past midnight. But Saturday October 2, 2021 still found us up early at our home in Treasure Lake Pennsylvania. Despite having been diagnosed with Covid earlier in the week Kelly was up and fixing our breakfast.

Kelly was using the oxygen concentrator that had been prescribed as part of her treatment, but she was saying, "I really don't think I need this." She enjoys cooking, and despite the inconvenience of the oxygen machine dragging behind her, and wearing the cannula in her nose, she was going about the task with delight. My daughter Janelle, her husband Justin, and our granddaughter Javaya live in the downstairs apartment of our home, and they joined us for a pleasant breakfast.

Saturday had been a relatively normal day; but by mid-morning on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kelly had become violently ill. I recall running downstairs to get my daughter to come up. We started to get Kelly ready to take her to the hospital, but we quickly decided that we needed to call 911 for an ambulance instead. I recall the dispatcher asking me about Kelly's color. I told the operator that she looked fine, but Janelle interrupted, "No Dad, she's turning gray!" That's how quickly Kelly's condition was deteriorating.

Here is how my daughter Janelle recalls the events:

"It was a typical Sunday morning for me. I was doing some cleaning, and was playing with my one year old daughter Javaya. I knew my mom had Covid; everyone in the house had it. And everyone in the house was getting better and starting to feel more like themselves – except, that is, for my mom.

It was 2 days prior that she had gone to the Emergency Room. The clinic had officially diagnosed her with Covid

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and recommended she go to the ER. While at the ER mom was prescribed a breathing treatment, an inhaler, oxygen, and had then been sent her home.

By the ER sending mom home we had all been given hope that she would get better. We felt that since the doctors had already checked her out, and sent her home, the worst was over. We would just keep her on the oxygen, and the meds, and she would recover. Of course I knew in the back of my mind that since it was Covid something could go wrong; but I tried to push those feelings and thoughts away as much as I could. I tried to stay in my happy little bubble; thinking that nothing tragic could, or would, happen to my family; and certainly not to my mom!

But on that terrible morning my bubble was about to burst. My dad came rushing down the stairs with fear in his eyes and said "Your mom's getting worse. I'm asking her questions and she's not answering them. I tell her to sit up, but she can't." I ran up the stairs to her room where she was lying on the bed. Terror ripped through me when I laid eyes on how sick she had become; and I gasped for air.

At first, my dad and I thought we would take her to the hospital on our own. We were trying to assure ourselves that mom really wasn't as bad as it appeared she was becoming. Perhaps she just needed a little TLC, or a different breathing treatment? But as we started to put on her shoes and coat we realized that we needed to call for an ambulance immediately.

When my dad handed me the phone I began to answer the dispatchers' questions. "Hello, yes, my mother has Covid and she's very lethargic; I believe she's having trouble breathing. We need an ambulance and quick." I told the dispatcher my name and address and he asked a few more questions like mom's name, age, birthday and her

symptoms. I tried to answer them all as quickly and as accurately as I could. Finally, he told me that an ambulance was on the way. As I hung up the phone I held my mom's hand, and rubbed her arm, as we waited for the ambulance.

I felt like I was melting into a puddle on the floor, and I was crying my eyes out. But I tried to remain strong for my mom. I had to keep it together for her. I had to make sure she got the help she needed. I knew I'd need to give the paramedics all the information I could on her health and background when they arrived. Plus I was still holding on to the hope that everything would be fine; that maybe all of this was just a complete over reaction.

As we waited for the ambulance to arrive it felt like the minutes turned to hours. "Why aren't they here yet?" I thought. "What's taking them so long? Did they forget about us?" My dad must have been feeling the same way because he called 911 back and began asking more questions. I heard him saying, "How much longer until the paramedics arrive? Should I lay her on our side, or should I sit her up? What about this inhaler, should we let her use it again?"

Just before the paramedics arrived I remember laying my hand on my mom's arm and saying "I love you mom." No response. I repeated myself, louder this time. "I love you mom!" She must have sensed the desperation in my voice. She did not open her eyes, she did not move a muscle, but somehow she responded with a faint whisper, "I love you too honey." I believed those would be the last words I'd ever hear from my mother; and I was shaken to my core.

When the paramedics finally did arrive they seemed to have no sense of urgency. To them it was just another day on the job. But to me it was the scariest day of my life.

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They trudged up the stairs. "Hello, where's the patient?" I pointed to her room and shouted, "Down the hall to the left!" I'd hoped by shouting that I'd put some pep in their step. They began to examine her, asking the same questions the 911 operator did. Once again I answered them as best I could, but I was really thinking, "Just get her in the ambulance; I can walk and talk you know!"

After they examined her, they lifted her into the special motorized wheelchair that can go up and down steps. They pulled her down the steps, and with a loud thud into the back of the ambulance. The sound must have startled mom because she looked scared, briefly opened her eyes wide, and then quickly shut them again. Once she was loaded, the ambulance door slammed behind her.

I began to wrestle once more with the idea that this might be the last time I would see my mother alive. But just as quickly as those thoughts came to me, I tried to push them away. The paramedic informed us that they would continue to do an examination in the ambulance, and that it would take a few minutes before they left for the hospital. My dad began to put on his shoes and coat. He gave me a hug and told me that he was going to follow the ambulance to the hospital; and that he would call me as soon as he got a report from the doctors.

Knowing there wasn't much I could do I reluctantly agreed to stay behind to attend to my daughter. I had an appointment of my own in a half an hour and had to get ready for it. My husband began watching our daughter. I gave him a hug and let him know that I was leaving. As I drove to my appointment I wondered what was happening at the hospital. Once again I tried to stay in my bubble; telling myself that mom would be okay. I thought to myself, "She is so strong and healthy, she'll bounce back in a few days. "

As I was leaving my appointment my phone rang. I glanced at the screen. It read, "Dad's Cell." I hurried to answer it, "Hello" I said, "How's mom?" "Where are you?" my dad asked. I said, "I'm on my way home." His next words were a command for me to, "Pull over." My heart sunk. If he's telling me to pull over this cannot be good news. Tears began to fill my eyes. "Don't tell me she's dead dad!" "Just pull over," he said again.

I quickly pulled into the closest parking lot I could find. "Okay, I parked my car; now please tell me what's going on." "Things aren't good," He stated. "She's alive but the doctors said that her prognosis is poor." When she arrived at the ER her oxygen was low, and they are going to put her on a ventilator."

"Oh no, God please no!" I couldn't hold back the tears anymore. My bubble had indeed burst....into a million pieces! My mom, the most wonderful, caring and loving mother, and grandmother, a girl could have was most likely going to die. How on earth could I come to grips with this? How could I continue my life without her? What if my daughter never gets to know how amazing her grandmother is?

"What should I do?" I asked. "Come to the hospital now!" Dad replied. "I'll be right there," I said, and I hung up the phone and drove to the hospital as fast as could. I was Crying and pleading to God. "Please don't you take her away from me! She still has a life to live God. I still need her. Please don't take her!"

Now, fade from Janelle, and back to me.

From our home I quickly sped to the hospital, following the ambulance as best I could. I caught up with, and spoke to, the paramedic outside the entrance. He told me that Kelly had "come

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around” on the ride in. Those words gave me hope that Kelly would be recovering. So I went inside to sit in the lobby and wait for some word.

A pleasant lady, who was a total stranger to me, saw me in distress and approached me. She asked why I was there. I told her my wife had just come in with Covid, and that I was waiting to hear something. She told me that she had just come from inside the Emergency Room. She told me, “They were working desperately on a woman in there, and if that person is your wife, you should call your family. “Don’t wait!” she said. I thought to myself, “There is no way that she could be describing Kelly; the paramedic had, after all, just told me that Kelly had come around.”

Kelly had been in the Emergency Room for about half an hour when a nurse finally called me to step back into an office. Once inside, two Doctors tried their best to explain the situation. They told me that the outlook for my wife of 39 years was meager at best. They told me, “Covid has already damaged her lungs so badly that she is experiencing acute respiratory distress; quite frankly her prognosis is poor!”

Respiratory distress meant that Kelly was not breathing well enough to maintain sufficient oxygen levels in her blood. The doctors said, “That without adequate oxygen to her vital organs they will begin to shut down.” They were doing their best to be humane and guard my feelings, but by the grave tone of their voices I could tell they did not expect Kelly to survive. I called my children telling them to, “Come to the hospital right away.” My son Jay, and daughter Janelle, told me they would come immediately; but, I had no idea what I was going to tell them when they arrived!

## ECMO

Ever heard of a medical treatment called "ECMO"? Prior to October 3<sup>rd</sup> I'd never heard that term either. ECMO is an acronym that stands for **E**xtra **C**orporeal **M**embrane **O**xygenation. Here's how it works. During the treatment, blood is pumped outside of the body and into a heart-lung machine that removes carbon dioxide from the blood. The machine then enriches that same blood with oxygen, and sends it back to the tissues in the body.

If that sounds like a risky, perilous, last chance procedure to try and save someone's life...your right....it is! Up until recently ECMO was used to treat such conditions as a heart attack, infections like sepsis, or for transplant complications. But now that Covid is upon us, and is a disease that robs the body of its oxygen, ECMO is used for critical care treatment of Covid as well.

As you might imagine ECMO wasn't available everywhere during the pandemic; and its use was in extremely high demand. Subsequently "someone" had to establish when, where and to whom this vital treatment could be given. My heart goes out to the "someone" who had to establish those rules. God only knows how agonizing it was to decide who would receive the treatment...and who wouldn't!

On October 3, 2021 the decision that "someone" had made was that only Covid patients who were under the age of 50, and who did not have "other" health concerns would be considered for ECMO. Can you imagine telling someone who was over 50, and otherwise healthy, that they could not receive the treatment because only younger healthier patients were eligible?

Or for that matter, how about telling a 23 year old that had diabetes, and then became ill with Covid, that they were not eligible to receive ECMO because of their condition? How would you like to be the doctor who had to tell a patient, or their loved ones, that a potentially lifesaving treatment would not be given?



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Two such doctors stood before me!

Compassionately the doctors explained to me that the best procedure to try and save Kelly's life would have been the ECMO. "But," they said, "Kelly will not be a candidate for ECMO. Yes, it could possibly save her life, but we have spoken to doctors in Pittsburgh who told us that since ECMO is in such high demand, no one over 50 is even being considered."

Now intellectually I understood that decision, but part of me was also morally outraged that a treatment that might save Kelly's life was being denied her. All I could do was cry.

The doctors told me that instead of the ECMO, the plan was to take Kelly upstairs to the Hospital's Intensive Care Unit. The Doctors explained that once in the ICU they wanted to "prone" her. They explained that "proning" meant Kelly would be turned onto her stomach while fully ventilated. They said, "This will allow the fluid in her lungs to move forward, exposing more lung tissue to the open parts of her chest. It will allow more oxygen to get into her blood, and reduce the risk of damaging her vital organs."

They went on to explain that the procedure was most certainly life threatening! They told me that proning overworks, and overloads the lungs thereby increasing the risks that the lungs will fail. "But," they said, "We feel this is her only hope to regain the oxygen supply in her blood." And so, I reluctantly choked out the words which gave them permission to proceed.

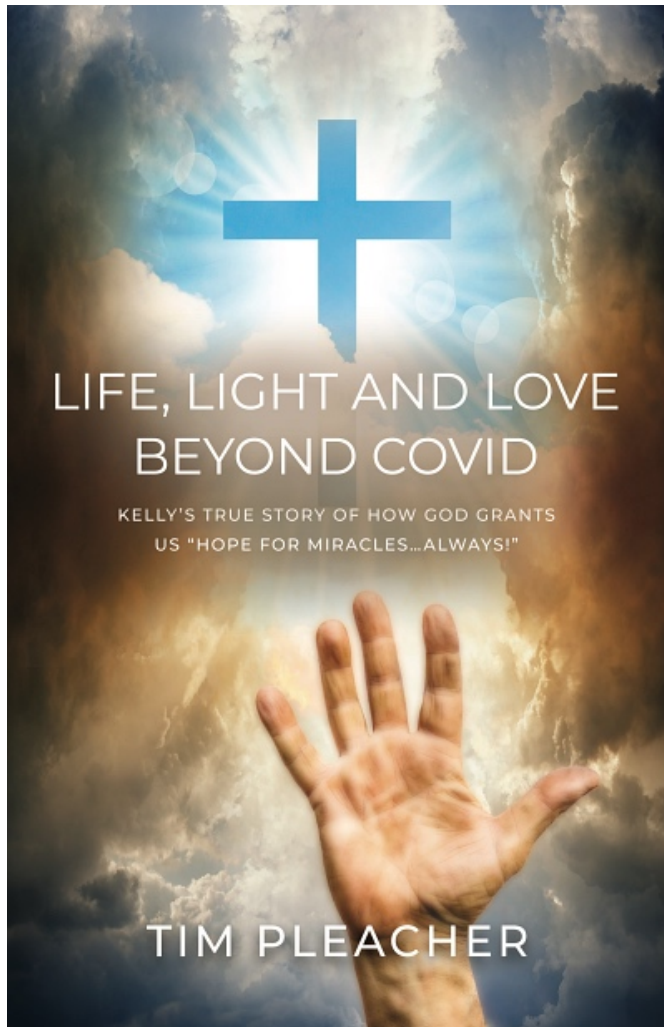
Finally, they permitted me into the Emergency Room alone to see her. It was obvious to me they were allowing me to have an opportunity to say goodbye. When I looked at her there seemed to be no light in Kelly's beautiful eyes. I pulled our masks away and I hugged and kissed her. I told her "I love you, and you are my whole life." I could barely feel Kelly return the kiss. Soon, I was swept away and returned to lobby. Kelly was sped away to the ICU.

*Tim Pleacher*

Through tears in the lobby I told my son Jay, and my daughter Janelle, "Your mother's prognosis is poor; the doctors pretty much told me she won't survive." I told them about the ECMO and why Kelly wouldn't be receiving it. Through the sobs I also told them of the plan to prone her in the ICU, and that, "She will most likely pass away when they try it."

When Kelly was finally placed in the ICU, ventilated, proned and on her stomach; Jay and I were allowed up to look at her through the glass of her room. She was unconscious with tubes and machines everywhere around her. She appeared to be "hanging" stomach down over a table. The ventilator looked like a metal rod had been jammed into her mouth. To us, it was a sight from a bad horror movie. Except that this was all too real!

I can remember the tears, but I can't recall what Jay and I actually said to each other in those moments. But I do know it seemed we were saying goodbye.



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