



## First Person – One of Our Own

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Dignity Health – St. Mary Medical Center

### **I got to live when others are dying, and I thank God for being alive.**

I distinctly remember going to the Urgent Care on Friday, March 20, and being asked a series of questions of which most of my answers were no. So the doctor told me that I didn't qualify for a COVID-19 test and probably had the flu – that I should go home and rest.

Within 48 hours, I was saying good-bye to my three children because I felt like I was going to die. I struggled to breathe and no matter what I did, I just couldn't catch my breath.

I called a friend at work and told her I was on my way to the Emergency Department. She notified the ED Director that I was coming in and that I strongly believed I was COVID-19 positive. My husband drove me to Dignity Health – St. Mary Medical Center and they wouldn't let him stay with me. That's when I knew things were bad.

All I remember was staring into the hazel eyes of the ED nurse in full personal protective equipment and begging her to not let them intubate me. I swore if they did I would die. Her eyes just filled with tears, and now when I think of those hazel eyes, my heart goes out to heroes like her.

The next thing I knew, I opened my eyes in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and thought maybe one to three days had passed, only to be told it had been nearly two weeks. I immediately asked for my husband and kids. I asked if I had contracted the virus, if my family had it too, if they were doing okay, if they knew I was doing okay – so many questions just raced through my head.

As the nurses and doctors explained that I was COVID-19 positive, they informed me that I had been on a ventilator, had lost body mass, but that I was a miracle. I was the hospital's first-ever COVID-19 patient and I came off the ventilator and survived!

### **I knew I had to keep fighting, that my struggle wasn't over.**

No visitors were allowed and I missed my family dearly, and I started feeling depressed not being able to see them. I asked the nurse, 'What do I need to do to get out of here?' to which she responded that I had to pass a swallow test and Physical Therapy test in order to eat and walk. I passed the swallow test, but when asked to touch my nose, I couldn't. My finger swayed to the side and touched my ear. My brain was telling my body what to do, but it wasn't doing it correctly. She asked me if I could stand and I said, 'Sure, no problem.' But my legs wouldn't move.

My hallucinations of falling from a dark, never-ending hole, and figuring out what are real memories and what are hallucinations have been difficult to manage. I am so thankful for the hospital staff, nurses, and doctors for the wonderful care I received. I specifically remember nurses Kayla and Georgina, both of whom did not let me get depressed and remained my biggest cheerleaders. A physical therapist came to my room an hour a day to help. Thankfully, they gave me an exercise band, so I could continue to strengthen my body again on my own. Within four days, I was up and walking on a walker with some assistance.

The health care workers continued to tell me I was a miracle and that my determination is what ultimately helped me survive. All I wanted was to get home to my husband and kids and that's what I did. On April 9, I finally got to see my family, although I'm still recovering. I go for daily walks with my cane because my muscles have felt completely gone.

### **Although my physical strength has been lacking, my spiritual strength is stronger than ever.**

**I am determined to live.**



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