

As fentanyl takes lives, an offer of hope arrives

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Two years ago, Craig Lopez sat in an audience, listening to speakers talk about the grip addiction had on their lives and the years—sometimes decades—it took to break that hold.

He knew the storyline all too well, both as an addict and the parent of one. After back surgeries from an auto accident and injuries from playing sports, Lopez, who'd been drafted years earlier by the Baltimore Orioles, misused pills prescribed for the pain.

"I was probably taking enough to kill a small herd of elephants every day," he said.

But no one knew his secret. He was too good at hiding behind the various masks he wore, as a husband and father, physical education teacher and successful baseball coach at Mountain View High School in Stafford County. He also considered himself a man of God, but felt he didn't deserve love from a supreme being—or anyone for that matter—given the way narcotics ruled him.

Lopez decided to stop the lie and end his life.

"I had no self-worth, no self-
SEE DRUG DEATHS, A16



Jeannie Lewis is a former drug addict who worries that fentanyl is making drug use even more dangerous.

'A GLIMMER OF HOPE THAT RECOVERY CAN BE DONE'

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

When Greg and Penny Traber considered holding their first "Inspiring Hope" event on addiction two years ago, she asked her Facebook followers how many had been directly affected by drug abuse.

All but two of several hundred responders said they had. The couple was surprised—not by the high numbers, but that there were two people who hadn't been impacted.

"Our family was in bondage for many, many

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DRUG DEATHS

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esteem and I felt like I had let everybody down," he said. "I did everything in my power to be off the face of this planet."

Five years ago this May—he remembers it like it was yesterday—the father of three left his home in Fredericksburg and headed south. He bought a fish sandwich, paid cash for a hotel room in Thornburg, then chewed up every pill he had. He chased down the mix of pain and sleeping medication with a half-gallon of rum.

When he miraculously survived the suicide attempt, Lopez became a changed man. He was determined to learn how to open up to those close to him as well as share his story with strangers. Maybe he could spare someone else from the almost-death spiral that he endured.

"I truly am a walking miracle, to be honest with you," he said. "Even with the horror of my story, whether people accept it or don't accept it, it's a gift to be able to share it."

DEATH BY FENTANYL

Lopez will be one of several speakers at "Inspiring Hope," a Feb. 26 event in which participants will describe the toll addiction has taken on their lives and how they were able to recover. In addition to his own experience, he'll also address another byproduct of addiction—something he felt at the first "Inspiring Hope" event in February 2020, when he was in the audience with other grieving parents.

Two months earlier, his son, Jacob, died from a drug overdose "after he had made a couple choices he could never forgive himself for," his father said. Lopez believes the drug cocktail that killed his 26-year-old son contained fentanyl, a powerful synthetic painkiller that's being made illegally and mixed into almost every drug on the street—with lethal results.

"I'm hearing that it's plentiful, easy to get a hold of and it's super cheap,"



Craig Lopez, who struggled with addiction, offers encouragement to students while they work out in his weightlifting class at Mountain View High School.

said Pastor John Cook, who leads a recovery program at Mount Ararat Church in North Stafford. "It's also super easy to mix it with all these other things, but people have no idea what they're playing with."

Fentanyl poisoning deaths have doubled in the United States in the last two years, according to Families Against Fentanyl, a nonprofit organization founded by an Ohio man to bring attention to the crisis and to call for federal action. The Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking noted that 100,000 Americans died from overdoses in the last two years, according to Families Against Fentanyl, a nonprofit organization founded by an Ohio man to bring attention to the crisis and to call for federal action. The Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking noted that 100,000 Americans died from overdoses in the last two years, according to Families Against Fentanyl, a nonprofit organization founded by an Ohio man to bring attention to the crisis and to call for federal action. The Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking noted that 100,000 Americans died from overdoses in the last two years, according to Families Against Fentanyl, a nonprofit organization founded by an Ohio man to bring attention to the crisis and to call for federal action.

In a report released last week, the commission said early numbers suggest that deaths from synthetic opioids will hit their highest numbers in history in 2021 by the time data is collected.

"The overdose crisis in the United States claims more lives each year than firearms, suicide, homicide or motor vehicle crashes," the commission states. "This is one of our most pressing national security, law enforcement and public health challenges."

Virginia data shows the same trend. Fatal



Jacob Lopez died from drugs his father believes contained fentanyl.

drug overdoses—which climbed by the unprecedented rate of 42 percent in 2020—probably will go up another 15 percent for 2021 by the time death reports are counted, according to the Virginia Department of Health's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Based on activity during the first nine months of 2021, the state health department is estimating that 2,660 Virginians died from drug overdoses last year. That's an all-time high for drug deaths in the state.

Fentanyl was involved in 77 percent of the drug fatalities statewide from January to September 2021, but the substance was even more prevalent

in local deaths.

From Fredericksburg west to Culpeper County and east to Westmoreland County, 81 percent, or 122 of the 150 people who died from drug overdoses during the first nine months of last year had fentanyl in their system, according to state data. Fentanyl was to blame for six of seven drug deaths in King George County, 18 of 21 in Culpeper County and 25 of 29 in Stafford County.

It's no wonder, when an amount as tiny as a grain of sand can kill a person, said Jeannie Lewis, a Spotsylvania County woman who fought addiction to cocaine, pain pills and heroin.

"Drug dealers can sell you low-crap fentanyl and you might be getting that one grain of sand," she said. "When we get a batch of bad dope in town, we lose five or 10 people a week."

She said things were bad when she was out on the street, looking for any drug she could get. That was six years ago, before she did prison time for credit card theft and fraud—yet another byproduct of drug addiction.

Not only are dealers adding fentanyl to other drugs to jack up the high, but they're also mixing it with pain pills that "look exactly like what they get in the pharmacy so they think they're getting legitimate pills," Lewis said.

"It was scary when I was out there," she said, "but it's even scarier today."

'STRANGER WHO CARES'

As if the drugs circulating aren't deadly enough, Pastor Cook believes life during the second year of COVID-19 took an even greater toll on addicts. The ongoing isolation was a huge component, but so was the divisiveness prevalent in society: bickering over masks and vaccine mandates, the debates about cancel culture and critical race theory.

Greg Traber agrees. He's a substance abuse counselor—and former addict—who is helping to sponsor "Inspiring Hope" with his wife, Penny.

"The way our society is, with the pressure and

the stress and everything going on with COVID, it seems like such a hopeless world we're living in right now," he said.

That's why the Trabers wanted to present their event again this year and to give participants the chance to see and greet each other in person, not virtually. Greg Traber and other counselors often quote a British journalist who says that the opposite of addiction isn't sobriety. It's community.

"The addict expects his family to care, but a lot of addicts don't expect strangers to care and that's what we want to be, we want to be that stranger who cares," Greg Traber said.

Cook, who says his drug of choice was alcohol, leads a Celebrate Recovery program at Mount Ararat and would like to see the program—or any 12-step program that includes going out and helping others—available every day of the week in the Fredericksburg area. He'd love for other churches to make it part of their ministries.

"When you are in the midst of your addiction, it's hard to fathom that there's a way out," Cook said. "To hear somebody say, 'Hey listen, I've been in your shoes and I know exactly where you're coming from and I'm here to tell you, not only is there a way out, but I'll walk you through it.'"

'I AM READY'

At the Feb. 26 event, which starts at 4 p.m. at River Club Church, 10835 Tidewater Trail in Spotsylvania, Lewis will do the same thing she does whenever she meets a fellow addict. She'll talk about the way she started doing cocaine because everyone at her former workplace did. She'll describe the way she abused pain pills, prescribed for a blood disorder, and the heroin habit that was so bad she had track marks up and down her arms.

But she'll also mention that the day she was arrested for theft was one of the best in her life—second only to her son being born—because it saved her life. She got into a program during her three years in prison, came out clean and hasn't anything stronger than a Motrin since her release in February 2019.

"I tell my story to anybody who will listen because someday that right person is gonna hear me," she said, acknowledging that no one will seek help and enter rehab until they're ready. "But I will have this conversation as many times as it takes."

Lewis also stops regularly at a convenience store on her way to work in a lumber yard. In her drug days, she often met dealers in such parking lots, then went into the bathroom to use what she just bought. Hours might pass until the next person came along.

Armed with Narcan, a drug that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, Lewis checks to make sure no one has overdosed.

ABOUT THE DRUGS

What do poppy plants, Mexican drug cartels and Chinese chemicals have to do with the fentanyl problem in the Fredericksburg area and the rest of the nation?

They're all part of the complicated history of drug use in this country, which has only worsened in recent years, according to the Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking. In a report presented last week, it noted that since 1999, drug overdoses have killed about 1 million Americans—more than service members who've died in all U.S. conflicts.

What's worse, drug deaths have never been higher than they are now, according to the commission. The recent epidemic started in 1995 with the overuse of OxyContin and other prescription opioids, substances that act on receptors in the brain and produce painkilling effects. Opioids are found naturally in the opium poppy plant.

When federal agencies cracked down on the over-prescribing of pain pills, people who'd already become addicted often turned to other drugs, such as heroin. Then, Mexican drug cartels found a faster, easier way to make the drugs instead of harvesting them from poppy plants.

Illegal fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that's up to 50 times more powerful than heroin, hit the scene and in less than a decade saturated U.S. drug markets.

Using chemicals from China, Mexican labs manufactured this illicit fentanyl, which dealers added to other drugs to increase their potency—making it impossible for users to know exactly what they're getting. Because "such a small amount goes a long way, traffickers conceal hard-to-detect quantities" in packages and on people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the report.

While enforcement efforts may disrupt the supply chain temporarily, "another cartel, trafficking method or analogue steps in to fill the market that addiction causes," the commission stated. "Without a major shift in U.S. policy, more American sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends will perish."

The commission identified several needed strategies: shut down sources of chemicals used to make synthetic opioids; offer treatment and support for those addicted; and invest in more research to understand how opioids affect the brain.

—Cathy Dyson

"Every day at 4 o'clock in the morning, I'm looking for an addict lying on the floor," she said. "I have not [found one], and I thank God for that, but I am ready."

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LOCAL DRUG DEATHS INVOLVING FENTANYL

	2019		2020		2021*	
	Fentanyl overdoses	Total drug overdoses	Fentanyl overdoses	Total drug overdoses	Fentanyl overdoses	Total drug overdoses
Caroline	4	5	10	12	10	14
Culpeper	9	9	7	15	18	21
Fauquier	7	12	7	11	11	14
Fredericksburg	5	6	14	16	14	17
King George	3	5	6	7	6	7
Orange	6	9	7	9	7	8
Spotsylvania	32	42	44	58	31	40
Stafford	23	31	31	33	25	29
Westmoreland	4	6	2	5	0	0
Local Total	93	125	128	166	122	150
% involving fentanyl		74%		77%		81%
VIRGINIA	964	1,627	1,659	2,309	1,551	2,011
% involving fentanyl		59%		72%		77%

*Numbers are from January-September. Source: Virginia Department of Health, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner



Penny and Greg Traber are helping sponsor the event 'Inspiring Hope,' at the River Club Church.

TRABERS

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years with Greg's drug use," Penny Traber said. "The freedom that we've found in the last 22 years is a miracle. We thought, if we could just share our story and give hope to others, that's what we want to do. This whole event is about getting people willing to share their stories because their story is gonna touch somebody."

They estimate that more than 350 people attended the 2020 session,

held about a month before the world went into lockdown from COVID-19. They were able to reach some in the audience, and at least six people there that night sought treatment as a result.

But Greg Traber, who works full time as an outpatient counselor, knows of at least one person in the crowd who later overdosed and died.

This year's event is planned for Feb. 26 at River Club Church in Spotsylvania County. The address is 10835 Tidewater Trail and the event is held from 4-6 p.m.

Speakers will share how drugs led them to addiction and their failed attempts at rehab, which were followed by prison sentences until they found a recovery program that worked. Parents will talk about children who've died from drug overdoses, and representatives from various treatment centers and recovery groups will offer resources.

"Addiction is a lonely place for families who don't understand or don't have people to reach out to," Greg Traber said.

But in the midst of es-

calating drug-related deaths, Greg Traber said he's seeing another aspect of the epidemic: more people looking for a way to break their addiction. He hopes the Feb. 26 event will "give the people who are struggling with addiction and their families a glimmer of hope that recovery can be done."

The Trabers encourage anyone who needs help to call. He can be reached at 540/760-6791 and her number is 540/847-3932.

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Stafford woman says she's getting life back

Growing health concern helped by federal plan

CATHY DYSON
The Free Lance-Star

Abbe Buck Hann is overjoyed that the spending plan approved by Congress last week includes benefits for people who suffer, as she does, from a little-known condition affecting lymph nodes.

The jubilation is a stark contrast to the despair the Stafford County woman felt in the past, when she went to the doctor's office and discovered she weighed more than 400 pounds.

"I started crying on the nurse's shoulder. What have I done?" she asked, sobbing because she was eating so little at that point, she couldn't understand the increase. "I started blowing up like the Pillsbury Doughboy. ... My hands started getting bigger, my feet started getting bigger. Everything started getting larger."

Hann, 66, eventually learned she has lymphedema, swelling that comes from a buildup of lymph fluid in the body.



Hann lobbied Congress for years to pass the Lymphedema Treatment Act, which is included in the spending plan recently approved by the Senate.

The lymph nodes "act like a drain in your sink" and when they get clogged, the liquid accumulates, according to the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website.

Sometimes, the condition is caused by certain surgeries, such

as a mastectomy that affects the lymph nodes. Or, it can come

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on as a result of certain medical conditions or for reasons that are unknown, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

With the ailment, people like Hann, a former contract writer and self-employed businesswoman who still sings and does “a weird vaudeville act” at Fredericksburg breweries, will blow up, as she described it, without proper treatment.

That includes initially wrapping the area affected—usually one or both of the arms or legs—in gauze and being hooked to pumps that drain off the excess fluid. Hann had that done twice a week for four months back in 2018 when a doctor finally diagnosed her problem.

Since then, she’s lost more than 110 pounds and has relied on compression stockings, similar to what diabetics wear, to keep the blood circulating and the excess fluid from building up.

The garments are tight-fitting, custom made for her and cost about \$650 a pair. They’re worn daily for 12 to 14 hours and lose their elasticity after about six months.

The cost is not covered by Medicare and that’s why Hann and others have lobbied Congress for 12 years to pass the Lymphedema Treatment Act. The Senate approved the act last week as part of the \$1.7 trillion Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 that President Joe Biden is set to sign.

The act expands Medicare coverage for the type of pressure garments needed to help an estimated 3 million to 5 million lymphedema patients maintain their health, “avoiding needless suffering,” said Cindy Cronick, who leads the Virginia team that’s lobbied for pas-



PETER CIHELKA, THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Abbe Buck Hann, who has lymphedema, uses a Pilates wheel for strength exercises at her Stafford County home on Dec. 22.

sage. That includes Hann, who’s regularly been in touch with her representatives.

“It’s because of advocates like Abbe, who were willing to speak up about lymphedema and the need for Medicare coverage ... that we were successful,” Cronick said. “I’m very grateful to Abbe for the great work she has done on behalf of so many lymphedema patients.”

Heather Ferguson, executive director of the advocacy group, said “some people are easily discouraged, but not Abbe.”

“I hope that Abbe’s can-do attitude, even in the face of adversity, is an inspiration to others reading her story,” Ferguson wrote in an email.

Health setbacks

Hann certainly has faced her share of setbacks.

She was 14 when she was diagnosed with scoliosis, a curvature of the spine, but she didn’t learn of her condition until decades later.

Her parents were divorced and she said neither described it as a cause for concern.

After she gave birth to her son in 1989, she had so many problems with her back, she was put in traction for nine months in a New Jersey hospital. One relative took care of her baby and another, almost as an afterthought, later mentioned the scoliosis diagnosis.

Hann recovered, ran her own company as a contract writer and business developer and was living in Gainesville, in a three-story townhouse with her husband, Skitch. She’d worn a brace for a while, did stretches and pilates, saw a chiropractor and walked regularly — and very fast, she said.

For much of her adult life, Hann has been 5-foot 5-inches tall and between 200 and 250 pounds.

“I was a big girl, but I wasn’t this large,” she said.

By 2010, the scoliosis caught up with her again. Several times, she

almost lost her footing, or her legs buckled under her and she fell. Once, while driving from Maryland to Northern Virginia, her legs suddenly felt like they were on fire with pains shooting from the knees down.

She thought it was the old back pain or problems with her sciatic nerve. A test showed her spine was shaped like an S-curve and that she needed surgery.

What she hoped would be the answer to her problems may have caused an even bigger one.

‘Shamed’ patients

Hann eventually had two surgeries to correct the scoliosis and she said both were botched. She ended up with several rods, a dozen screws and two separate cases of MRSA, a difficult-to-treat staph infection that often spreads in hospitals and health-care facilities.

Her weight started to go up after the first surgery, but she said the pounds really piled on after the second procedure, and MRSA infection, in 2014. The surgeries were done in two separate hospitals.

In the meantime, she went from walking fast to needing a cane, then a walker, then a wheelchair. When she asked one doctor to look at the pain she felt in her knees, he told her: “I can’t look at anything, you’re just too fat.”

Dr. Jennifer Kirby, a specialist in endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism management with UVA Health in Charlottesville, said those responses are typical. Obesity and lymphedema often go together, she said, but many medical providers don’t know about lymphedema or recognize it as a separate condition.

“Patients are often shamed and told to lose weight,” Kirby said. “Unfortunately, lymphedema does not respond to weight loss mea-

asures.” Kirby happened to see Hann in a hospital hallway and took her aside to talk with her. Hann discovered that water is worse than fat and came to think of the excess fluid in terms of water jugs.

“Consider having 20 of those 5-pound jugs of Deer Park inside your body and you’re dragging them around because your lymph nodes are gone,” Hann said. “They don’t work anymore, they don’t flush the toxins from your body.”

Kirby reassured Hann that what was happening wasn’t her fault, that she needed treatment—wrapping the area, pumping off the fluid, then daily use of compression garments.

Hann would like to get down to about 250 pounds, and she and Kirby are discussing various options.

‘My life back’

Hann still uses a walker as she jokes that she’s got a couple screws loose—in her spine—and probably will need more back surgery to correct the problem. Even so, she’s grateful for the improvements she’s made.

“I feel a lot better because I feel like I’m getting my life back,” she said.

After relying on a paid caregiver or her husband to take off work and get her to treatments, she was able to drive herself to Charlottesville last year for a checkup with Kirby.

The doctor was amazed that Hann was able to put her walker in the back of the car and get there without assistance.

“I told her I actually could drive a car,” Hann recalled. “I just couldn’t do cartwheels in the hall.”

Maybe next year.

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HE HAD COLLAPSED IN HOSPITAL PARKING LOT

Medical team saves 'the miracle man'

BY CATHY DYSON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Donald Hurt wasn't normally in the Massaponax area that hour of the day—and the unusual timing was the first in a series of events that probably saved his life.

The Colonial Beach man is 58 and a construction superintendent who mostly works in King George County. When he got to a Spotsylvania County job site about 7 that morning in March, he had a sip of coffee. Then he had the weirdest feeling, like his insides were melting.

Hurt has never liked to darken the doorway of a doctor's office, but even he knew this wasn't good.

He called his wife Kelly, and his boss, told them "something don't feel right," and headed to Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center. He was in the parking lot outside the emergency room when the melting changed to a cooling sensation—and that's the last thing he remembers.

Tracy Ishee wasn't following a normal schedule, either. Her night shift in the hospital lab, where she's a medical technologist, lasted longer than expected, and she was more than ready to go home. But someone else had taken her parking space and she



SPOTSYLVANIA REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

Spotsylvania Regional staff recognize Tracy Ishee (center) for her role in alerting the medical team about Donald Hurt.

had to walk to a different part of the lot. As she got into her car and charged her phone, something caught her eye.

It was a pair of boots. That's odd, she thought. Had they fallen off a truck?

She pulled closer, but wasn't sure if she was seeing a body or a pile of clothes. There was no hair or skin showing. HCA Healthcare, which owns the Spotsylvania hospital, asks employees to keep an app called LiveSafe on their phones for use in medical emergencies—or if they see something suspicious. Ishee might not have remembered she

had it, if the app hadn't updated the night before and she'd been playing around with it.

She used the app to alert hospital security, then drove a little closer. She saw a person, face down in the dirt, head on the curb. She could hear the gurgling of his breath, but got no answer when she asked, "Sir, are you OK?"

Ishee saw people come out of the hospital and waved her hands at them. When Dr. Jennea Correia, vice chair of the ER, saw the body and the pool of blood around him—from where Hurt

SEE HURT, A10

HURT

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gashed his head on the curb—she said, “Call a code blue.”

Hurt’s heart had stopped beating and he didn’t have a pulse. Correia started doing chest compressions until other team members arrived, bringing a defibrillator and other medicine and equipment.

Nurses, respiratory therapists, paramedics and pharmacy workers—some in scrubs and others in shirts and ties—surrounded the hospital bed, outside in the parking lot. The team used the paddles to shock Hurt twice and Correia was about to put a tube down his throat when he rolled his eyes.

She asked him a few questions and he was able to answer, although Hurt has no memory of the conversation. He’s been told he kept asking for his wife—and joked later it’s a good thing he didn’t call out for his girlfriend.

When Correia questioned if he had any allergies, the man who’d been clinically dead moments earlier quipped, “I’m allergic to dirt.”

The doctor laughed, then quickly shot back: “You can’t blame me for that. I didn’t ask you to fall outside.”

Since the episode, the serious nature of the incident has sunk in for the doctor and patient, the medical technologist who prefers to work “in a cave,” away from the clinical aspects of hospitals, and everyone else who played a part in bringing Donald Hurt back to life.

“Finding someone pulseless, the chances of achieving ROC, the returning of circulation, are very low,” Correia said. “I believe that if Tracy didn’t find him when she did and if she didn’t use that app and get the right people

involved, I don’t think he would have survived.”

A ‘WIDOW MAKER’

Hurt fell about 7:45 the morning of March 10. By noon that day, doctors were threading a tube through his arm, looking at pictures of his heart and blood vessels to see what might have caused the attack.

They found a gigantic reason. The main artery that goes down the front of the heart was 99% blocked, the Hurts said. Doctors were able to place a stent, an expandable metal mesh coil, in the artery to keep it from narrowing again. They also found two smaller blockages and are treating them with medication, according to the Hurts.

Medical workers told Donald Hurt he’d survived a “widow maker” heart attack. Because the vessel involved, the left anterior descending artery, transports so much blood to the heart, when it gets blocked, the heart can quickly run out of oxygen and stop beating.

Only 12% of people who have such an attack outside a medical facility survive, according to the American Heart Association.

Friends, family and co-workers have been shocked by the news of his hurt heart, the couple said. He didn’t have the first symptom—no chest pains, shortness of breath, tingling in the hands or any other issues normally associated with a heart attack.

“It stunned everyone because he is so healthy and he’s always joking around and he’s always active,” Kelly Hurt said. “He doesn’t stay still very long, at all.”

It was no different after his major heart attack. Donald Hurt spent two nights in the hospital and was back at work a week

later. That was after he assured the nurse practitioner at the cardiologist’s office that he would not run a marathon or do any heavy lifting.

He’s started a heart-healthy diet and has lost 12 pounds so far, although he’s said he’s already tired of eating chicken and fish.

‘YOUR ANGELS’

Seemingly the only downsides of the experience are the what-ifs that run through Donald Hurt’s head. What if he’d planned to go to work at a normal time that day and the attack had happened at home, a good 40 minutes from the hospital? Or at a job site in King George?

What if Ishee hadn’t noticed him? How long might he have lain there?

What if he’d been behind the wheel of his van when he collapsed?

“I could have took out a whole family of kids or something and that really, really eats at me,” he said. “It’s just kind of spooky that it happened so quick, with no warning, that I couldn’t call someone and say, Hey my chest is hurting, send an ambulance.”

The Hurts took some Edible Arrangements to Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center on Easter weekend. They visited each of the three departments where he’d been, but he didn’t see as many staff members who helped him as he hoped.

Many of the staff members had come to his bedside in the days after his attack. Some came individually, others as part of a group, and Kelly Hurt watched as each “became overwhelmed with emotion. They cried and he cried with them,” she said.

“Everybody was calling me the miracle man,” he said, “but they’re the miracle, not me. They’re the reason that I’m here.”

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