

# INSPIRING HOPE

**Melissa Justice - "I have learned an incredible lesson first-hand:**

**MIRACLES DO HAPPEN.."**

In March 2009 my husband and I went on a cruise to celebrate a job promotion. Little did we know that less than three weeks later, I would not be able to walk the six blocks from my office building to the parking lot without gasping for air and clutching my chest. At 31 years old, I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy - Congestive Heart Failure. Within two months, it progressed to end-stage. June brought us the news that the only chance at surviving was to get a heart transplant; however, I was too sick for the transplant (the pressures in my heart and lungs were too high). So, in August 2009 I had a Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD or mechanical heart pump) implanted through open-heart surgery to help my heart pump blood.



Imagine the feeling of being 31, wanting nothing more than to become a mother, and undergoing your first surgery - open heart. It was scary. It was painful. But there was a peace in knowing that God works all things together for good in some way... even if that meant my death. I was surprised at how much strength came daily from my husband, family, friends, and prayers. **We learned to live one day at a time and not to worry about the future.**

In December I was finally well enough to be placed on the heart transplant list. On January 11, 2010 a heart became available for me and I was taken to the operating room. While on the table, the surgeons did one last scan of my heart and found that my own heart had begun to heal.

When I woke up after the surgery, I heard the nurse say, "It's a miracle!" And I thought to myself, "I do feel better than I thought I'd feel having my heart cut out and another one sewn in." And then entered my husband, who was always by my side. He told me the news. I didn't get that transplant because my own heart had started healing. Wow!! Next, I made him tell me again, I made my mom tell me, my sister tell me, I just wanted to hear it over and over again.

A few months later in September 2010, I became the first person at my hospital to ever have their LVAD removed to their recovered heart. That was over a year and a half ago. Every day I wake up with a new appreciation for life and am learning to take each day one step at a time. I have learned an incredible lesson first-hand: MIRACLES DO HAPPEN. If only we could remember that in the most bleak of situations. **Dawn always comes after the night. Beauty can be brought from ashes.**

*If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to Melissa about living with heart disease, her contact information is listed below!*

**Mended Hearts of Central Ohio**

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*It is great to be alive – and to help others*