

DISPATCHES

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“I told my husband, ‘I feel like I’ve been hit by a Mack truck.’ He said, ‘That’s because you have.’ ”

Catherine Rubinow

WOMAN PLUCKED FROM ROUTE 4 CRASH SURVIVES DEVASTATING MULTIPLE TRAUMA

By Randall Dustin, CMMC Communications Director

Several weeks after the vehicle she was driving collided with a tractor-trailer truck, Catherine Rubinow’s eyes brim with tears as she recalls the day of the accident. “I remember getting in the car and that’s it. I don’t remember anything else,” she says.

Two weeks after the accident, Catherine opened her eyes to find familiar faces in an unfamiliar place. “I woke up in the ICU to my family and asked what had happened, what was going on. Little by little they told me.” She says that at one point — she can’t

remember exactly when — “I told my husband, ‘I feel like I’ve been hit by a Mack truck.’ He said, ‘That’s because you have.’ ”

A dangerous stretch of highway

A self-described “youth pastor by trade,” Catherine was in Maine with a United Methodist Church contingent hailing from the Yardley-Newton, Pa., area. The group was working with the United Methodist Economic Ministry to refurbish the homes of some low-income families in the Franklin County region. Though the group was scheduled to be in Maine for only two days, Catherine’s stay would extend to six weeks – and for much of that time she would be battling for her life.

Catherine and four other members of her work group were returning to their rooms at the University of Maine at Farmington in mid-afternoon when the car in which they were riding entered an intersection on Route 4 in Strong. Anyone familiar with the area understands the dangers that this stretch of highway can pose to unsuspecting drivers. The small vehicle that Catherine was driving collided with a

Continued on page 3 ...

Photo by Steve Weymouth, CMMC Media Services



Paramedic John Roy, Catherine Rubinow, and flight nurse Heather Cady

THE SAFETY OF NOT KNOWING

Flight Protocol for LifeFlight of Maine

Suzanne Spruce, Community Relations Associate at EMMC

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide a statewide medical helicopter service that transports critically-ill and -injured patients. LifeFlight will provide the highest quality of care and follow rigorous safety standards.

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LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE

When LifeFlight is called into action at Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor or Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston, crewmembers come running from all over the hospital. By the time they reach the helipad the pilot knows where they are going. But what the pilot does not know is who the patient is, or the specific details of what life threatening illness or injury they may have. Pilots are not told about the patient so they will not feel an emotional urgency to fly because the patient is, for example, a child or mother.

Bangor-based LifeFlight pilot Larry Miller says the decision to fly must not be influenced by information about the patient they are going after. "We've learned through years of practice and experience that pilots shouldn't make emotional decisions on anything that

Pilots are not told about the patient so they will not feel an emotional urgency to fly because the patient is, for example, a child or mother.

could risk lives." For example, explained Larry, "if the weather were yellow, which is our designation for iffy, and they wanted us to go to, say, Lincoln, they won't tell us it's for a kid who swallowed poison. That knowledge could influence the decision to fly."

Weather patterns combined with the state's topography often mean fast-changing weather conditions; something that demands special decision-making skills when it comes to flight

safety issues. While it may be clear as a bell in northeastern Maine, there may be bad weather brewing to the west.

"We have rules and regulations and they take precedent. Our job is to make sure everybody goes home at night."

Pilot Larry Miller

LifeFlight pilots know that the safety of the crew and aircraft has to come first. Even if it means turning down flights.

Decisions about flying safely are made not only before take off. If changes in weather conditions dictate, the LifeFlight pilots will ground the helicopter during the trip as well. Larry says his aircraft was grounded in Belfast once. "We went down there to get a baby, but when it came time to leave it was snowing really hard and it had been raining before that. The combination of ice, snow, and poor visibility caused us to not be able to leave. We transferred the patient by ground," he recalls. Pilots are taught to think safety first, or as Larry put it, "safety, safety, safety!"

Much has been learned from helicopter crashes that happened back in the 1970's and early 80's. Those tragedies prompted policy studies and tightened procedures that led to today's strict and successful standards. Still, Larry says the job that LifeFlight pilots do is really no different than any other job that requires and special emphasis on safety. "We have rules and regulations and they take precedent. Our job is to make sure everybody goes home at night," he says.

... Two-day stay continued

would also include general/trauma surgeons Karen Crowell, M.D., and Larry Hopperstead, M.D., general/thoracic surgeon Maria Ikossi, M.D., pulmonologists Karen Lahive, M.D., and Evan Ramser, D.O., orthopedic surgeon David Brown, M.D., intensivist Michael Sterling, M.D., and neonatologist Mark Perlman, M.D.

If the number of physicians associated with Catherine's case didn't set a new record at CMMC, the number of people sending her Internet greeting cards certainly did. With upwards of 25 cards coming in through www.cmmc.org each day for the entire length of her stay, Catherine is second only to Stephen King as the most-popular patient ever to stay at CMMC. Catherine says her popularity was due to the concern shown by those involved in her extensive church network.

Strange dreams, bedside vigil

Though she was unconscious during the first two weeks of her stay, Catherine says she was somehow aware of the danger she faced. She says she dreamed repeatedly that she was at her own funeral.

Meanwhile, members of her family gathered, holding a vigil in the ICU that was interrupted only by the need for sleep. Her mother, mother-in-law and husband took residence in an Arbor House apartment on Main Street. The Arbor House provides temporary housing for the families of long-term CMMC patients. "The Arbor House made a huge, huge difference," says Sharri Rubinow, Catherine's mother-in-law. "It is a wonderful thing to provide."

Catherine's mother, Donna Frey, who came in from Tucson, was so impressed with the care that her daughter received that she asked Dr. Brown to examine a chronic shoulder problem that she was coping with. "He was very good with my daughter and I figured if he was good enough for Stephen King [another of Dr. Brown's patients] than he was good enough for me." She said he prescribed an exercise regimen and she's already feeling better.

"The helicopter really mattered."

In the weeks following the accident and rescue, Heather Cady and John Roy tracked Catherine's recovery very closely. They visited her regularly and don't seem terribly surprised that

she has done so well. "She's a tough woman," John says.

Heather says this flight is among the most memorable that she has participated in. "The helicopter really mattered. I know that we saved her life by getting her to CMMC quickly," she says. John agrees.

"I can't believe I'm alive!"

Catherine says her survival is "a miracle. I think that God has something bigger planned for me. It's my job to discover what that is." She also credits the "prayer chain" that extended throughout the United States and even into Canada, and the countless Internet cards and other messages that served as "an active reminder that I'm prayed for, that I'm loved," she says. She believes that her church and the tremendous support that it has offered were essential in helping her overcome the tremendous obstacles she faced.

She credits virtually everyone involved in her rescue and care for her remarkable recovery, but she singles out LifeFlight for special praise. "I don't think I'd be here today without them," she says. "I think 'Oh, my God! I can't believe I'm alive!' ... I experience that every day."

News

REDINGTON-FAIRVIEW HOSPITAL OPENS LANDING PAD

Redington-Fairview Hospital is the latest Maine hospital to open a helicopter landing pad.

The Skowhegan hospital officially opened its landing pad for flights on October 22 when Richard D. Willett, the organization's chief executive officer, presided over a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new site. "Here at Redington-Fairview General Hospital we've taken the added step of incorporating a safe, new, state-of-the art helipad as part of our facility expansion. We recognized the valuable resource that LifeFlight has become to our critical care system in Skowhegan. By working together, our community and our

patients benefit from the enhanced level of care that air medicine offers."

LifeFlight pilot John Marino gave the new helipad a thumbs up after his arrival with crew members John Macone and Sue Wardwell for the inaugural landing. "This is just the sort of facility we need to get in and out safely. The folks at Redington-Fairview have done an outstanding job with this site. Patient care and flight safety just took a big step forward in Skowhegan," John said.

Continued on back page...

... *Route 4 crash continued*

southbound tractor-trailer truck. Catherine remembers nothing about the crash.

When emergency medical service responders from LifeStar and the Farmington Fire Department arrived on the scene, they knew they had trouble on their hands. Four of the five people riding in the car were hurt, two of them seriously. Catherine was semi-conscious and pinned in the vehicle. Rescue personnel knew it would take a considerable amount of time to extricate her from the car, and then she'd have to be transported to a trauma center. They decided to call LifeFlight.

“... so cold and it was so hot ...”

When LifeFlight pilot Al Sabaka put the helicopter down near the accident site that afternoon, the three-person flight crew had seen one of its toughest days since the service was created some three years ago. “It was 98 degrees and this was our third flight that day. We were toast,” says flight paramedic John Roy. But the heat may have been one of the factors that combined to save Catherine’s life.

John says that MedCom, LifeFlight’s dispatch, had provided the crew with detailed information gathered by the first responders. When John and his partner, flight nurse Heather Cady, joined the rescue effort, Catherine was just being removed from the car. What struck them, John recalls, is that “she was so cold and it was so hot that day.”

“We knew that she was hurt pretty bad. She was cold and had no radial pulses. She was pale, confused and in and out of consciousness,” he says. What these symptoms suggested, explains Heather, is that Catherine was

experiencing severe internal bleeding. “She was shunting her blood from her extremities to her vital organs,” Heather says. “John was lucky to get the IV.”

Removing the 28-year-old from the driver’s seat of the car had taken about an hour. By the time rescuers had cut her loose with “jaws of life” extrication equipment, the critical “Golden Hour” in which EMS providers try to get trauma patients to definitive care had already been consumed. Traveling by ground, it would take another hour to get Catherine to the closest trauma center. The first responders had made a good decision in bringing in LifeFlight. “We have to credit the local EMS people for making the right call,” John says. “She never would have survived the transport by ground.”

Thirty minutes to definitive care

After assessing Catherine’s condition, John and Heather were convinced she was bleeding internally, so they began administering intravenous fluids. They used the IV line to administer a paralytic agent that would allow them to perform a rapid sequenced intubation to assure that her airway could be maintained. “We had to do everything right there in the dirt,” John recalls. “Heather did an excellent job intubating her right away. Then we had to move her about 200 yards to the helicopter, put her on board, ventilate her, and push for quick transport.”

The trip to CMMC was harrowing. Heather and John administered two liters of IV fluid on the short flight. Just 30 minutes from the moment she was freed from the vehicle, Catherine was in the CMMC Emergency Department and under the care of the trauma team.

“As we were landing at CMMC, they asked us if we could do a quick turnaround and get a patient from the same accident,” John says. So the crew set out on its fourth mission that day, this time to take a 14-year-old from Franklin Memorial Hospital in Farmington to Maine Medical Center.

Fighting for her life

The trauma team at CMMC that day – which included surgeon Peter Siviski, M.D., and emergency physician Heidi Blake, M.D. – worked to stabilize Catherine and get her to surgery as quickly as possible. She was given another unit of IV fluid and blood products. In the first of several surgeries, the operating room team focused on life-threatening injuries, which included a ruptured artery in her diaphragm, bruised, bleeding and collapsed lungs, and other internal injuries.

In the course of her stay at CMMC, Catherine would undergo surgery six times. She would lose a kidney and her spleen, and have repairs for a bowel perforation, bowel obstruction, lacerated liver, and punctured diaphragm. Her injuries also included broken ribs, cracked spine, bruised heart, a broken leg and foot. Adding a further emotional blow was the loss of the five-week old fetus she was carrying. She would also contract pneumonia in both lungs. The lung injuries and pneumonia required the use of three chest tubes.

In the early phase of Catherine’s care, physicians would administer 31 units of blood, 20 units of plasma, and four six pack of platelets. She would remain unconscious for two weeks. By the time she was discharged, the list of doctors who provided care for her

Continued on page 4 ...

COOPERATION AND PLANNING MAKE A NORTH MAINE WOODS ADVENTURE A BIT EASIER TO BEAR FOR HUNTER

By Elizabeth Sutherland, Senior Community Relations Associate at EMMC

Cooperation and generosity have long been the hallmark of many Maine companies. The Seven Islands Land Management Company is no exception. Concerned about the safety of its employees, who work deep in the north Maine woods, Seven Islands also worries about the people who play there. “We constantly see snowmobilers, hikers, fishermen, and hunters,” says Bill Brown, company unit manager. “We wanted a better system in place to speed up any rescue situation that might arise.”

About two years ago LifeFlight of Maine Executive Director Tom Judge spent some time at one of the Seven Islands woods camps, talking with employees about basic first aid and helicopter safety. It was after that presentation the company decided to create one landing zone in each township where they have land holdings. “We recorded the global positioning coordinates of each landing zone and gave that information to LifeFlight,” Brown says. Seven Islands also provided LifeFlight with topographical information, such as terrain conditions and the location of camps or overhead wires at each location, thereby providing LifeFlight with advanced notice of exact positions and conditions.

The Seven Islands landing zones had been in place just about a year when LifeFlight was called to land in a remote section of northern Piscataquis County. John Hummel, a lumber company salesman, and five of his buddies from central Pennsylvania arrived at Johnson’s Allagash Lodge for a week of bear hunting near Narrow Pond in T8 R13. John ran into trouble as he was making his way into a tree stand. “I climbed up about 16 feet. Two rungs before the platform, the tree stand started to spin around the tree and it threw me. I knew I was going to hit the ground.” And hit the ground he did, all 425 pounds of him, feet first. “I was stove up bad, but I didn’t realize I broke anything until I felt my ankle pop,” John said.

Maine Guide Bob Johnson raced back to his truck, where he radioed for help. He then went searching for the other hunters to help him carry John out to the road. Fortunately, three Seven Islands employees, who were working in the area, heard the radio message and went to the accident site to help. A litter was constructed from trees, branches, rope, and duct tape. John was dragged on the litter to a dirt road where he was lifted into the back of a pickup and driven to the landing zone and a waiting LifeFlight helicopter. The LifeFlight aircraft was crewed by pilot Don Dorsey, flight nurse Donna Bulger, and flight paramedic Deb Urquhart. Also on the scene was Ashland Ambulance and a

forest ranger. Thanks to the advance planning by the Allagash Waterway rangers and Seven Islands management, LifeFlight was able to be on scene before John was brought out of the woods, something he is very grateful for. “That mile to the helicopter was painful enough, I’m really glad I didn’t have to go the other 100 miles through the woods, it could have been ugly,” says John.

Once in the Emergency Department at The Aroostook Medical Center (TAMC) in Presque Isle, it was quickly determined that both of John’s ankles were broken and he needed surgery. With pins and plates holding his ankles together, John reflected on his adventure during his stay at



Bear hunter John Hummel from central Pennsylvania is seen here surrounded by his hunting buddies at The Aroostook Medical Center in Presque Isle. His buddies became a rescue team after Hummel fell 16 feet from a tree stand deep in the North Maine woods and broke both ankles. Seen here visiting Hummel are (l-r): Melvin Hostler, Harry Wilson, Chuck Morrow, Hummel, Dave Lyons and Sam Kingsborough.

TAMC. “I had a lot of firsts with this trip. I never fell out of a tree stand before. I never broke a bone before. I never had a helicopter ride. And I’ve never stayed overnight in a hospital before. I’d love to come back, but I think I’ll stay off tree stands,” he says.

John is thankful for the staff at TAMC and LifeFlight, his hunting buddies, and the Seven Islands workers who helped him out. LifeFlight Executive Director Tom Judge credits the mission’s success to planning. “This was a challenging call to begin with, but we were able to do it because we are ready and because we had a successful working relationship with Ashland Ambulance who requested Lifeflight, Seven Islands, other woods management companies, and the Allagash Waterway Rangers already in place. We wanted

Continued on back page ...



LIFELIGHT OF MAINE

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For more information about LifeFlight, call toll-free 877-262-2525.

www.lifeflightmaine.org

... Landing pad continued

LifeFlight helicopters had to land at the local community center field some distance from the hospital. Thanks to the great work of Redington-Fairview Hospital staff members Carol Steward, director of Support Operations, Barbara Demchak, director of Emergency Medical Services, and especially the facilities crew led by Larry Pike, LifeFlight of Maine can now land directly across the street from the hospital entrance at a safe, secure well lit and marked landing zone adjacent to their new parking lot. This site features and internally lit wind-sock and photoelectric pad lighting surrounding a clearly marked, level asphalt surface.

**For more information about the
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... Maine woods continued

prearranged landing zones in the north Maine woods so we could answer just such a call. Their willingness and expertise made it all possible.”

The plan worked so well that LifeFlight pilot Don Dorsey raved about the flight's success. “Don called it a letter perfect landing zone. He told me that the training we are doing is really paying off. It's great when the plan comes together,” Tom said.

LifeFlight is also working with Irving Woodlands, Huber Resources, the Maine Forest Service, Maine Department of Conservation, and the Maine Warden Service, as well as EMS agencies throughout the northern woods, to establish landing zones and re-fueling capabilities.