

Mother of the bride survives heart attack on mother's day

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Only weeks after learning its symptoms, Belinda Waggoner had a heart attack on Mother's Day. Photo: Don Ipock

Belinda Waggoner is the type of person who gives her all to everything she does.

She devoted so much to the human resources company she founded that she wound up with high blood pressure. So her focus became getting healthy. She started by walking, then upped her game to triathlons. After shedding 70 pounds, the mother of two—including a soon-to-be-married daughter—thought she was in the best shape of her life.

"That's when God said, 'Here you go, honey. Here's your [heart attack](#),'" she said.

That was last Mother's Day.

The day before, Waggoner and her husband, Terry, were three miles into a 30-mile ride along the bike trails in Kansas City when she started feeling bad. Waggoner stopped, let whatever it was pass and continued riding.

The next morning, after taking a sip of coffee, she began feeling classic heart attack symptoms—crushing chest pain, clamminess, pain in her jaw and teeth. Waggoner recalled videos of women describing their heart attacks from a Go Red For Women event she attended three weeks before.

"As I was lying in bed convincing myself that everything would be OK, all I could see was the videos of the women," she said.

Her husband went to check on her and didn't like what he saw.

"She was all curled up, hugging her pillow," he said. "I knew something was wrong. The color was kind of out of her face. She said she was ready to call an ambulance."

At the emergency room, tests proved inconclusive. Doctors said Waggoner wasn't having a heart attack but she may have experienced one earlier. They wanted to take a better look at her heart, so they scheduled a visit to the catheterization lab for the next day.

Later that evening, a nurse removed a nitroglycerin patch from Waggoner. She suffered a heart attack about 30 minutes later.

"I just started to sink," Waggoner said. "My blood pressure was in the toilet. I felt like I was going [to die] . . . It's the weirdest feeling, and I wasn't scared. It was actually one of the most beautiful experiences of my life, if you can believe that."

A severe bend in the left anterior descending artery caused Waggoner's heart problem. To improve her blood flow, a cardiologist inserted a stent.

"I like to call it my coronary tiara," Waggoner said.

Imagine the range of emotions that flooded Gemma Hausback, Waggoner's daughter and the bride-to-be, when she learned about her mother's [heart](#) attack.

Thoughts of her mother not being at her wedding "crossed my mind a lot," she said.

Fortunately, Waggoner got better, maybe even motivated by getting to share in wedding planning and shopping for the perfect dress.

"I really didn't want anything too big or extravagant, just casual," said Hausback, whose ceremony took place at a local vineyard in front of about 45 guests.

"It was awesome," she said. "There were a lot of tears."

Especially from the mother of the bride.

"I think I cried from dawn 'til dusk," Waggoner said. "I feel very blessed. I'm a very lucky woman."

The 56-year-old entrepreneur hopes she's cleared to fully train for triathlons at her one-year checkup on May 25.

Waggoner competed in a duathlon in the fall, running a 5K, then cycling 12 miles, then running another 5K.

"I placed dead last, but you know what? That's OK. I finished," she said.

This Mother's Day, Waggoner plans to celebrate with family and friends. She's throwing herself an "I'm Still Here Party."

"We haven't figured it all out yet, but I do intend to have a better Mother's Day this year than I did last," she said.

Waggoner is grateful she listened to the women's voices in her head. She gladly said yes when asked to share her story at this year's Go Red For Women luncheon.

"I felt compelled to because you know whoever was on those videos last year saved my life, and hopefully I can do it for somebody else," she said. "It's kind of a way to pay it forward."

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