

## Angels on Flight 859

After participating in Life Care's 2004 annual meeting for directors of nursing, Tricia Richardson, director of nursing at Treasure Valley (winner of the Company-Wide Director of Nursing of the Year Award), and Kate Drake, director of nursing at Valley View, were sitting together on the plane ride from Atlanta to Denver. Suddenly, an appeal was made over the plane's public address system for any doctor or registered nurse on board to click on the call light.

Richardson and Drake looked at each other, sensing an emergency, and paused a few seconds, hoping a physician would respond, then illuminated the signal. The two nurses were the only medical personnel answering the call. They discovered "a dear, sweet lady who was having severe chest pain that radiated down her arm, through her back and up into her jaw. She had just taken her nitroglycerin, which afforded her some relief. We started getting her vital signs, seeing what equipment we had on board, and getting her history," Richardson explained.

The woman's name is Julie, probably in her 50s. She only had 12 percent of her heart functioning, and was scheduled to receive an atrio-ventricular pump that would hopefully keep her heart functioning until she could get a transplant. The operation was actually scheduled the prior week, but she had postponed it by a few days so she could fly to Tennessee for her brother's funeral. Julie stated her surgery was to be done the day after she returned to Denver. She kept saying that she wanted to go to Denver. The plane was about an hour and 20 minutes from Denver when the emergency began.

The plane's flight attendant had called medical personnel on the ground and then handed Richardson the phone. "After I gave the doctor the report, he wanted to know if she was going to 'crash' before we got to Denver. Obviously, I could not answer that question, and I just told him again what her vital signs were and that he knew as well as I did that a heart attack was unpredictable. The doctor stated that there was still time to divert to Kansas, so we should just watch her for awhile."

Julie's blood pressure and pulse began to go higher, and the pain in her back and arm returned to join the pain in her chest. "We had her take another spray of nitro to see if that would relieve the pain," Richardson said. "I was just getting ready to tell the flight attendant that I thought we should divert to get her to medical help as soon as possible, when the flight attendant told me that the captain wanted to talk to me."

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The captain told Richardson that he was at the turning point where he either had to divert to Wichita or go on to Denver. "I was ready to tell him we should divert when Julie looked at me and pulled her oxygen mask down. She had tears in both eyes and she said, 'God and I will get to Denver. Please.' I not only heard her say this, but I felt it in my heart. I really knew this was true. However, since my faith is not always as strong as it should be, I asked the captain for a time frame. He stated that it would probably take 30 minutes to get to Wichita, and that they still had to clear air space. I asked how long it would take to get to Denver, and he said, '45 minutes max, Ma'am.' I told Kate what the captain had said, and then told him to head for Denver."

With 15 minutes to go before reaching Denver, Julie started to crash. Her heart rate became very erratic, and she had increased pain. She also became very nauseated. Drake gave Julie another dose of nitroglycerin to see if that would help. During the entire flight, Richardson and Drake were praying for Julie and for help to do whatever was needed should she code.

As the plane began a very rapid descent into Denver, Richardson leaned to Julie and said, "Julie, you were right. God did get you to Denver, and I have this feeling that He is going to continue to be with you and see you through. There are not many people who can walk around with only 12 percent of their heart functioning, so you must be very special to Him. In fact, He must have a very special plan for you. She squeezed my hand harder, and said, 'I know.' I believe our Heavenly Father reached down and touched her. Her blood pressure lowered, her pulse, although erratic, slowed down, and her pain diminished. She was no longer nauseated."

A few minutes later, Julie looked at Richardson and Drake and said, "What would be the chances that I would be on this flight with two angels?"

The plane arrived in Denver 37 minutes after the captain told Richardson it would take 45 minutes at the most. The paramedics were there waiting. Richardson and Drake gave them their report and told Julie goodbye. "This experience was very spiritually rewarding, and reminded both of us of the reason we became nurses," Richardson said.

This is National Nurses Week (May 6-12). Do you now understand why this is such an honorable profession, and why it is an important part of God's plan of caring for His children?

--Beecher Hunter