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LOCAL COMMENT

## Family found a short but meaningful Christmas miracle

December 25, 2007

BY ISAIAH MCKINNON

Christmas time in the McKinnon household was always about more than opening presents. It was about family get-togethers with music, laughter and feasting on our mother's wonderful cooking after our father's prayer of thanksgiving.

December 1977 looked to be no different. Preparations were well under way for another great family get-together, and everyone wondered excitedly who would draw whose name in our gift selection game. But just 10 days before Christmas, my 65-year-old mother, Lula, told me her doctor wanted her to check into the hospital to investigate an irregular heartbeat.

Nothing serious, she assured me. It was just routine.

As I drove her to the hospital, my mother remembered something about the previous August when my wife, Patrice, and I told my parents we were expecting our first child. I'm not sure why, but as mother spoke, a dark thought occurred to me -- my grandmother Ellen had died shortly before I was born. Would our child ever know my mother?

A day after Mother checked in, I was shocked to get a call to get to the hospital as soon as possible.

At that point in my life, I had faced plenty of crisis situations during my military and police careers. But nothing prepares you for the moment a doctor tells you that your mother has just suffered two heart attacks and a stroke.

I thought it might be a bad dream. She'd only been at the hospital overnight for some tests.

My sister Gloria arrived and I listened again as the doctor explained that our mother wasn't responding. He suggested that we speak to her; perhaps the sound of her children's voice could bring her out of it.

Entering the critical care unit we saw tubes protruding from Mother's nose and mouth, and machines beeping to monitor her feeble life signs. I approached the bed, grabbed my mother's hand, and called her name repeatedly. I got no response. I tried again and again. My frustration showed, and the doctor pulled us away to deliver more grim news.

"In her condition, and at her age, there is a strong possibility that she may not recover," he said as kindly as he could. I asked the doctor if there was anything I could do. "Pray for a miracle," he said.

I drifted down the corridor, trying to gather my thoughts. I stumbled into the hospital chapel, slid into a short pew, and began to pray. For

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Isaiah McKinnon

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the next several days, I would arrive at my mother's bedside, grasp for her hand, and talk to her. I told her how Patrice's pregnancy was going and what I thought about my job with the Detroit Police Department. After an hour or more, I'd retreat to the chapel where the family gathered: my sisters Gloria, Ada, Helen, Bernice, and our father, Cota McKinnon.

My father's prayers were always out loud. The head deacon at Weeping Willow Baptist Church, he would ask for his wife's recovery and always end by saying, "I pray for Jesus' sake."

Two days before Christmas, I got a call from an exuberant Gloria.

"Guess what," she said, almost hyperventilating. "Ma is up and talking."

I dropped the phone and hurried over to the hospital to find Ma propped up in the hospital bed, talking to everyone and having a wonderful time.

She spoke of losing weight. She couldn't wait to get home and fix her own meals because she didn't like hospital food. She knew she wouldn't be home in time for the Christmas Day celebration, but she gave my sisters explicit instructions about how to fix Father's favorite meal for the holiday.

It was an incredible day. All of us had given up hope that we'd ever speak with our mother again, yet there she was, her usual animated self.

"Maybe this is your miracle," her doctor told me.

We all went home feeling blessed.

Early the next morning, Christmas Eve, we received a call from the hospital, telling us to "get back here immediately."

When I arrived, the doctor's head was low. "You've got bad news," I said.

"Yes," he said, "your mother just passed."

As the rest of the rest of the family began arriving and tears began to flow, I thought about how I'd hoped for a Christmas miracle that would save Mother. And in that sadness that engulfed our family, it occurred to me that, indeed, we'd had our miracle. Our mother had come back to us for one joyous day. We'd been given a last chance to share our love with her. That was our Christmas miracle.

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