

# ANGELS AT BETHESDA

Charitable medical air transportation serving patients of the National Institutes of Health

## ‘Someone Finally Believed Me’

Losing her beloved grandmother was one of Corrie’s most devastating losses, but it was one that saved her life.

The wife, mom, and mental health therapist from Hayden, Alabama, was mystified by debilitating symptoms of fatigue and severe joint pain that began a few months after her son, Canaan, was born in 2004.

She visited numerous doctors and underwent myriad tests, but the response was always the same: “We didn’t see anything,” or, “You’ve had a baby and you’re stressed. Your symptoms are normal.”

Corrie, 32, said that after each appointment she’d get into her car and cry. “No one believes me.”

She said the fatigue “was terrible. I was working as a therapist and substance abuse counselor at a mental health center, and these problems were interfering with my work.”

During a checkup, her cardiologist took her blood pressure on both arms instead of one. “He took it six times. Then he removed the stethoscope from his ears and said, ‘Young lady, you better start talking. There are things you need to tell me.’”

Corrie began to cry, thinking, “Someone finally believed me.”

The doctor told her there was no



**Corrie and Canaan share a smooch. Canaan hopes to have a baby sister soon, as adoption plans proceed.**

pulse and no blood pressure in her left arm and made an appointment for her at University of Alabama-Birmingham’s (UAB) Kirklin Clinic.

During this time Corrie’s grandmother died. “I was very close to her. I was so upset that my blood pressure went up and down. I began to lose feeling in my left arm. It started turning blue and white.”

When she went to UAB for her appointment, which happened to be on her son’s second birthday—Oct. 16, 2006—she was sent to the ER, where an arteriogram was ordered.

Just before the procedure, “the

vascular surgeon sat beside me on the bed and said he knew my grandma had died but that God used her to save my life. He said if I hadn’t reacted as I did, he wouldn’t have known the extent of my condition and that her death was very purposeful for me.”

The arteriogram showed serious blockage in two arteries—one, 100 percent; the other, 85 percent. This led to the diagnosis that had evaded her for so long—Takayasu’s Arteritis, a rare disease named for the Japanese physician who first described

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## “Someone Finally Believed Me” (Cont.)

it in 1908. Takayasu’s is characterized by inflammation, leading to arterial narrowing. “It’s extremely aggressive,” Corrie said. “Its major goal is to attack my heart—to close up my aorta. There’s no known cause.”

Doctors at UAB were baffled with her disease.

Corrie prayed for God to lead her to someone who could help. An Internet search turned up a few names of specialists, but only one answered her email inquiries.

That was Dr. Peter Merkel, a rheumatologist and internist at Boston Medical Center. He agreed to take her case. Her first appointment was in 2007, when she was enrolled in a study to help find a cure for Takayasu.

Merkel collaborated with Corrie’s physicians at UAB to manage her treatment plan. After experimenting with various drugs and combinations, doctors tried Humara, a medication that put the disease into remission for a year and a half.

Corrie had to resign from her job as a counselor. Though leaving her long-standing career was difficult, she was able to go on disability and begin a ministry--Filling the Gap Ministries-- she had conceived years before. “I hit the ground running,” she said. “I began to speak at women’s conferences. God knew I had a passion for people.”

But she and her husband, Shane, a middle school teacher/coach, saw that their finances were dwindling. Yearly appointments in Boston would pose a problem of distant travel. Merkel referred them to Marita Eddy, transportation coordinator on staff with Angel Flight/Mercy Medical Airlift at NIH, and Eddy arranged for the couple to receive free commercial airline tickets.

To date, they’ve taken three flights to Boston, with another planned in March.

“When I see confirmation that they’ve bought our tickets, I think, ‘they’ve spent \$800-\$1,000 to save my life. Mercy Medical has been fabulous.’”

There’s another blessing on the way for this family. Plans are in progress for the couple to adopt a child from China. Corrie says God gave her a name for the baby girl they hope to bring home: Judah, which means “praise.”

## Free Airline Ticket Program Growing



Ed Boyer

Long distance patient travel is a common experience for many NIH patients. When government funds are not available for travel, Angel Flight at NIH is a logical alternative.

Angel Flight at NIH can arrange for charitable airline tickets for hospital trips or clinical trials.

The mission and purpose is simple: to ensure that no patient is denied distant, specialized medical care for lack of a means of long-distance transportation.

*Edward R. Boyer is the CEO and President of Angel Flight and Mercy Medical Airlift. He will be presented with the distinguished AMVETS Silver Helmet award on March 19.*

## A Mother Writes to Say Thanks



*I wanted to say thank you for helping to make our trip to Houston possible. When your child has a rare syndrome, it is difficult to find health care providers who have considerable amounts of experience. Going to Texas Children's Hospital to meet with the experts is such a blessing. To come away with greater understanding brings with it greater hope. Angel Flight made it possible for us to ensure Emma is getting the best of care...Teresa*

**Give the Gift of Miles to Save Lives.**

Call Marita Eddy at [301-451-9646](tel:301-451-9646) to donate frequent flyer miles. Or visit [www.DonateFrequentFlyerMiles.org](http://www.DonateFrequentFlyerMiles.org)

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