

A Romantic Getaway and an Unexpected Emergency

By: Nicole Lee



If you've ever been to Zephyr Cove, Nevada, you'll understand why Israel Bohlander and his wife not only said "I do" in this tranquil spot but why they returned three years later to celebrate their anniversary.

With a campsite reserved among the lumbering pine trees and sparkling blue waters of Lake Tahoe, Israel and his wife were excited to spend a relaxing weekend together.

The trip had started off wonderfully. The couple spent Saturday enjoying the sites and were planning a nice celebratory dinner for that evening. But as the day went on, Israel began to notice that he was feeling especially winded and was struggling to keep up with his wife.

"My wife and I joked all afternoon about how I thought she was walking fast because I just couldn't

seem to keep up with her anywhere we went," said Israel.

Chalking his shortness of breath up to the high altitude, the couple hit the town for a romantic dinner celebration. In the early hours of Sunday morning though, Israel awoke with what he would later identify as a warning sign.

"I woke up around 3 in the morning with terrible heartburn," said Israel. "I had been suffering from it for months, and the guys at work had assured me that it was just part of getting older, so I just took some medicine and went back to sleep."

But when Israel woke up the second time, things had only gotten worse.

"My wife and I were planning to have breakfast together at the same restaurant where we ate on our wedding day," said Israel. "But as we started getting ready, I began feeling a tightness in my chest, pain in my left arm and tingling in the fingers of my left hand. I was also incredibly anxious, I felt like something bad was going to happen."

Having worked as an EMT several years ago, Israel knew that something just wasn't right, so he began researching the symptoms of a heart attack online.

"The signs and symptoms that I found online were the same as what I was experiencing," said Israel.

Not wanting to spoil their last few hours of vacation, Israel pushed on and continued getting ready for the day. But as the minutes dragged on, his symptoms only continued to worsen.

"I told my wife, 'I hate to ruin our morning, but I think I need to go get checked out,'" said Israel.

And it was a good thing that he spoke up when he did.

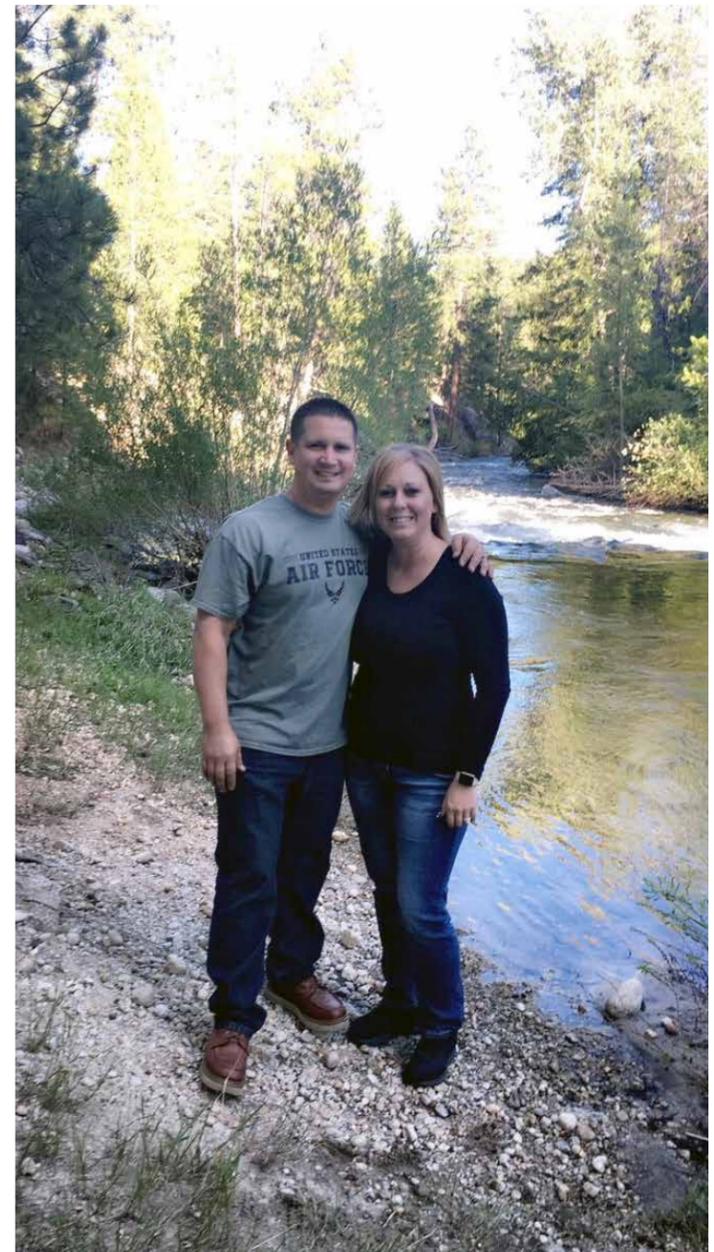
After unsuccessfully trying to reach the local urgent care clinic, Israel and his wife headed for the nearest emergency room. By the time the pair were seated in the waiting room of Barton Memorial Hospital, the pain in Israel's arm was so intense that he had to keep his arm extended and lean toward his right side just to get comfortable.

"We had only been there for a few minutes when they called me back and got me hooked up for an EKG," said Israel. "After the test, the nurse printed my results and when she began to read them her face changed dramatically. She ran out of the room and came back just a minute later with 6 or 7 doctors and nurses."

Not wanting to scare Israel, the clinicians at Barton said they were going to transfer him to a room where he would be more comfortable. But as they began to get him settled, Israel began to piece together what was happening around him and it didn't prove to be good news for him.

"They immediately started two IV's, which I know isn't a good sign because that usually means you are trying to get medication into someone's system fast," said Israel. "Then they started giving me nitroglycerin tablets and baby aspirin, and they placed defibrillator pads on my chest."

The hospital room quickly became a whirlwind, and Israel was stuck in the center of it. Taking a moment to calm herself, Israel's wife stepped out of the room to gather her thoughts. Soon she was approached by Israel's doctor and was informed that he was, in fact, suffering from a heart attack and that a helicopter would be there in just under 9 minutes to pick him up.



Israel and his wife Angie

Overhearing this conversation, Israel quickly grew fearful of leaving his wife behind.

"When my wife came in and told me about the helicopter, I told her that I was not getting on it because I didn't want to leave her," said Israel.

Despite his anxiety, he was going to have to take the flight if he was going to make it into surgery in time to save his life.

"It all seemed like a bad dream," said Israel. "I didn't have much time to say goodbye to my wife, I just told her I loved her, and that I'd see her in Carson City. I told her not to worry and to drive safely. Then, they rushed me up to the roof and about a minute later, the helicopter landed."

Because Israel's condition was incredibly time-sensitive, the hospital team and flight crew would load him into the aircraft while the rotors were still turning and the engines were on. This is known as a hot-load, and it is a scenario that the teams from CALSTAR and Barton train for annually.



“There are no words, no amount of money that could express to them how thankful I am for what they did.”

When the crew of CALSTAR 6 landed, Pilot Jess Smith began filing his flight plan to Carson City while Flight Nurses Julia Sandoval and Stephen Poehls quickly met the medical team accompanying Israel.

“I remember walking through the doors from the helipad and seeing a young guy who looked very uncomfortable,” said Julia. “We talked for a moment, and I just assured him that we were going to get him to where he needed to go.”

While Julia and Stephen received a full report from the medical team on his vitals and condition, fear crept back into Israel’s mind, and all that he could think about was his two teenage daughters.

“They were talking about my vitals, and that was when I got really scared,” said Israel. “I kept thinking that I just couldn’t die without saying goodbye to my girls.”

With Israel transferred to CALSTAR’s gurney and equipment, Julia and Stephen, along with the medical team at Barton, prepared to load Israel through the rear doors of the running EC135 helicopter.

While most patients would feel overwhelmed by the sound of the aircraft and the speed of the rotors, Israel’s mind was in another place completely.

“When they went to load me into the helicopter it was such a strange moment for me,” said Israel. “I really thought that I was going to die, and all of a sudden, I started thinking back to moments throughout my childhood. I just kept telling myself that I couldn’t go like this because I HAD to say goodbye to my kids.”

With the aircraft loaded and Stephen and Julia safely seated in the rear, Jess lifted off for Carson City.

“The flight to Carson City is a very short flight,” said Jess. “It’s 20 to 23 minutes total from pad to pad.”

Having only a short ways to go, Julia and Stephen focused on providing Israel with the best care they could. They kept a close watch on his vitals and were prepared to act quickly if anything changed.

Being experienced nurses, both Julia and Stephen know that providing patient care also means providing comfort - something that Israel desperately needed.

“During the flight, they put headphones on me so that they could tell me

exactly what they were doing,” said Israel. “And at one point, Julia asked me for my wife’s cell phone number so that she could call her as soon as we landed, and that was really important to me. My wife was on the road for 50 minutes with the fear of not knowing what she was going to find at the end of the drive.”

Thankfully, the flight went smoothly, and Israel’s condition didn’t decline before they arrived in Carson City. But, he definitely wasn’t out of the woods yet.

“When we landed at Carson Tahoe, there were doctors waiting for me on the helipad so they could take me straight into surgery,” said Israel.

After having two stents placed in his heart, Israel was taken to the ICU to recover. Just a few hours later though, he took a turn for the worse.

“At around 3 that afternoon, I had another major heart attack,” said Israel. “All morning they had been telling my wife that I was going to be fine, but when the second one happened, they didn’t know if I was going to make it.”

At the time of the second heart attack, surgeons were just wrapping up with another patient in the operating room. If Israel were going to survive, the medical team at Carson Tahoe was going to have to work quickly.

“They called down to the OR to ask how much longer they were going to be,” said Israel. “As soon as they got the all-clear, I was flying through the hallways of the hospital on a gurney and went straight into another surgery.”

Surgeons added a third stent into Israel’s heart and did an angioplasty to open another blocked artery.

The surgery was a success and soon Israel was taken back to the ICU where he could finally begin his recovery.

After just a few days in the hospital, Israel was cleared to head home to Hanford.

“The trip was incredibly emotional for me,” said Israel. “We got back really late, but I finally got to hug my daughters. Everyone that took care of me, including the crew at CALSTAR, gave me that chance. There are no words, no amount of money that could express to them how thankful I am for what they did.” *