

Jupiter mother survives nighttime, near-fatal heart-stopping moment

By Debbie Batteiger Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Jupiter resident Michelle Kellim, 32-year-old mother of two small children, suffered a cardiac arrhythmia in the middle of the night.

Miracles can happen — just ask Michelle and Erik Kellim.

The Jupiter couple learned about miracles on July 12 when Michelle Kellim, 32-year-old mother of two small children, suffered a cardiac arrhythmia in the middle of the night, causing her heart to stop.

Although she doesn't remember it, Michelle Kellim said she feels grateful for life.

"(My survival) is pretty miraculous and I am so very happy to be here," she said.

Erik Kellim will never forget the morning he woke up at 2:36 a.m. to find his wife ashen and lying still in bed next to him, he said.

"I turned on the light and looked over at her. Instantly I knew something was not right, she wasn't breathing," he said. "I ran to get the phone and call 911."

Erik Kellim started CPR on his wife while he waited for the paramedics to arrive, he said. He was later told that performing CPR during those critical six minutes before paramedics arrived was paramount in her survival.

When the ambulance sat in his driveway for 45 minutes after working on her, he said he couldn't bear to walk out to the paramedics.

"I was afraid she was gone," he said. "But they were giving her injections and heart medications."

Having only lived in Jupiter for three weeks, he had to stay behind and wait for relatives to arrive to take care of Brenna, 4, and Ryder, 1. He talked with the doctor at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center every 10 minutes.

"(The doctor) said not to hurry; she was probably not going to make it. It was my worst nightmare," Erik Kellim said.

Doctors put Michelle Kellim in a hypothermic coma — a cooling of the body after cardiac arrest — and then slowly warmed her up. Michelle's first physical movement was the wiggling of her right foot.

"I asked her to squeeze my hand if she could hear me. She did. The nurse was amazed, she'd never seen that happen," Erik Kellim said. "I was confident she was going to be fine but (the doctors) said she wasn't doing good."

Dr. Augusto Villa was Michelle Kellim's doctor at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center. He said that a heart's job is to pump blood to the different organs in the human body.

"If there is acute pump failure, you can die," Villa said. "In (Michelle Kellim's) case, her heart was extremely weak in a matter of hours."

They decided to insert an Impella Pump, Villa said. The pump is designed to help the weak heart do its job with no open heart surgery, he said.

"(The Impella Pump) is inserted fast with low complications. We use this device as a bridge to heart transplant," Villa said. "The next day she was much more stable. I was amazed (at her progress). It was really quite unusual."

After installing the device, Michelle Kellim was transferred to University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center to await a heart transplant.

Michelle Kellim recovered faster and better than he expected, Villa said. After she was at University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center for a few days, he received word that her recovery was going well.

"I was very emotional. I was sent a text with a picture of her walking, I was very happy," he said.

the Impella Pump is not meant to be long term and is good for patients with massive heart attacks or patients that are high risk, and for use in conjunction with balloon stents, Villa said.

"The surgery to have the pump put in basically saved her life," Erik Kellim said. "I was praying nonstop."

After the sixth day with the pump, Erik Kellim said, it was taken out because she was doing so well, after days of multiple blood transfusions and gaining more than 100 pounds because of the 22 medications she was on to stay alive. After 32 days in the hospital and the insertion of a pacemaker, Erik Kellim said his wife is doing better every day. She did not need to have a heart transplant.

"I can't believe we went through all that, it's like I'm telling you about a movie I just saw," he said. "It's a real storybook ending."

Still hoarse from 25 days of a tube inserted in her throat, Michelle Kellim said she is just grateful to be here for her husband of 7 years and her children.

"I remember waking up, feeling scared. Normally I'm so healthy, running 4 miles a day. Now it takes a while to walk around," she said. "(When I was in the hospital), I was just so desperate to get home to my babies. I'm grateful."