



Against All Odds

A trauma unit stepped up when a firefighter went down.

Written by LAUREL DIGANGI

On Saturday, August 9, 2011, firefighter Tim Larson was at his family's shop in Sylmar, tinkering on an old car, when an alternative fuel tank stored nearby exploded, catapulting Larson 20 feet in the air. Despite life-threatening injuries, he remained calm enough to phone his wife, Corinna.

"There's been an accident," he said. "I'm probably going to lose my right hand, maybe my right leg . . . just wanted to tell you I love you and tell the kids I love them."

Larson's composure continued as he rattled off his medical history and vitals to the paramedics, who rushed him to the Level II Trauma Center at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center, where he briefly met trauma medical director and surgeon David E. Hanpeter, MD, before

undergoing extensive surgery.

“Dr. Hanpeter explained that to save Tim’s life, he would have to amputate his right leg and hand,” says Corinna. “I was very grateful for his honesty and gentle demeanor.”

“I spent a lot of time with Corinna, explaining what was happening,” says Dr. Hanpeter. “Communication is an important part of this job. This was going to be a long, tough road for Tim and his family.”

In addition to the amputations, Larson suffered numerous broken bones, burns over 30 percent of his body and lacerations so extensive that he needed 500 stitches in his face. “He was in a medically-induced coma for 26 days,” says Corinna. “We didn’t know until day 15 that he was going to make it.”

Victims of traumatic, life-threatening injuries, like Larson, stand a better chance of survival when treated at a designated trauma center, such as the one at Holy Cross. In addition to handling the types of injuries seen in emergency rooms, it has a specialized medical team that includes trauma surgeons, other medical specialties, highly trained staff and the latest in medical equipment to provide patients with around-the-clock care. It’s one of the few Level II Trauma Centers serving the San Fernando Valley and the Santa Clarita Valley and has been part of the Los Angeles trauma system for more than 30 years.

“I’ve worked at many hospitals, and there are few that have the same feel as Providence Holy Cross,” says Dr. Hanpeter. “Everybody’s here for the patients. We’re all pulling in the same direction.”

Dr. Hanpeter came in every day, even days off, to change Tim’s bandages with

a nurse practitioner. “Tim didn’t get one infection,” Corinna says, “even with all the open wounds and burns.” She praises Dr. Hanpeter and the entire staff for their compassion and expertise. “I can’t say enough about everybody. They truly took care of our family.”

Because the media carried news of the

emotional recalling the day she opened a greeting card from the nursing supervisor. Inside was a handwritten note that reminded her to take care of herself, too.

Larson says that even his children remembered the hospital experience. They have fond memories of the cafeteria worker who made them special pizzas, the cashier

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explosion, Corinna worried that her privacy would be compromised, and the hospital respected her request. Says Corinna, “It was like a lockdown.” And she still gets

who gave them greeting cards and others who made them feel comfortable.

Dr. Hanpeter agrees that a team effort contributes to a patient’s quality of care and their family’s emotional support. “The entire staff—the nurses, radiology technicians, respiratory therapists, lab technicians, even the transporters—make a big difference,” he says.

Today Larson, 43, and Corinne, 46, live in Charlotte, N.C., with their sons Coby and Cade, ages 19 and 16, and their daughter Abby, age 11. Together they run Torches Design Studio, a full-service screen printing business with a clientele that includes film studios, restaurant franchises and concert tours.

Larson credits his emotional resilience to his faith, his wife and his children. But he attributes his against-the-odds survival to Dr. Hanpeter and the trauma team. “Among my firefighter friends who’ve been supporting me through everything, this hospital is the place they want the EMTs to take them to if they ever go down in a fire.” 

A PLACE FOR SICK CHILDREN IN THE VALLEY



Ambulances transporting sick people don’t just go to the nearest hospital. Various hospital emergency departments have different capabilities, including the types of injuries and ailments they treat and whether the patient is an adult or child.

Last year Providence Tarzana Medical Center was designated as a pediatric medical center by the Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services agency. That means the hospital is qualified to treat certain types of medically sick children, such as a child having an asthma attack or a seizure.

Tarzana is one of only two hospitals in the San Fernando Valley to obtain this designation, which means a portion of pediatric patients won’t have to be transported into Los Angeles for care. Prior to this designation, some children in the Valley would have been taken by helicopter to a hospital in Los Angeles.

“There are certain requirements that a hospital has to have for this designation,” says Paula Whiteman, MD, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics California Chapter 2 and a board-certified pediatric emergency physician at Providence Tarzana. “We have certain specialties to handle sick children. We’re not a children’s hospital or a pediatric trauma center, but it allows some children to get care closer to their homes and families.”