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One Doctor Thanks Rescuers for Her Life



A month after nearly dying from heart dysfunction, a La Crosse doctor was reunited with the people who saved her life.

Twenty-eight year-old Michelle Williamson had been jogging on November 13th, when she collapsed and went into cardiac arrest.

All of the people involved in her rescue say they became very attached to Williamson as they struggled to keep her alive. They said seeing her alive and happy on Monday, at a Franciscan Skemp fundraiser to help pay Michelle's medical bills, was the perfect ending to their story.

"I just want to thank them for all they did to save my life," said Michelle Williamson.

"Getting a chance to sit them down and shake to their hand, and give them a hug and thank them is priceless," said Gehrige Williamson, Michelle's husband.

Williamson and her husband are both physicians at Franciscan Skemp, so Michelle can explain expertly what happened to her heart that day.

"My heart went into a rhythm called ventricular fibrillation," said Michelle. "That's where the heart is just kind of quivering. It's not actually beating the way it should."

Back on November 13th, Julie Boudreau was driving her daughter to basketball practice when she saw Michelle lying on a driveway out of the corner of her eye.

"She seemed to be seizing, she was moving and gasping for air," said Boudreau. "I immediately ran to the home because I thought there was a nurse who lived in that home."

Kimberly Wichelt was that nurse, and she quickly began chest compressions on Michelle while another passerby, Tracey Johnsrud, did mouth-to-mouth.

"You have that split second to decide to react or not react," said Johnsrud. "She was blue, she needed a breath."

Both Johnsrud and Boudreau were able to reunite with Michelle on Monday.

"It's so nice that they knew CPR and knew what to do right away," said Michelle. "There's just so many miracles that happened at just the right place and the right time."

Once Michelle was loaded into an ambulance, it took three shocks from a defibrillator to bring back her pulse. At Gundersen Lutheran, she was placed on a ventilator and induced into a coma to protect her brain. The next day, she woke up next to her husband.

"As soon as she started to wake up, I just wanted to run around and tell everybody thank you," said Gehrige. "That whole day was full of miracles. It was the best day of my life."

Michelle has since returned to work at Franciscan Skemp Hospital full-time, and says despite sometimes getting tired, she's doing just fine.

Her doctor's are calling the rescue a "textbook response" to cardiac arrest, and say one small change to the story could have been the difference between life and death.



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