



Photos by KEVIN ANDERSON/The Kansas City Star

Pam and Phil Morgan perform their gospel music recently at New Covenant Community Church in Liberty, where they shared the story of Pam's remarkable recovery from a devastating car accident in 2000.

STEP BY STEP A MIRACLE

**A car accident. A severe spinal injury.
The doctors said she would never walk again.
Pam and Phil Morgan didn't believe it.**

By JAMES A. FUSSELL
The Kansas City Star

Even the faithful wonder sometimes. Do miracles really happen? Or are they only the stuff of myths — fascinating, but ultimately unbelievable?

For Pam Morgan it's no longer a debatable issue. Even her doctors say the gospel singer from Lee's Summit is living proof of a miracle medical science cannot explain.

On a recent weekend, the 34-year-old rose from her bed, took a shower, got dressed, then walked to the kitchen to fix some breakfast. Later she climbed into her van, drove to a Liberty church and sang standing beside her husband, Phil, for more than an hour.

She shouldn't have been able to do any of it. By all rights she should still be in a wheelchair, unable to walk or raise her arms, paralyzed from the chest down, a quadriplegic with a complete spinal cord injury.

Why she isn't is still anyone's guess. All her neurosurgeon knows is he has never seen anything like it.

"It's an extraordinary medical saga that continues to inspire me daily," said Frank Coufal, who treated Pam two years ago when he worked at Research Medical Center. "And I can use such language because, in retrospect, I have discussed this case with the world's leading experts on spinal surgery and spinal cord regeneration. There should have been no

chance for her to have any functional recovery. None."

Coufal was so amazed at Pam's recovery after a car accident in June 2000 that he researched the medical literature dating to before World War II looking for an explanation.

He found none.

"To have clinical evidence of a complete spinal cord injury beyond three days of the time of injury and then to walk again," he said, "is essentially unprecedented."

Especially with an injury as serious

as Pam's. Coufal called it the most severe case of spinal dislocation he had ever seen: completely separated vertebrae, her spine wrenched into a sharp S curve.

"I was very blunt with her husband," Coufal said. "I said she has a complete spinal cord injury, and I am very sad to have to tell you that she will never walk again."

Phil and Pam Morgan never believed it. Armed with positive attitudes and a strong faith, they vowed Pam would walk again, down the



Pam works out at the YMCA in Raytown, part of her rehabilitation from a spinal cord injury that at first left her paralyzed.

"God himself or one of his angels must have caught me and laid me down. It was a miracle I wasn't crushed."

THE PHIL AND PAM MORGAN FILE

- **Occupation:** Gospel singers
- **Title of newest CD:** "Living Proof"
- **Reason for the title:** Pam's healing from a catastrophic car accident that left her paralyzed.
- **Her doctor's explanation of Pam's healing:** He has none.
- **Phil and Pam's explanation:** Pam was healed by the power of prayer and the goodness of God.
- **Things that make you go "hmmm":** The three cars that stopped immediately after Pam's accident contained a doctor, a respiratory therapist and a nurse on her

way to a Christian camp. Also, Pam's surgical nurse had seen the Morgans in concert and played Phil and Pam's music during Pam's operation.

■ **Pam's quote:** "For as long as I can remember I wanted to make a difference for God. It was almost like God allowed this to happen, saying, 'Child, I am sorry you have to go through this pain, but you will make a difference.'"

■ **Next performance:** 7:30 p.m. May 10 at United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, 13720 Roe Ave. in Leawood.

MORGAN: Some believe she's living proof that miracles can, and do, happen

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hall of Research Medical Center and right into Coufal's office. And after thousands of prayers from around the world poured in for Pam, that is what she eventually did.

How? Coufal recently asked Edward Benzel, one of the premier experts in spinal surgery from the Cleveland Clinic, what he thought.

"He just shrugged his shoulders and said, 'How could you classify this as anything short of miraculous?'"

So is it a miracle, direct testament to the power of prayer?

Coufal, certainly, won't take the credit.

"I like giving it to the big man upstairs," he said.

So do the Morgans. Members of a United Methodist church who are uncomfortable with the hyperbolic healing claims of some TV preachers, they say too much has happened for it to be anything but a miracle.

Today, they say, their ministry is stronger for it. They have helped more people, changed more lives for God.

"There is no question in my mind that God has done this, and there is a reason for it," Pam said.

That belief is reflected in the title of the couple's newest CD — recorded one year to the day after the accident.

The CD's title: "Living Proof."

'His angels must have caught me'

Sunday, June 4, 2000. Mid-afternoon. Phil and Pam Morgan drove their 1996 Ford conversion van and a trailer of musical equipment to a concert in Stockton, Mo.

Near Butler, Mo., Phil, exhausted from a grueling schedule, grew tired, his eyes heavy with sleep. They closed for just a moment. The van drifted off the road. It struck a bridge abutment and flipped on its side. Pam, who had fallen asleep in the rear of the van after unbuckling her seat belt to rub her daughter's back, shot out a side window like a missile.

She slid on her left side across the concrete highway. A trailer of musical equipment detached from the van and hurtled down the road after her like a huge metal ball. Its roof flew off, and hundreds of pounds of amps, speakers and other equipment hit the road like heavy black bombs. Pam slid under them, around them, past them and came to a rest on the other side of the bridge.

"God himself or one of his angels must have caught me and laid me down," Pam said. "It was a miracle I wasn't crushed."

As it was she was nearly dead. Her neck was broken, her left arm nearly shorn off at the shoulder. Mangled hands lay uselessly by her side. Skin on the left side of her forehead was scraped to the bone. Her left ear was ripped in two.

Phil, who was wearing a seat belt, badly broke his collarbone. The couple's two children, Kayla, then 5, and Alisha, 21 months, were also strapped in and escaped with scratches.

Pam was flown by helicopter to Research Medical Center. Her mother, Julia Kleeschulte of Raytown, remembers seeing her daughter when she was brought in. "Hi Mom," Kleeschulte remembers Pam saying. "Just pray."

Pam's family had gotten good at that. In 1997 Pam lost her eldest sister, Denise, 46, to ovarian cancer. In 1998 Denise's 21-year-old son, Jason, broke his neck in a pool accident. Six months later he died in a car crash.

A lot of families would have given up on God at that point.

Pam's never did.

They believe things happen for a reason. And they always have believed in miracles.

And so Pam's mother prayed. Faithfully, earnestly. So did countless others after Phil described the accident and asked for prayers on the couple's Web site — philandpammorgan.com. Soon the couple began receiving e-mails by the hundreds, from Kansas and Missouri, from California and New York, from Guam and Poland.

One man wrote: "I am not much of a praying man, but since your (accident), I can't help not to pray...I was fortunate enough to see you guys in Austin (Texas) at the Church of the Nazarene. I was really blessed by your music. I believe God is using your situation in my life. He works in ways we cannot understand."

Another said: "I believe the Master Physician has many miracles in store for Pam."

And another: "I don't understand why things happen. I am very human, and I question God. Why he allowed this to happen I don't know. But I do know he has something special planned for you."

People sent pictures, crosses, toys for the girls.

The encouragement helped. Phil and Pam continued to be positive. But it was hard.

Early on, things didn't look good. Surgeons fused four of Pam's vertebrae and shook their heads at the sadness of such a severe injury to such a young woman.

In all Pam had about 10 surgeries, including skin grafts and multiple face-lifts and reconstruction of the skin around the outside corner of her left eye, which still droops a bit. She stayed in Research for four weeks, before being moved to the Rehabilitation Center of Kansas City, where she spent six more weeks.

Pam, a poster child for a positive attitude most days, even took her turn getting mad at God.

"I couldn't understand why he would grow our ministry to the point where it was...And then for him to just cut me off I felt like he was just throwing me away. And I questioned him, you know?"

She was not the same

Besides relatives — who took turns staying by her bedside — many friends visited Pam at the hospital. But perhaps none was more affected by the accident than the couple's road manager, Barb Underwood.

Underwood usually accompanies Phil and Pam on their weekend performances, helping them drive and set up. The weekend of the accident was the one weekend she did not go along. Today she still feels guilty. She should have been there, she thought. Maybe she could have done something.

As she looked at the white gauze bandages on Pam's face, Underwood's heart ached. It was three weeks since the accident. She wanted to help. A day before she had polished Pam's toenails red. She bent down to check them. That's when she noticed Pam's big toe.

It moved.

"Pam!" she screamed, heart suddenly pounding in her chest. "You moved your toe!"

"I did?" Pam said.

"Do it again!" Underwood said.

Pam tried. As God was her witness she tried. Could she produce a twitch, a wiggle, a quiver?

Nothing.

When she couldn't repeat it, doctors dismissed it as involuntary and

meaningless.

It was anything but. The next day Pam moved her toe again.

Stunned doctors then watched as Pam, a slender, 5-foot-9-inch brunette with a Julia Roberts smile, began to get even more sensations in the next few weeks and months. They came slowly: a toe waggle here, a pin-prick sensation there.

It was wonderful, except for one thing. Through nine agonizing months she still couldn't walk. Despite the encouraging signs, the day she came home, on Aug. 17, 2000, 2½ months after the accident, was among the lowest of her life.

As the door closed behind her, the reality of her disability hit. She couldn't walk. She could move her toes but still couldn't use her hands. She couldn't even cough or sneeze right. How could she do the laundry or be a mother to her kids?

How would they pay their bills? How would she get downstairs? Even the relationship with her children had changed. They had to be careful how they touched her. Where was the other Mommy they knew?

No, Pam thought. This wasn't home. And she was not the same. She hung her head and sobbed.

First step toward the impossible

But it wasn't long before tears turned to triumph.

Her children enjoyed getting rides in her electric wheelchair.

Housework? Phil's mother moved in temporarily and took care of things.

Money? Countless supporters sent money — many \$1,000 at a time. A local couple even donated a significant sum from their own insurance settlement. It was enough to help purchase a new van.

And, of course, there was Phil, Pam said. Fighting through his own recovery, he was her rock, more than she could ever have expected. She remembers when he said "this isn't just your injury. This is our injury," she said.

That made all the difference. "It put me at peace, because I knew that whatever happened he was going to be there," she said. "And he was, 24/7...He was my biggest cheerleader, my best coach, my best nurse. He did everything...He's just been amazing."

That left Pam free to focus on her therapy. And from October to January, the Morgans' miracle began to take shape. The strength in Pam's left leg increased, and she got feeling back in her arms. She could move her knee sideways, then raise it up, then push against her therapist's hand with her foot.

It was coming back — the nerves, the muscles, the strength. No one knew how or why. But it was all coming back.

In October her therapist, Shannon Lepper, decided Pam was ready.

"Come on," Lepper said. "We're going over to the parallel bars."

Pam couldn't believe it. "My heart almost jumped out of my chest," she said. "That was the first time anyone of the medical personnel ever gave me any hope that they believed I could walk. That was huge!"

By the parallel bars, three therapists gently guided her to her feet. The whole gym grew quiet. Trying with all her strength, she kicked out her left leg and took a step. It felt stiff and sore, awkward and weird.

It felt wonderful. She had taken the first step toward the impossible. At home that night she turned to her husband.



KEVIN ANDERSON/The Kansas City Star

Phil Morgan talks with daughter Kayla, 6, about her day while Alisha, 3, watches and Pam Morgan looks through Kayla's schoolwork.

"Guess what I did today?" she said.

Phil's face lit up and tears rolled down his cheek.

From October to January progress came quickly. When her right leg began working, she was able to use a walker.

"Dr. Coufal," she thought.

She hadn't told him of her remarkable progress. And now she was going to wow him.

At Research, Phil positioned her at the end of the hallway with her walker and had a nurse get Coufal's attention. Then Pam stood up and — step by step — walked into his office. As she passed him, she looked up and smiled.

His jaw fell open.

"You just made my day," he said. "No, you just made my six months!"

"How 'bout let's go for the whole year?" Pam said.

Today, nearly two years after the accident, Pam's miracle continues to grow. She no longer needs a walker. As she walked with only a slight limp on a recent therapy visit, Lepper marveled at her progress.

"It's pretty amazing," she said. "I think playing basketball is out of the question, but other than that..."

A miracle from God, Pam says.

But why her? Why not other equally faithful people?

There are no easy answers — even for her pastor, the Rev. Steve Campbell of Christ United Methodist Church in Independence.

"It isn't that God smiles on some and turns away from others," Campbell said. "I think it's that God shows compassion and love to all, and sometimes we can see it with our eyes, and sometimes we can't..."

"What I appreciate about them is that it would be easy to be triumphalistic — and they aren't...They are humbled by it, and grateful."

That's not to say Pam isn't excited. Today the possibilities for further recovery are virtually limitless.

She looks ahead to further mobility. What would she really like to be able to do?

There was a moment of silence. "Dance," she finally said. "I want to dance. When Phil gets excited and dances out in the audience, I'd love to be able to go with him."

Don't bet against it.

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