

FEBRUARY 7, 1994

PHILLY

As an ambulance skimmed across the icy crust that covered Broad Street—the longest street in the United States—its flashing red light reflected off the walks, cars, and trees, blanketed with snow. Its screams ricocheted off buildings that stood in the freezing air. The week-long blizzard had brought sub-zero temperatures to Philadelphia, and had transformed its bustling streets into blocks of desolation covered with thick, frozen sheets of white, spotted with eerie glows from street lights. As the ambulance raced forward, it veered suddenly to the left, skidding several feet, but righted it and found its way back on course.

“Don’t worry, Dr. Lowe. We’ll get you there in one piece.”

The paramedic by my side sensed my fear that we might crash into an oncoming car, and gently placed a hand on my shoulder.

I laughed sarcastically in a moaning sort of way and said, “How can you get me there in one piece when I’m already broken into thousands of pieces?”

I knew I had shattered my right leg when I slipped on the ice, but I didn’t know how badly. And now I was being transferred for emergency surgery from the local community hospital to a teaching hospital. This ride was the longest one I’ve ever taken through Philly. Fortunately my good friend and colleague, Dr. Joseph Rosen, had telephoned ahead to reserve a private room for me.

When we finally reached the hospital, as I was being scurried to my room, I overheard the doctors muttering behind me, “It’s almost midnight, but we’ve already made arrangements for her tomorrow afternoon.”

I heard them mentioning *bone grafts*, *metal screws*, and *metal plates*, which confirmed to me what I already knew—I was in sad shape.

The night and morning that followed were long and uncomfortable, and when they were finally over, I was wheeled into the operating room. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was one thirty in the afternoon.

The next thing I knew, someone was saying, “Rose, open your eyes.”

I tried to speak but had no voice. I opened my eyes slightly, I think. Bright lights blinded me. I closed my eyes, wondering where I was. Bright lights... bright lights... bright lights... Wasn’t that what people who’d died, but were resuscitated saw?

Am I dead? I tried to say. I still had no voice. I tried my eyes again and saw those bright lights...then gradually I saw coming into view...people...people in green hospital scrub suits. Then I saw behind them the clock on the wall: it was seven thirty.

My operation had lasted six hours. I sighed with relief and closed my eyes again.

I’m still in Philadelphia, I thought. *Thank goodness, I’m still alive and in Philly.*

At that point, my mind whirled out of control as a giant kaleidoscope of scenes from my past spun before me. I saw my family, myself as a little girl, myself as a college student, and my struggles to get to where I am today—to become the person that I am now.