On the day of my Sudden Cardiac Arrest, I have two recollections. The first, my wife Karen offered to fix me breakfast before I left home to play golf. My reply to her was “no thanks.” The second was very surreal. I was watching someone being loaded into an ambulance. I didn’t know who it was, but I watched and followed the ambulance to the hospital.

The rest of my story is second hand from my friend of twenty years, George, and my wife, Karen.

According to George, we had arrived at the putting green of the 18th hole. My friends, Dave, James and George, were on the green. I was walking down to the putting surface when I fell down on my back and passed out. Dave called George and said: “Joe is down.” James had his cell telephone so he dialed 9-1-1. He put the speaker on when the operator answered. She asked George if I was breathing. George said “no.” She told him to start CPR. None of the three knew how to perform CPR, but the operator was firm that it had to be done immediately and instructed them on how to perform it.

So the first hero in my new life was the 9-1-1 operator, Katie Sheridan. She knew what had to be done and was firm, in control, calm and patient. My other four
heroes were my golf partners, James, Dave and George, and Freddy, one of the workers in the golf pro shop. They took turns doing about 400 chest compressions. They were scared that it wasn’t doing any good because they saw no sign of life in me, but they continued doing what Katie told them to do and prayed it wasn’t too late. Everyone was concerned about brain damage because the length of time the CPR was administered, but as it turned out, not only did the CPR save my life but also saved me from suffering brain damage. The four continued to perform CPR, changing turns until the fire department arrived.

The fire department delivered two defibrillation shocks before they got a pulse. I was then taken to Saint Joseph Hospital in central Phoenix. All my identification was in my golf bag, so until George got there I was admitted as John Doe. George called Karen and she contacted some of my family. Our family and friends came, as well as the priest from our parish who anointed me.

Karen said I was on a ventilator and in a coma for five days. On the second day in ICU I was given a therapeutic hypothermia treatment for 24 hours. After the treatment, the ICU doctor said it would take 36 hours to determine if the treatment was successful. They had done all that was possible and that it would be up to me if I wanted to live.

Our godson’s grandmother told our godson and his sister that Papa Joe was very ill. These two children asked their teachers and classmates to pray for me. So there were at least seventy-five children praying for me. Our son had his prayer group praying. Our daughter prayed for God’s will to be done.

On the fifth day I came out of the coma and started saying all sorts of mean, nutty things. I don’t recall any of that.

The first thing that I recall is seeing my sister’s grandson as they were taking me out of the ICU and moving me to a regular room. In that room I had difficulty sleeping because of the hallucinations I was having. Our good friend came up from Tucson
and spent the night with Karen and me in the hospital room. I knew they were praying for me, but the hallucinations continued until the next day.

On Friday January 20th the cardiologist implanted a defibrillator in my chest. Thankfully, I was released out of the hospital on January 21st. I am home and doing fine. I am walking four to five miles each day and riding my mountain bike.

It was later when I discovered who my next hero was. It was my wife, Karen. She never gave up on me. There are a lot of people I am so thankful for helping me live. I still have questions – why me? Karen tells me it’s to make people aware of how important it is to have 9-1-1 operators recognize cardiac arrest and instruct people how to perform CPR. I feel the other reason is to witness the power of prayer, especially those of small children.