Gayle's Great Heart Adventure - Fall 2015

(As told through texts, emails, and stress-filled recollections)

During a routine physical, Gayle's doctor notices an unusual heart rhythm and suggests she see a cardiologist.

Aug. 4
Echocardiogram with Dr. Alan Markowitz (see list of doctors and nurses last page).

Aug. 7
Appointment at UH Ahuja Medical Center in Beachwood. Diagnosis: mitral valve regurgitation.

Aug. 12
Surgery to repair the valve is scheduled for Sept. 8. Hearing the words "open-heart surgery," Graeme and Alison plan to fly up for the procedure. (Dr. Markowitz, a noted cardiothoracic surgeon, prefers the more invasive approach "in case anything goes wrong.")

Sat., Sept 5
The Lockwoods arrive for a weekend of partying before the Big Day. Dana's parents have gotten word that she was in a three-car accident on Friday night but is okay. She describes the car as "scratched." (It's totaled.)

Sun., Sept 6
Labor Day Picnic with the Zarlinos and Cartinos at Uncle Ralph's house. Dana and Derek arrive from Pittsburgh.

Mon., Sept 7
Gayle, Rudy, Graeme and Alison trek for miles in 80-degree heat for the Crazy Dash, a scavenger hunt/walking tour of downtown Cleveland. Jet fighters roar overhead for the Labor Day Air Show. Afterward, beers at Shooters and oysters and bloody Marys at the Nauti Mermaid.

Tues., Sept. 8
Before dawn, the Drewniaks head to Ahuja for Gayle's 7 a.m. surgery, which is expected to take 5-6 hours. Half of the waiting room is taken up by Zarlinos.

1:04 p.m. (from Alison to Aunt Patter): Nurse came out with update. Gayle's valve couldn't be repaired, had to be replaced. Probably will be a few more hours before we hear more.

Leah and Rudy, who've been researching for weeks, debate what this means. Graeme looks up complications on Google and goes white. Later in the cafeteria, he quietly says, "She may never leave the hospital."

2:36 p.m. (from Alison): Surgery is done. Dr. came out and talked to everyone. Everything went well, but he was frustrated that he had to replace the valve. It'll be another 2 hours before anybody sees her, and she'll be asleep, so most of the gang just left. Doc said Gayle should be back to normal with no limitations.

Rudy and Leah visit Gayle in the ICU and advise family to go home ("no need to see her like that").

Wed., Sept. 9
Assuming that Gayle will be tired and in recovery for a few days, the Lockwoods fly home at 7 a.m. Thirty minutes later, Rudy gets a call from Dr. Markowitz that Gayle is in a "downward spiral." A heart balloon and Impella pump are implanted at Ahuja, and Gayle is transported to UH Lerner Tower downtown.

3:15 p.m. (from Leah to Graeme): She has very high fever - 103 - don't know why. Icing her. Sedating her bc of delirium and discomfort. Very very critical. I asked if we should get kids here and *was told "yes"*. Riley will be here in 30 mins. Dana getting here by bus - should arrive by 10pm. So sorry to be the bearer of such news.

8:32 p.m.(from Alison to her family): Flew home from Cleveland this morning thinking Gayle was through the worst of her surgery, and she was in critical condition by the time we landed. She's been moved to a downtown hospital, and her doctors are scrambling to figure out what went wrong. Basically, a temporary unit is keeping her heart going. She had a successful mitral valve replacement, all was good, but then her left ventricle failed, which may mean there was more wrong with her heart to begin with. Her kids were called home this afternoon. Graeme is flying back in the morning. We're hoping things aren't as dire as they sound. Will keep you posted.

Thurs., Sept 10
Graeme catches a flight back to Cleveland. The family has a private waiting room in the SICU.

9:03 p.m. (from Rudy): Hello everyone, just checked in on Gayle for the last time tonight. She is resting peacefully and her fever has returned but they are treating her with antibiotics and a cooling blanket. They are planning an echocardiogram tomorrow afternoon. Dr Markowitz saw her today and was very pleased with her progress. We will keep you all posted.

Fri., Sept. 11
A long day of no news as the family waits to hear results of the echo.

9:24 a.m. (from Rudy): Good Morning Everyone. Gayle is resting...as comfortably as someone in her condition can. She is lying on a cooling blanket and her fever is way down. Her hands are actually cool for the first time. She seems a bit more awake this morning, stirring and yawning. Saw her incision for the first time. It is long but neat, and should be minimal after it heals. Echo scheduled for today. Hope to hear some positive news from Dr. Markowitz after he sees it. Keep on praying.

Gayle is put on a breathing tube for the procedure ("sedated and on a ventilator"), and a feeding tube is installed.

(from Leah to Alison): Spoke to Rudy a few minutes ago but was interrupted. In that brief conversation, I learned: She had the echo. He did not hear from surgeon at all, all day. They've given her a feeding tube. Want to get her off ventilator but in order to do that must dial down pain med. So, you can only imagine. That's it, for now.

The doctor finally arrives at 7 p.m. to say that the echo didn't show the results he wanted. A global echo is scheduled for Monday morning. That night, Alison has a dream that Gayle is sitting up in bed, tired but talking.

Sat., Sept 12
The breathing tube is removed. Gayle is talking! She says that ginger ale and moaning are her two favorite things. She snacks on pudding and yogurt.

(from Alison): Much better news after a frustrating day yesterday. Ventilator tube has been removed, and Gayle's talking and eating a little. I'm not sure if she knows something went wrong, or if she just thinks surgery sucks. They'll try to remove one of the devices on Monday and see how her heart does; function has been steadily improving. Another few days of rest might be what her heart needs to heal itself. Everybody's afraid to ask what happens if not. She's having some trouble breathing, fever comes and goes, but much more comfortable today. From what Graeme says, the worst part is watching her writhe in the bed with her arms tied down, a tube down her throat, and machines everywhere.

Sun., Sept. 13
Rudy, Graeme and the kids spend the day at the hospital, watching the Browns.

11:30 a.m. (from Rudy): Good morning all. Doctors have been by this morning. Both are very encouraged by Gayle's cardiac output! Even better than yesterday. Still on plan to reduce and/or remove pump tomorrow afternoon. She is in quite a bit of overall pain today, but she is very good about it. Hospital going broke due to Gayle's ginger ale and ice bill! She was able to get some extra pain meds and is taking a nap right now. She is really a trooper. Remember no news is good news. If something negative happens I will let you know. Something good happens, I will let you know. If nothing changes, I may just take a break. I love all of you and really appreciate my role in keeping you all up to speed on Gayle's situation. Thanks all of you for your support. It means so much to all of us here. Appreciatively, Rudy & Gayle

Mon., Sept. 14
The breathing tube is put back in for the global echo, and the process is begun to wean Gayle off the Impella pump. She's able to write messages on a pad of paper.

9:42 a.m. (from Rudy): Good morning. Gayle says hello to everyone! She still has plenty of pain, but we have the lovely nurse Felicia back. Amen. She has her on a little stronger med. It is keeping Gayle a little more restful. Her cardiac output looks good. She is sad that she has been cut off from her life-sustaining ginger ale since midnight. Not happy! Hopefully she will tolerate her procedure today, and the pump can be removed. That is the ideal plan. Let's pray for that!

2:02 p.m.: Dear family and friends, today's news is a mixed bag. The doctors were able to dial down Gayle's pump to the minimum level, but they felt her cardiac output was still at a borderline level, and to be on the cautious side they felt it would be best to leave the pump in and to let her heart rest for a couple more days. On the downside for Gayle, they want to leave her on the breathing tube in order to further rest her heart. Tough on Gayle. Doctor said this was a possibility. Pump removal today was best possible outcome, not necessarily most likely. Keep praying.

9:46 p.m. (from Alison to friend): They're holding out hope for one last test on Wed., but it's starting to look like she'll need a heart transplant. She'll be on a temporary pump [LVAD] in the meantime, fueled by a battery pack or 20-foot power cord. (The pump can last for years, apparently, but severely hampers your quality of life). She's intubated and sedated until Wed. Rudy doesn't want to tell the family until the doctors know for sure. So, pretty much shock all around.

Tues., Sept 15

(from Alison to parents): She was doing so well yesterday, in good spirits (although I don't think she knew something had gone wrong). So we're going through the stages of grief. Graeme is in the anger stage. Rudy called a lawyer. Not exactly sure what Gayle knows. She was only starting to wake enough to talk to everybody this weekend, and now she's back to sedation. The staff told Rudy not to say much, but she must have had a sense from ICU that things weren't right. On the other hand, she was expecting to be there for a few days after surgery under normal conditions. Can't imagine hearing that kind of news after expecting to go home in a week.

7:49 a.m. (from Rudy): Hello everyone. I spoke with Gayle's night nurse. She had a quiet night. They lower her sedation occasionally to check on her. She wanted me to bring her ginger ale at 1 a.m.! Nurse Nicole sent her back to Sleepyville. She is tolerating her tube a little better this time. I think it is a little smaller than last time. They have it on the lowest setting. She is mostly breathing herself. After the good Saturday and Sunday we had, it is very sad seeing her on the tube and sedated again, but it will help her rest. I went to work today. Hard to be in the hospital 15 hrs everyday. Graeme and Katie will watch her sleep today. I will see her at 3:30. We really can't wait to get her home! I will update everyone later.

That afternoon, Paulette makes an unexpected visit, even though relatives have been asked to wait until it's safe for Gayle to be stressed or exposed to infection. (Leah, feeling ill, stays home for a few days after practically living at the hospital.)

8:33 p.m. (from Rudy): Good Evening Beloved Family and Friends. Our dear Gayle is still fighting her little heart out. Hard day for her. Breathing tube still in and aggravating her. She was kind of agitated today, when the doctors really want her to rest today. She wanted to talk but couldn't and was very frustrated, while in and out of wakefulness. The night nurse (Kim) seems to want to get her to sleep tonight. She really needs it! Tomorrow they are planning another echo and an attempt at weaning her off the pump. Lots of good thoughts and prayers for that! I know how hard it is on all of you not being able to see Gayle, but it is the best for now. The doctors really believe rest is what will help her the most at this time, and we truly appreciate your patience, and prayers from home. As Always, Rudy, Graeme, Dana, Riley and Katie.

Wed., Sept 16

1:24 p.m.(email from Alison - Subject line: "The roller coaster just went up again"): Crazy news from the ICU this morning. Graeme found the head of cardiology [Dr. Oliveira] arguing with two of Gayle's surgeons, who were planning another procedure today. The three went away and argued for an hour. Apparently, the chief won. He says he's 100% certain that Gayle has Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, which is an acute ballooning of the heart caused by stressors or trauma (like surgery), and that all the treatments in the ICU are basically keeping her heart from healing. So they'll pull the drugs and the ventilator and stop all procedures for the next 5 days. Graeme almost sounded giddy. Now we wait and hope this doctor is right!

6:47 p.m. (from Rudy): Good evening everybody. Sorry for no news earlier. Had to work today, and we had lots happening with Gayle. And I wanted to have all the proper info before I spoke! After many discussions and multiple examinations of her echocardiogram, the chief of the unit feels there is a "*good*" chance of Gayle's heart function returning—if she is weaned off multiple drugs, extubated, and given total and complete rest, for a minimum of 5 days. They will do an echocardiogram next Tuesday and see how her heart is doing. The doctor (new) has a good feeling about the likelihood of a cardiac recovery for her. This is all great news!!! She will be off the ventilator tomorrow, and we should all be thrilled for her. That thing sucks!! Every doctor and nurse is impressed with her and the amount of fight in her!!!! She is an amazing woman. Thank you all for your support our beautiful Gayle. Love, Drewniaks

Thurs., Sept 17

9:23 a.m. (from Graeme): Balloon being removed now. Extubate next. Booted from room until 10. Good night but not able to get full details since they're pretty busy applying pressure to leg [where balloon tube was removed]. Will let you know when I hear more.

5:37 p.m. (from Rudy): Hi everyone. Quite a day today for Miss Gayle. This morning they removed the balloon pump from her heart. It went well and she shows no ill effects from its removal. Painful but successful! They gave her a rest then removed the drainage tubes from her chest, finally. They then continued weaning her off the majority of her heart meds. Went well again. She is awesome! But sadly they decided she had been through enough for today and decided not to remove her breathing tube yet. She is sad but they really want to sedate her so she can rest, and the breathing tube allows them to do that. The doctors insist that Gayle gets as much rest as possible to maximize her recovery. Hard to see her so disappointed about the tube. But she is sleeping deeply now and looks much more at ease. Gayle accomplished a lot today. She is amazing! Thanks for all the support. Love, All of us.

That night, Graeme calls nearly in tears. Extubation took nearly 45 minutes, with dozens of medical experts looking on helplessly while Gayle begged for help and couldn't breathe. Graeme says he watched her eyes lose focus and thought she was dying. Alison books a plane ticket to Cleveland.

Fri., Sept. 18

9:39 p.m. (from Rudy): Good evening everyone. Sorry for the late update. Spent the night here last night. Had to work today, pick up clothes for the weekend stay. Gayle had an uneventful (thank goodness) day. Good rest. Some minor doctoring. And no negatives! When I got here her pain meds were low and she was more alert than usual. Her notes begging for ginger ale were much easier to read. She is so upset she can't have any. She was in a very good mood for the first time in a while. She even laughed a little over my silly jokes. No changes planned for now. Going to lower the rate of her heart pump a little over the weekend to see how she handles it. They have raised her pain meds back up a little so she can rest better this evening. She doesn't want me to leave tonight so I will stay with her until Nurse Paul kicks me out, back to the waiting room! Thank you all for support of Gayle. She needs it! Good Night.

(from Alison to a friend): Gayle was added to the transplant list on Friday, priority 1A. She's on a temporary pump now; the next hurdle is installation of a new LVAD pump and 3 months of recovery before she's re-eligible for transplant.

Sat., Sept. 19
Alison arrives in Cleveland. Katie, Dana, Riley, Rudy and Graeme have been camped out in the SICU waiting room. UH delivers breakfast. Gayle is scheduled for surgery on Monday. (For LVAD? We're not sure.). Nurse Jessica questions why things are happening so fast and cancels it. She requests a family meeting for Monday.

1:06 p.m. (from Rudy to Graeme, on way to the airport): All good so far. Just got evicted while they reinstall swan catheter, the one in right jugular.

5:36 p.m. (from Rudy): Good Afternoon everyone! Finally, so far, so good! No major setbacks today. They were able to dial down her Impella pump another notch. She is down to level 4, from level 8 (max). She has quite a bit of fluid in her lungs which causes her quite a bit of discomfort. They switched her sedation drug to help her with her breathing issues. Much better! The doctors believe her echocardiogram looked good today and her cardiac output as well. They were encouraged. So are we. She is sleeping much more deeply now. I hope she has a restful night. Gayle thanks you all for your support and can 't wait to see everyone again.

Sun., Sept. 20

12:03 p.m. (from Alison to a friend): We're hanging out at the hospital, watching the Browns. Still in a holding pattern. She was added to the transplant list on Friday, priority 1A. If there 's no real progress in the next few days, the hope would be for a new heart vs. surgery to implant pump, recovery 3-4 months and THEN transplant. Meeting scheduled for 2 tomorrow to assess. Thanks for checking!

9:27 p.m. (from Rudy): Sorry for the late hour update. Very little to report today. Gayle is still pretty sedated. She is still in need of as much rest of possible. Hopefully things will get better this week. Thanks so much for the food [from neighbor]. We really appreciate it. Way better than cafeteria food! Better news tomorrow. Hopefully, Rudy, Gayle, the Kids and the Lockwoods

That night, Dana writes on Facebook: “My mom's health situation is difficult in about every aspect imaginable, but right now the hardest part for me is not being able to talk to her. I feel like she is gone and this is probably the most scared/sad I have felt in a long time.”

Leah texts Rudy to ask if something's wrong, and if he's seen the post. Thinking he's replying to her, he accidentally texts the family: Did Dana mention the LVAD or transplant?

Mon., Sept. 21

Graeme picks up his 4th rental car (they won't let him extend his stay without returning to the airport) and moves to a second Hampton. A family meeting with the cardiac team is scheduled for 2 p.m.

9:09 a.m. (from Rudy to Jeanine): Just saw your text. Kids were asking me what would happen if her heart doesn 't get strong enough. Told them what I had read as to the options in a heart failure situation.

3:36 p.m. (from Rudy): Hello everyone. Gayle is still sleeping like a baby. She is holding up well, considering the circumstances! We had a meeting with the doctors today, the upshot of which was to try and remove her breathing tube and dial down the Impella and see how she does. Her numbers on everything are good, but we have to see how she does without all the support. They will do this over a period of several days. No one is in a rush at this time, as all of her other organ systems are doing well. Hopefully she will be tubeless and talking in a few days. The doctors are confounded by her condition but hopeful that she can overcome it. That 's everything for today. The Drewniwoods

(from Alison to a friend): Family meeting with team doctors today. Back in holding pattern. Good news is that they 've stopped pushing for a transplant and want to wait and see if Gayle can tolerate being off the ventilator and temporary pump (again). That means a couple of procedures over the next few days. The head cardiologist says he 's never seen a case like this in 37 years. In other words, nobody really knows what 's going on.

Tues, Sept 22

Throughout Gayle's ordeal, dozens of doctors, nurses and interns have rotated in and out of the SICU, each with a different medical opinion. Rudy has been given assurances that he'll be consulted before any new procedures. That morning, Dr. Heather McFarland and her team decide to extubate before anyone arrives. Nurse Jessica plays James Taylor music; Heather tells Gayle to visualize a beach. Poor Gayle can't breathe—her throat is swelling shut. Heather struggles to reinsert the breathing tube (with Haren assisting). A scope reveals constriction of the vocal cords.

1:46 p.m. (from Alison): Hey, Rudy. I've been sitting with Gayle while Graeme works. They just came in to do an x-ray. Should only take a few minutes.

2:31 p.m. (from Alison to Rudy): Just talked to ENT doctor. Her partner specialist will be here tomorrow to assess. They'll do an OR procedure to remove tube and image throat. May or may not start with trach. Gayle's awake.

4:27 p.m. (from Alison to a friend): In the good news-bad news dept., Gayle was doing well enough to remove her breathing tube this morning, but her throat is so raw that it swelled shut, and she couldn't breathe. Tube back in. She'll probably need a temporary trach; an ENT specialist is coming tomorrow to assess. Gayle woke up for a bit this afternoon and was desperate to ask questions. Rudy has been collecting her notes. They're mostly squiggly lines trailing off the page. She's out again.

4:45 (from Alison to a friend): *She's* on the OR schedule tomorrow. Once through this throat issue, we'll know if she can breathe on her own, and whether her heart can handle the load. And Graeme and Rudy will both be doctors by that time, with all the research they're doing. (One of the cardiologists said he deferred to them.)

A scope reveals constriction (granuloma) on the vocal cords. Butchie Cartino, an ordained minister, asks if he can visit to say a prayer for Gayle.

9:22 p.m. (from Rudy): Hello again. Sorry for the hour. Good day, bad day, as usual. Did great with ventilator on unassisted mode for 13 hours. Heart looked good. Vent tube removed. Ok for 30 minutes. Throat closed up. Gayle started to breath with difficulty. Tube was reinserted. Way disappointing. Good news, Gayle's heart held up well during this time of stress! ENT group to address Gayle's constricted (quite common) throat tomorrow. They have several options to reduce swelling/scarring in her throat. Again, hoping/praying for the best. Drewniwoods

Wed. Sept 23

9:20 a.m. (from Rudy to Alison): Uneventful night for Gayle. Felicia on now. Tracheostomy scheduled for 2 p.m. Will be there after lunch sometime.

11:34 a.m. (from Alison to Barb): Gayle waves hi. She's awake, the first time in 5 days. Scheduled for a procedure at 3 to remove ventilator. She'll be much more comfortable. All other signs improving. Slow work!

6:23 p.m. (from Alison to Barb in response to text, *"Did procedure go okay?"):* Yes, very good. She's awake, but still can't talk. Color looks much better. Trach will take a few days to heal, and she'll need to adjust to breathing with it. And then they'll start dialing back the heart stuff again. All good! Rudy's staying the night with her, so she'll have company. Pain's much better, and she's herself again. Frustrated because we don't read lips very well! Tomorrow should be a good day.

Thurs. Sept 24

Gayle's left arm port is moved to her right due to bleeding. Thanks to all the Heparin, blood oozes from every puncture. A drainage port has been installed for fluid around her lungs.

9:30 a.m. (from Rudy): Yesterday was a long day for everyone. Gayle traded in her ventilator for a temporary tracheostomy. It was rough on her, but it went well. She is more comfortable now and they have lowered her sedation. She can mouth words to us. In a few days she should be able to talk a little. Now we can get back to getting her heart stronger. It was a long night. With her being awake, we didn't want to leave her. Hopefully we can have some more good days. Thanks for the chili, Leah. Drewniwoods

12:43 p.m. (from Alison to Barb): She's awake, a little uncomfortable with the new breathing technique, but holding her own. All vital signs are good. She's getting a *swab of ginger ale. Very happy. [*"Is she peaceful?*"]* Wouldn't quite say that. There's so much going on in the ICU, alarms going off, people talking, someone new coming *to poke or prod. Gayle said, "It's too loud."*

4:14 p.m. (from Alison to Rudy): Drainage tube is in, all good. Quite a bit of fluid draining. They're cleaning her up and moving her to #1, first bed on the right as you come in. Should be more quiet for her (walls and a door).

A member from the Infectious Disease team comes into the room and puts on a rubber glove before shaking Alison's hand. What next?

Fri., Sept 25

8:30 a.m. (from Rudy): Good morning. Went to the hospital before work this morning, and Gayle looked great. They have moved her to a different bed which is much more secluded and private. She got a good night's sleep and looks great. Still can't talk but can mouth words. Writing is pretty clear. Still can't drink diet ginger ale. Swabs only. Much much better. Nothing scheduled for this weekend. Will start weaning her off pump again next week. All in all, great progress. Still a ways to go. Thanks, Drewniwoods

8:50 a.m. (from Alison to a friend): A few bumps in the road this week. She needed a trach because of scar tissue from the ventilator, then a drain for fluid around her lungs, and several infections. They won't try to wean her off the heart pump again until Monday. There's more hope that she can leave under her own power, but that'll be at least a month in the SICU. I'm scheduled to go home Sunday.

11:15 a.m. (from Graeme to Rudy): Hate to jinx it but here's current status. She looks really good today. Neck not bleeding, chest not bleeding. Far more comfortable. On CPAP and doing fine. Temp way down. Best we've seen her in a long time.

11:16 a.m. (from Rudy): She looked good this morning. Was at 50% O/2 at 6 a.m. this morning. CPAP now is great. Breathing ok. No anxiety?

11:18 a.m. (from Graeme): Breathing good. Anxiety down but still a bit nervous at times. Nothing like yesterday, though.

In the afternoon, Gayle is scheduled to have the drug port in her neck moved from one side to the other, due to bleeding. She's supposed to receive Lasix in advance, but Nurse Bridget is "off her game" and late getting started. The echo team arrives unexpectedly to take a look at Gayle's heart and lungs. Nurse Bridget adds the drug bag in the middle of the test. By the time the ENT team arrives, there are a dozen people in the room. The family is sent outside to wait. Dana arrives from Pittsburgh just in time to hear doctors say something's going wrong—Gayle's heart has gone into arrhythmia. Dr. Heather later says it might have been caused by fluid around her heart, or an electrolyte imbalance caused by the Lasix.

3:44 p.m. (from Alison to a friend): They tr*ied to switch Gayle's drug port this afternoon and sent her into* cardiac arrhythmia. The shock paddles are by the bed now. Gayle thought she was dying and asked not to be *resuscitated next time. (It wasn't quite* that bad, but she freaked out the whole unit.) I think everybody is losing *hope that she'll make it off the pump if her body can't tolerate the smallest changes.*

Sat., Sept 26
Because of the continued bleeding from various ports, Gayle is scheduled for another procedure.

11:27 a.m. (from Rudy): Good Morning. Well, as often happens, one step forward, half a step backwards. After our good morning she had a minor setback when they were changing some of her lines and developed some erratic heart beats. Scared her quite a bit and she is more apprehensive about things. Heart beat seems fine now. Back to trying to wean her off of the ventilator, hopefully by Monday morning. She is uncomfortable, as we would doubtless be after 18 days in the ICU. Would love to be home. Hope she can be. The sooner the better. Thanks again.

11:51 a.m. (from Alison to Rudy): She asked the tech not to change her air. He's coming back at 1 to try again.

1:07 p.m. (from Rudy to Alison): In Gayle's room. They just started procedure in new line in right jugular. Should be done in an hour.

Sun., Sept 27

Alison flies home on what was supposed to be a day of rest for Gayle in preparation for beginning to wean her off the Impella pump on Monday. By the time the plane lands, the pump is out. Heparin had been stopped in preparation while the pump was running, prompting the removal.

12:09 p.m. (from Alison to her family): Graeme just called. The weaning process that was supposed to take 3-4 days starting tomorrow is already done, and the pump is out. Gayle is holding her own. Rudy doesn't know exactly what happened, but he seems to think it's good news. So now we wait and see.

8:27 p.m. (from Rudy): Today was a good day. Too many details to go into! Ups and downs, but all in all good. I am waiting until tomorrow to report. I don't want to jinx anything! Gayle is sleeping like a baby right now. She needs and deserves it. So proud of her. She has kept up her cheerful thankful self through some really, really tough days. Thanking nurses constantly for helping her, no matter how much it hurts her. Always asking them "with no voice" about their kids and if they were tired, and when they get to go home. God bless her. Good day today. Keep her in your prayers.

Tuesday, Sept 29

Gayle stands for the first time since her surgery.

1:40 p.m. (from Alison to Aunt Patter): Graeme just called. He says Gayle looks great today, the best she's been in 3 weeks. She's sitting up in bed, laughing. They removed the heart pump on Monday and drained fluid around her lungs, which helped her breathing (she's on her own with minimal assistance). They also adjusted her trach to make her more comfortable. If she keeps this up, Graeme thinks another week of rest and she might be able to leave the ICU. So...fantastic news!

Wed., Sept 30

With his sister on the mend, Graeme finally flies home. Updates continue to scores of friends, family and clients asking about Gayle's progress.

Fri., Oct. 2

(from Alison to a friend): We're both home now, thank god. Gayle has made miraculous progress since Monday. They're still trying to wean her off the *ventilator, and she's* anxious about not getting enough oxygen. Because of the trach, she can't talk yet, but she wrote a note yesterday asking what happened to her. Doctors have been standing around her bed talking for a month, so it was no surprise that she had a pretty good idea. They have her sitting up in a chair for 30 minutes at a time, whic*h wipes her out for the day. It*'ll be a long recovery, but at this point, she might just walk out of the hospital under her own steam....I think Graeme is going through withdrawal, now that he's back in the real world after 22 days at the hospital. He doesn't know what to do with himself and keeps checking with Rudy every ten minutes.

Sat., Oct. 3

(from Rudy): Gayle is doing great. They have her off the ventilator. All she has is a little of the drift oxygen toward her trachea tube. Doing very well. They pulled the chest tube out of her back today also, which was important. That was bugging her. Still having issues with the electrical portion of her heart so they can't give her her regular meds for anxiety, which gives her a little bit of an issue, but they gave her some other meds a little bit ago and she's sleeping pretty nice now. All in all she's doing great. Talk to you later. Thanks.

Wed., Oct 7

Rudy calls to say that doctors are planning to remove Gayle's trach. They intend to move her to a regular room, followed by 2 weeks in a rehab facility.

Sun., Oct. 11

(from Rudy): Yes, tracheostomy is out. She is on solid food. Not connected to anything. EKG is wireless! Now in room 3052. Can go to bathroom by herself. Doing well but very weak. She walks 1 or 2 laps a day....slowly. Definitely going to take time. The heart failure unit (Dr. El-amm, et al.) is on her case again. They did an echo yesterday. Will discuss on Monday. Glad they are back. Much more willing to discuss future and such. On a side note, met someone whose husband had a mitral valve repair last week with Markowitz. He went straight to a replacement. Not even an attempt at repair! I know I have been sparse with info lately. Please feel free to call me. Sometimes I just get busy and don't catch up. Call me anytime. Thanks Rudy.

Monday, Oct. 12

Gayle calls and leaves a phone message, saying she's getting ready to go home from the hospital! It's the first time we've heard her voice in a month.

Wed., Oct. 14

(from Alison to a friend): Believe it or not, *Gayle is home. We're as shocked as everyone else. We thought she* was headed to a regular room and then two weeks in rehab. On Monday night, she was getting ready to leave! *She's still having some electro*-cardio issues and has to wear a LifeVest that will basically restart *her heart if it stops. She's still on the transplant* list, still very weak. But getting stronger every day. Thanks for asking!

Oct. 22

Leah takes Gayle to UH for a follow-up. (Gayle has a new haircut.) The photo on FaceBook brings several people to tears.

Dec. 15

(from Alison to a friend): Gayle had her 3-month check-up on Friday, and we were waiting to hear if she would need a defibrillator implant and/or *stay on the transplant list. (She didn't sound very good last time we talked, very weak.) She called last night to tell us that she won't need the implant, her heart* scores are high enough that she no longer has to wear the LifeVest, and she woke up feeling like her old self for the first time since September. A great Christmas gift!

***Medical personnel involved in Gayle's* case** (before Alison lost track)

Doctors:

Alan Markowitz, MD
Cardiothoracic Surgery

Benjamin Medalion, MD
Cardiac Surgery

Basar Sareyyupoglu, MD
Cardiac Surgery

Guilherme Oliveira, MD
Cardiovascular Disease, Heart Failure, Onco-Cardiology, Interventional Cardiology

Mahazarin Ginwalla, MD
Cardiovascular Disease

Chantal El-Amm, MD
Cardiovascular Disease, Heart Failure

Heather McFarland, DO
Anesthesiology

Haren Bodepudi, MD
Anesthesiology

Nicole Fowler, MD
Otolaryngology

Nicole Maronian, MD
Otolaryngology

Kevin Charnas
Clinical Research Specialist, Heart Failure

Meteli & Lei (doctors who installed new neck lines)

Nurses:
Nicole
Kim
Paul
Jessica
Felicia
Jackie
Nick
Valerie
Bridget