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Doug Zirkle amazes doctors, walks daughter down aisle 1 year after car crash

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STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — When Doug Zirkle took his daughter Rachel Zirkle Miller's hand to guide her down the aisle on her wedding day, it was a moment she had imagined her whole life. It was also a moment her father nearly missed after suffering life-threatening injuries in a car crash outside Craig in July 2017.

"I didn't know if I was going to be ready for that wedding or not," said Doug, who has been the pastor at the Mission of Grace Baptist Church in Hayden for 20 years.

On Father's Day weekend, Doug walked Rachel to the gazebo in New York City's Central Park, where she married Taylor Miller.

"Once he was in the clear at the hospital, and he was not on death's door, I always felt hopeful," Rachel said. "I knew that he would get to that point, and it's incredible to think about what he did to get here."

The moment came 11 months after Doug was involved in a [single-car rollover west of Craig on U.S. Highway 40](#). He suffered a broken back and a head injury. But as he lay in a hospital bed in Denver, he promised himself he would be there for his daughter.

"Sure enough, they got married outside, up a big hill," Zirkle said with a chuckle "I took her arm, and up we went."

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Rachel said there were times when she was scared her dad would not make it to

her wedding day.

But Doug is no stranger to challenges.

When his kidneys started failing, he had a [kidney transplant in 2013](#). He also chose to find a silver lining after [Mission of Grace Baptist Church in Hayden caught fire](#) in February.

"We were at home, and the neighbor came across and said there is smoke coming out of the church," Doug said. "I looked out, and I could see the smoke, and the firefighters said the inside was gone."

Doug was thankful that the church had insurance, and he said the church plans to use some of its own money to upgrade the restrooms, making them ADA accessible.

"I think he has a really strong relationship with God, and he always goes to that," Rachel said. "He trusts that, no matter what, he is going to be OK, we are going to be OK."

Rather than focus on the hurdles life has presented the past few years, Doug is grateful for the gifts in life. That includes the community of Hayden and his congregation, both of which have supported the Zirkle family. He is also thankful for his wife of nearly 35 years, Lisa, and his four children: Rachel, 30, Laura, 27, Christopher, 25, and Caroline, 18.

The accident

On the morning of July 21, Lisa left home in Hayden to travel to Victory Motors in Craig, where she planned to meet Doug, who needed to drop off his car for a minor repair.

Along the way, Doug's blood sugar dropped to dangerous levels. He has Type 1 diabetes and suffered an "insulin reaction." He ended up driving past the auto shop and veered off the road nearly 9 miles outside Craig, sending his Jeep cartwheeling end-over-end down a steep embankment.

When Doug failed to show up, Lisa started to get concerned.

"When it got close to 45 minutes, I thought to myself, 'Something is wrong,'" Lisa

said.

She used an app to locate Doug and then headed to Craig Memorial Hospital.

"When I got to the hospital in Craig, they were getting ready to care flight him to Grand Junction," Lisa said.

She let medical personal know that Doug was a diabetic and that he had a transplanted kidney. Thanks to her efforts, Doug ended up at UCHHealth Anschutz, where doctors knew his circumstances and could better treat him. He would spend 12 days in the intensive care unit and seven weeks at the Aurora care facility.

Road to recovery

In his first 12 days at UCHHealth Anschutz, Doug was in and out of consciousness.

"Everybody initially was just impressed that he had actually survived the accident," said C.J. Kleck a spine surgeon at UCHHealth University of Colorado. "When I talked to the family initially, it was questionable if he would have much in the way of function afterward."

Kleck said Doug told him early on in his recovery about his desire to walk his daughter down the aisle.

"We talked about it over time, if he worked and if the nerves healed the way we hoped, he may be able to move and walk again," Kleck said. "He surpassed all of that to the point where, at six months, he came to my clinic and was walking with just a cane for assistance."

Kleck attributes Doug's progress to the pastor's positive outlook.

"For him, it really came down to motivation and ultimately wanting to walk his daughter down the aisle," Kleck said. "We, the medical community, did what we had to do, but I think it was really Doug. He's the reason he did so well."

Being grateful

Throughout his recovery, Doug never lost sight of his relationship with God and the importance of his family, who was by his side after the accident.

"I still remember that moment when we were all together," Doug said about having his children visit him in the hospital. "That's my first memory" from after the accident.

Doug and Lisa said they are just happy to be home and thankful for the support they have received.

"We wake up everyday and thank the lord," Lisa said. "The church and the town have been incredible to us. We grew up in the big city, and we have never