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## LIFE IS PRECIOUS.

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BY STEVEN H. DAYAN, MD, FACS

This week I happened to be in the right place at precisely the right moment. The story is about a 36 year-old male who awoke in the morning with a severe sore throat. The discomfort rapidly progressed to a dangerous case of epiglottitis (a rare infection that causes an acute swelling of the throat tissues) which can potentially lead to a complete obstruction of the airway. I raced to the hospital violating every possible traffic code. Since it was the height of rush hour I managed to anger many of my fellow motorists. Fortunately, I made it to the hospital with seconds to spare. As I entered the hospital, I was quickly escorted to the emergency room where among random chaos a patient was struggling to live. The patient was suffocating and fighting to get air. Sweat beads streamed down his forehead and cheeks. His primal reactions had his body twisting contorting and flopping around in an effort to breathe. His face was blue, his neck was rapidly contracting and retracting, and his veins were popping out like rigid cords. When his eyes rolled up into his head and he began to spit a frothy discharge from his mouth, I knew that we were entering into a tug of war with death. Fortunately, the prepared staff quickly handed me a scalpel. As three or four others restrained the patient's flailing arms and legs, I slashed his neck, blood spurt out spraying all of those in close vicinity.

I made a small opening into his trachea (windpipe). Forced air exploded out of his neck. I placed a breathing tube into this hole and the anesthesiologist administered 100% oxygen. The echoing alarms, which had been continuously ringing immediately silenced. The patient's eyes rolled back down and his facial complexion returned to a normal pink color. This man's precious life would not be prematurely stolen. Following surgery I spoke with the family they were thankful and gracious, although I am not sure that they really understood how close their husband, father, and son was to death. I left the hospital that afternoon happy that I chose medicine as a career. At least for the moment I forgot about the degrading manner of insurance companies, managed care and the always-sniffing personal injury lawyers. When I went home that night I kissed my wife and my little girl and told them that today I was part of a team that made another wife and little girl very happy. They too have a daddy they love very much and we helped to make sure they will get a chance to see their daddy live another day.

You may be asking what does this have to do with plastic surgery? Well... not much, I just thought it important to pause and recognize the preciousness of life. We can feel fine one day and the next day wake up with a fatal illness. Life is a vulnerable gift not to be wasted on being angry, depressed or fatigued, rather it is to be celebrated.

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