



ANATOMY OF A MIRACLE

Interview with Dr. and Mrs. Edward Gatz
Jeanne Jugan Residence, San Pedro, CA
February, 2009

Dr. Edward Gatz was cured of terminal cancer in 1989 through the intercession of Blessed Jeanne Jugan. His cure proved to be the miracle that opened the door for the canonization of our foundress. Dr. and Mrs. Gatz were interviewed at Jeanne Jugan Residence in San Pedro, CA, where they had joined the Little Sisters to celebrate the announcement of the canonization date.

LSP: Is it true that before your illness, you didn't know Jeanne Jugan?

DOCTOR: I had never heard of her.

LSP: Can you recall just how you felt when you were diagnosed with terminal cancer?

DOCTOR: I was deeply depressed. We were not even looking for a cancer in the esophagus... They were strictly going to do a colonoscopy thinking that it might be transverse colon cancer like my mother had. She died from it at age 45. When I woke up my partner was with me and he told me he had some bad news—that it was cancer of the esophagus—it was really bad news. I was very depressed. He kept coming by day after day and he would say, “Now you are going to do something aren't you?” And I'd say, “Yes, but not right now. I'm just too depressed.” He would keep bringing things for me to read, which I did. It was probably five to seven days later that he came by and told me that he had talked to two surgeons—one at Mayo and the other at the University of Chicago. “One is as good or better than the other,” he said, “so you can either go to Chicago or to Rochester.” But he told me I was going to have palliative surgery. Jeanne's brother had his residency at the Mayo Clinic, so there was no question as to where we were going. That is when we met Doctor Victor Trastek.

I would say that my deep depression and despair were tempered by the fact that I was very thankful that I had lived longer than my father—who had died at 39—and I was 51. I had a brother who died at 45 or 46 and it took him two years to die. So I thought, I've lived longer than either one of them. So it's a bonus, along with medical school. What more could I ask for? ... I just kind of planned about how to make use of the time.

I received the Sacrament of the Sick... It was like bottled grace... Then we went to Mass at the Mayo Clinic just before my admission and the priest there anointed me again. I can tell you, quantitatively it was awesome. I went through the surgery like it was a walk in the park ... it was so easy! ... That's how I went from despair to being able to say, “God's will be done” and to look on my graces.

LSP: So you did have palliative surgery?

DOCTOR: Yes, I had palliative surgery, which means it was not curative because it was a systemic disease. You just go after the tumors—the big ones—the size of my doubled-up fists in my chest, esophagus, stomach cavity... There was never any talk of it being curative. Afterwards the oncologists came by to offer chemotherapy. I said, “Why would I do that? Will you cure me?” They said, “Oh no, oh no.” “Well then, why would I have it?” I said. They said maybe they could extend my life. So I asked them if they could really extend my life, or if they might shorten it. “Well, we don’t know,” they said. So I replied, “Well if you can’t cure me and you can’t guarantee to extend my life why would I have it?” “I wouldn’t,” the oncologist replied. It was an honest answer from a physician to a physician—“I wouldn’t if I were you. Why go through that?” Then the nuclear medicine people came. The same thing. So I considered both and rejected both.

MRS. GATZ: I could tell by the look on the face of Ed’s partner and friend, and the gastroenterologist, when they came out and called us out of the surgical waiting room. They took us into another room. My son and I knew that something grim was coming. They just said that he had a large tumor of the esophagus/stomach. The gastroenterologist thought he had had it for a long time. There was no way that he could not have known that he had this. But Ed didn’t know. He never had problems swallowing. No symptoms really other than the normal gastritis that he had. The doctor said that he had a bad tumor and he had six months, at maximum a year. Naturally we were just devastated. It was like someone just knocked the thoughts right out of you. You feel numb. I could tell when we were going home that Ed did not know what he was going to do. We were totally taken off guard.

I ran to the phone and called Father McGloin the minute I got home. I told him about the situation and he asked what Ed was going to do. “I don’t know if he is going to do anything, Father,” I said. “This is something that is going to kill him regardless.” Father said, “Well you know, the doctors have not heard of Jeanne Jugan.” I thought she must be a doctor with a revolutionary cure! (laugh) So I said, “Who is that, Father?” He told me she was foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor and I recognized the order immediately, although I didn’t know any of them at the time. He said we would start to pray to her daily without fail for a cure. I told Father I would be happy to pray to her as well. So you see, he had never invoked her before, so I think this was divinely inspired. He wrote for the prayer since he didn’t even have the novena prayer to Blessed Jeanne Jugan. In fact he didn’t know she was Blessed at the time. He got the prayer and sent me my copy in Minnesota during Ed’s surgical stay there. He sent a letter saying he had a little friend in heaven...

Wherever I went, the prayer went with me. It became part of my daily prayer. So I don’t



Dr. Edward Gatz and his wife, Jeanne, with Mother Marguerite, San Pedro, CA, February, 2009.

think there is any question that she is the one who interceded. And of course Father McGloin's prayers to her. He had a special connection with her. So she heard our prayers.

DOCTOR: One comment—I too got a copy of the novena prayer. I always had my saints, and occasionally I picked up a new saint along the way. So Jeanne Jugan came along and it was like a brick wall. That's the only way to describe it. The point is, Father and Jeanne were the only two making the novena. I didn't have faith in the novena and I didn't think anything would cure me. I just thought, "Gee, I'm lucky to have had more time than I thought I had. I'll play this out as long as I can." I didn't pray for or think I'd be cured. So it was Jeanne and Father's devotion to her... I was just the recipient—I had nothing to do with it. That is important to know... Everything just happened for a reason.

LSP: How did you feel when you knew you had been cured?

DOCTOR: I don't know that I ever knew that I was cured. The bumps on my hands, which indicated that the cancer was systemic ... started to go back to normal. I thought, gee it has been six/seven weeks. This means something. But I didn't want to assume anything, so I went from checkup to checkup. Even after five years you'd assume I'd be cured, but being a systemic disease it could pop up at any time.

Fast forward two and a half years from that surgery and I was told by my insurance company that I had a disability policy and I was supposed to be dead in six months, but I wasn't, so it must be fraud. They wanted to do an investigation. We did all the appropriate things that the insurance company thought needed to be done. Then they asked if they could contact Mayo Clinic to see if the tumor was there so they could analyze it... They found that mine was the wildest of the wild... I shouldn't have even had four months. I knew it. That was probably at two and half years...

After some point in time, I'd tell everybody that I'm a walking miracle ... I'm a walking miracle! I was diagnosed with four to six months—and it turns out even that was optimistic.

MRS. GATZ: As far as knowing when he was cured, every time you went to get an MRI you were still naturally worried until you got the results. He was able to get the results immediately since he knew everyone who was ordering and giving the tests. They would tell him right away what it showed and that it was clear. The feeling we would get when we heard this was unbelievable. Especially since his partner was with him during the surgery and took the tumor to the lab. The night of the surgery my son and I had dinner with him and he said that they thought they got all the cancer but that it would be back in six months. That is the last thing you want to hear after a six-hour surgery—that this will only buy you six months! But he had not heard of Jeanne Jugan either (laughs). He wasn't even a Catholic ... but he called it a miracle.

I have always been a person to panic and think the worst. But yet I had this positive feeling. I said, "Ed, you are going to get better." That had to come from someplace because it didn't come from within me. And I had so much faith in Father's connection with Blessed Jeanne Jugan and his prayers... so I'll add mine, I thought. There was this feeling all along—this positive feeling—that came into a person who shouldn't have been positive in view of the scientific facts.

LSP: Is it true that several years passed between the time of your cure and when you contacted the Little Sisters of the Poor about it? What finally made you contact the Little Sisters?

DOCTOR: We were at a Catholic dinner for education and I sat next to a monsignor. And we were just visiting and I told him the story and he was pressing me for more and more information. He asked if we had documented this. And that began the process. We recently saw him and he does not recall the conversation... Fr. McGloin also said we should get moving on it. First I wanted to get my medical records... This is thirteen years after the fact and things had gone from video to digital and they hadn't used the old system for years... So we fired up the old machine and it wouldn't work. So I couldn't get the records... It was so frustrating I just kicked the machine and it turned on. So we started to print. They said it wasn't very good—but it was readable... I had enough of the significant data that would bear on the case...

MRS. GATZ: Why didn't Fr. McGloin suggest that we document the case earlier? He was not one to suggest or to order. He just sat back and let God handle everything. He kept saying to us that he knew she was a Saint. Even after the proceedings started... "We know she is a Saint but this will be God's will," he said. He was one to give advice, to suggest, but he was always in the background ... so humble, like Jeanne Jugan, from what I have read. We never thought Ed would be the miracle that would promote her cause to sainthood.

Then one Mother's Day I was in the kitchen. This was after the monsignor had suggested that we document the case. I was with two consecrated women from Regnum Christi who were staying at our house that weekend. I told them about the miracle and Ed's healing. I said, "I must get a hold of the Little Sisters of the Poor." They looked at me so puzzled and said, "Well call Mother Marguerite in Kansas City. We just saw her" [The Little Sisters had offered them hospitality] They were stunned that we didn't know about them being in Kansas City. So I called Mother Marguerite and she was very excited.

DOCTOR: So many things that happened, people have no recollection of saying ... an occult neoplasm ... the dermatologist doesn't remember telling me that. When I first started getting those bumps on my hands I thought they would go away but they didn't. I went to see Doctor Regan, the dermatologist, and he started to take some liquid nitrogen to freeze them and finally just threw everything in the basket. He said, "You have to see an internist. You have an occult neoplasm." In just seconds! I said "Jim, you really know how to make a guy's day." He said, "I'm serious!" I said, "I know you are, but I don't know how you can make a diagnosis like that." Everybody—every doctor who saw me from that day forward—would look at my hands and say, "Nobody can make the diagnosis from that." ... Dr. Regan was a holy man. I think he was moved by the Holy Spirit to make that diagnosis... Monsignor was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to tell us to document it...

LSP: How have you been involved in the canonization process since then?

MRS. GATZ: Mother Marguerite was such a delightful person to talk to on the phone. She told me to write her a letter and explain everything. So I sat down and gave her the details—in a sketchy way—but it told the story. So then she called Ed and they talked. Then I felt more and more that this could be the one—the miracle. So we both wrote her letters. And I believe she called Father McGloin. February 21 was the date of the letter he wrote her. February 21 is significant because that was the day Pope Benedict announced the date for the canonization!

God's hand was in everything. It has been such an awakening to see the Holy Spirit operating in the different steps. There is no question about it. In a way you just feel like you are helpless, but the Holy Spirit takes over. In his own time and in his own way, God takes care of all!

DOCTOR: I think I was directed, even before this cancer happened, to do a masters degree, PhD, MD, a post doctorate—and on and on—to be involved in the faculty, in the medical center... In other words, I had to write and publish and go through editorial boards. I had experience to know the questions that would arise from the data and to try to anticipate them... I had those gifts from God before I ever became ill. So I had to apply these gifts to my own problems.

I had to fill out a questionnaire about my cure; it was a simple questionnaire really. But the questions were unanswerable to me. I didn't want to misrepresent anything. So Jeanne said, "Let's take it to Father McGloin," and he helped with the answers... In ten minutes it was over.

MRS. GATZ: The questionnaire was such a stumbling block for Ed, but Father McGloin made quick work of it. I felt it was the devil. He was always there throwing up roadblocks. Ed had done things on our computer at home regarding documentation. And it had never happened before, but the whole thing was wiped out and Ed had to start all over. There were real stumbling blocks along the way but it did not stop us...

LSP: What can you tell us about Father McGloin?

MRS. GATZ: I was the one who knew him first when I was a student at Creighton University. At the age of 19 I was taking his Latin class. You couldn't help but just fall in love with him immediately. I think it was the only eight o'clock class that I looked forward to. He was such a holy man. Every time you were near him you just felt his holiness, his devotion to his duties and his students, and his love of God and his Jesuit order. I kept up with him... We just feel so blessed.

DOCTOR: I knew him through Jeanne after we were married. I might have met him on campus but took no classes from him or had no real interactions with him. But I really got to know him better when he took a liking to us and started to come to the house. Just unannounced...

LSP: Surely Jeanne Jugan and the Little Sisters of the Poor have become better known to you since 1989. Can you share what has struck you or touched you the most about the person and/or work of Jeanne Jugan?

MRS. GATZ: When I read about her life I almost wept ... I thought about this woman who carried someone down the street and up the steps to her own bed. I thought about her love and care for the helpless and the concerns of the elderly. Ed and I have always felt that children—children's hospitals—get the majority of the attention. And the elderly get little. We have been concerned for people who are older and who can't get around so well. Like Ed's aunt who required watching over because she had no children. And you can't forget all that your elders have



Rev. Richard McGloin, S.J.

done for you. I know when my mother lost her leg from diabetes... We just felt we could not do enough for her because of the wonderful woman she was. So I felt an affinity immediately for Jeanne Jugan. And then when I met the Little Sisters of the Poor there was such radiance about them, the warm welcome we received, the spirituality, the kind, loving care of all those people in their home. I can't express it. There was such a serenity about it—peace, love of God and spirituality—I just felt like I didn't want to leave this place. I want to stay here!

DOCTOR: I kind of felt like Jeanne Jugan was a Mother Teresa, but she came 100 years earlier. She was way ahead of her time.

LSP: What are your sentiments today, as the date of her canonization is announced?

MRS. GATZ: It's almost disbelief that it has finally come. This date, this time in everyone's life. There is just no way. We are awe-struck. It's tough to grasp. And everyone we have told, they just shake their head. They say they have not heard news like this in their entire life. I know what they mean.

DOCTOR: For years before we documented this there were physicians on staff who would see me at the hospital where I practiced. They would say, "Hey, there is the miracle doctor!" They knew it was a miracle. And the nurses who would see me around town would say the same thing. "You're the miracle doctor." Once when they were moving things around in the hospital they found a card. They had had a Mass said for our needs and intentions before my surgery and all the wonderful nurses had signed the card...

MRS. GATZ: We just thank God for our Catholic spiritual connections. It is such a gift. People who don't have this can't imagine what it's like to have this common goal and this sense of direction that we are all striving to get to heaven...

LSP: Will you be attending the canonization?

DOCTOR: God Willing. (laughter) If Mother Marguerite can make it, then I can make it!

Doctor and Mrs. Gatz will be attending the canonization festivities in Rome in October. They will be joined by Mother Marguerite, who is now superior of Jeanne Jugan Residence in San Pedro, California. Doctor and Mrs. Gatz spend time in southern California each winter, another Providential blessing! Father Richard McGloin, S.J., passed away in 2005 and will be celebrating the canonization with Jeanne Jugan ... in heaven!