

*He Said... She Said:*  
**NEW HEART PROCEDURE HAS TUPELO PAIR  
FEELING BETTER THAN EVER**

TUPELO, Miss.—A twist of fate brought two hearts together and created a lasting friendship.

**Her Story**

In June 2004, Shelly Smith suffered her first transient ischemic attack (TIA), a mild stroke that often precedes a more major one. Sure enough, that TIA was followed by many more over the next two years. “They would come one after another,” she said. “It was like they were having a party in my brain.”

In January 2007, she suffered a double-whammy—a heart attack and full-blown stroke. It was then doctors discovered that the 59-year-old Tupelo woman had atrial septal defect, a common heart disorder.

“The heart is divided into four separate chambers. The upper chambers, or atria, are divided by a wall called the atrial septum,” explains Dr. Barry Bertolet, a cardiologist on the NMMC Heart Institute’s medical staff. “An ASD is a hole caused by incomplete growth of that wall before birth. With ASD, blood flows through the hole and causes more blood to be pumped to the lungs, which is inefficient for the circulation to the body.”

Left untreated ASD can cause not only stroke and heart attack, but also pulmonary hypertension (high blood pressure in the lungs), congestive heart failure (weakening of the heart muscle) and abnormal heart rhythm. Until recently, surgery was the only option to correct ASD.

Dr. Bertolet recommended closing the hole with a new procedure approved for adults by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in fall 2006. NMMC is one of only a few hospitals in Mississippi to offer the procedure, where the cardiologist inserts a catheter through the femoral artery in the patient’s leg and uses a device known as the Amplatzer® to close the ASD.

“The Amplatzer is a small metal disk that works almost like a button to hold the hole shut,” Dr. Bertolet said. “It closes the hole immediately, and the person’s own tissue grows over it eventually. This device was actually developed for kids and then ‘biggie-sized’ to work for adults.”

Smith became one of the first patients to have the new procedure done at NMMC. “Dr. Bertolet talked with me at length and made me feel very comfortable beforehand,” she said. “I did exceptionally well.”

### **His Story**

Fast-forward a few months to spring 2007.

Bob Stanley, 70, of Tupelo recognized the symptoms of a stroke—numbness and tingling on one side of the body, blurred vision—and knew to get immediate help. A friend drove him to North Mississippi Medical Center where tests determined he had suffered a TIA.

Tests also revealed the culprit, atrial septal defect. “The doctor told me I had a hole in my heart, and that it needed to be repaired or something more serious might occur,” Stanley says.

Stanley works in housekeeping for the Mall at Barnes Crossing, a job that requires nonstop walking for seven hours or more. Before moving to Tupelo, he was a professional hunting guide for 20 years in Alaska, an even more strenuous job hiking through rugged terrain. He has always been athletic—wrestling and playing football when he was young, and still lifts weights most every day.

“The doctor asked me if I hadn’t noticed getting tired easily,” he says. “I just assumed you were supposed to feel tired.”

As with Smith, Dr. Bertolet recommended closing the hole using the Amplatzer® and Stanley consented, although he was anxious.

One day when Stanley was working at the Mall at Barnes Crossing, he struck up a conversation with a lady who politely asked how he was doing. When he told her about his upcoming heart procedure and his trepidation, she told him about her friend, Shelly Smith, who had recently had the same procedure and was doing wonderfully. The friend arranged for Smith to call Stanley to offer reassurance.

“I told Bob, I’ll be there when you go to sleep and when you wake up, I’ll be there,” Smith said. Unfortunately Smith was unable to uphold her end of the bargain as complications from lupus and multiple sclerosis landed her in the hospital’s Critical Care Unit at the time.

Like most patients, Stanley was discharged from the hospital the morning after the procedure and felt great. “I came home the next day and mopped the floor, did three loads of laundry, cooked supper and did some light exercises that night,” he said.

Stanley never even missed a day of work. “I went to work my next scheduled day. I felt good and I couldn’t see any reason to stay home,” he said. “I have more energy and I feel stronger. Life’s a lot brighter now than it was.”

He even made time to thank a new friend. “When I moved out of CCU to a room, Bob showed up with a huge bouquet of the most beautiful flowers I’ve ever seen in my life,” she says. “He said ‘even though you weren’t there physically, I knew you were there. If you hadn’t talked me into having the procedure, I’m not sure I would have done it.’”

According to Smith, a former radio personality who enjoys writing, painting and singing, the procedure turned out to be more than just a lifesaver... it led to “a real heart connection” and a friendship for life.

### **Other Indications**

The Amplatzer procedure is also used to repair patent foramen ovale (PFO), another common heart defect. “The foramen ovale is a flap in the atrial septum during fetal development that allows blood to travel through the heart without going to the lungs,” Dr. Bertolet explains. “In the womb, a baby doesn’t use his own lungs; he receives oxygen-rich blood through the umbilical cord. So blood can travel through the baby’s heart and bypass his lungs.”

The flap normally closes shortly after birth, but if it does not, a patent foramen ovale (PFO) results and can cause strokes. Until recently, surgery has been the only option for correcting PFO.

“Research into PFO closure indicates that there may also be some connection between PFO and migraine headaches,” Dr. Bertolet added. “People with migraine headaches who have had PFO closure for other reasons often reported having fewer migraines or none at all after the procedure, so more research is being done to determine that relationship.”

For more information about services offered by the NMMC Heart Institute, call 1-800-THE DESK (1-800-843-3375) or visit [www.nmhs.net/heart\\_institute](http://www.nmhs.net/heart_institute).