

From *The Baltimore Sun*, Thursday, Dec. 4, 2003:

For author, a cloud with a silver lining

By Diane Mikulus

MANY NOVELISTS draw upon life experiences when writing books.

What inspired Glenwood resident **Ed Cassity** to write a novel was his brush with death. Cassity's soon-to-be-published book, *The Silver Cord*, focuses on the question of what happens to us after death.

Writing under the pen name Johnson Edwards, Cassity used his experience to build a story that explores what might be.

"In 1985, I was stricken by non-Hodgkin's lymphoma," Cassity, 57, began. "At one stage there, I was in pretty bad shape and was told I might have a year to live."

Cassity underwent chemotherapy, which put him into remission within six months. But the lymphoma returned in 1991.

The recommended treatment was an autologous bone marrow transplant. In December 1992, he had bone marrow removed from his body. It was treated with heavy chemotherapy and a week later put back into his body.

After the procedure, Cassity's body temperature soared to 108 degrees, and he nearly died.

"I felt like my whole body was leaving this Earth," he said.

But he survived. As he recovered in Johns Hopkins Hospital, Cassity thought about his experience.

"What's really going to happen the last time I close my eyes?" he asked.

He began writing in the hospital. After several years filling dozens of legal pads, Cassity typed the story on a computer.

"The characters in the story began to mature, and the story evolved into an epic story of love, tragedy and a euphoric ending," he said. The *Silver Cord* was born through my own personal experiences where I stared death in the eye more than once."

The title comes from a quote from the Bible, in *Ecclesiastes* 12:5-7:

The man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before the silver cord is severed...and the dust returns to the ground.

Cassity's main characters, Bryan and Mandy, are high school sweethearts in the early 1990s in a small east Texas town. When Bryan is seriously injured in a high school championship baseball game, his heart stops. His experience is described in this excerpt from the book:

The sky is deep blue and cloudless. Bryan feels himself ascending, floating, yet there's no pain, no fright, only a profound sense of well-being.

Brian is puzzled by what is going on and doesn't realize he has left his body on the field, although he knows someone there is seriously hurt because he sees the medical staff working on him. A couple of minutes pass before he realizes that it is him.

But this truth doesn't disturb his sense of well-being. It grows him

stronger in fact: blissful delight. He hears music, country music, and then he's moving, taking off, a tremendous skyward surge.

Bryan recovers, but the experience affects him and Mandy and helps determine their life paths.

"It's a marriage between religion and science," Cassity said. "Everyone's got their own interpretation of eternity. It was important to me to try to have a good side to where we're ultimately going to reside."

Because he works full time managing his insurance agency in Ellicott City, it took several years for Cassity to draft, rewrite and refine his novel.

"I wrote a lot at night. Then I would rise early to do a page a day," he said.

Cassity received guidance from his brother, who is in the publishing business. After securing an editor in New Hampshire and a publisher in Pittsburgh, he is in the final stage of going to press.

He expects the book to be available early next month.

He says it will be sold in major chain stores and on the Web.

He also plans to hold book-signings at bookstores and libraries around the country.

Having owned an insurance agency for 30 years, Cassity seems poised for a career change. Writing is uppermost in his mind.

"It's just my passion. It's what I want to do and if it works, it works," he said. "I've got a bunch of stories I want to tell."

Cassity lives in Glenwood with his wife of 34 years, **Linda**. He has four grown children and five grandchildren living in the area.