

The Living vs The Drunk Driver

Coming back from the brink of death

A real life drama written and lived

by

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Authors note: Throughout this article, I make reference to the "battle." I use this military term in place of the word "accident" because like MADD, I don't feel that any accident took place. The other driver made a very deliberate decision to drink to the point of intoxication (BAL .16), steal a van, and then drive. None of this was accidental.

39 hours before the battle.

It's the Friday before my Army Reserve weekend and as usual, I am big time busy trying to finish up my work at my civilian job before catching my flight to Fort Knox (Louisville) Kentucky. After 23+ years of service to my country, it still isn't any easier to juggle two careers. Sometimes I wonder if it's time for retirement. After all, the military is basically a young person's profession. Nah, I'm young. 43 years young.

24 hours before the battle.

The flight to Louisville was uneventful and I go to the rental car desk to pick up my car. They say that my travel agent made reservations for a sub-compact and not an intermediate size car. I hesitate for a moment. It's not that far from Louisville to Fort Knox so I could make due with a sub-compact, however, I have a lot of training materials with me in addition to my luggage so I ask the agent if I could upgrade to larger car. She says yes, and unknown to me, I have just extended my life span from 1 more day to many more years. I would have been crushed to death in a sub-compact car.

18 Hours before the battle.

Saturday morning arrives much too early after my flight and hour long drive the night before. However, I get myself out of bed and get ready for a good training day with my students.

7 hours before the battle.

A good day of training with just a few minor problems. Now it's time to get into some civilian clothes and go visit my girlfriend (Patty) in Louisville. I hate these long distance relationships but it's always nice to see her again. I make a mental note to plan more non-military trips to Louisville.

1 hour before the battle.

After visiting with some mutual friends, I drop Patty off at her house. I think about asking her to come out to Fort Knox for weekend but think better of it. I'm tired and so is she. In addition I have to get up at five am so I really would not be able to spend much time with her. Unknown to both Patty and myself, her life span just got extended from one hour to many more years. The passenger side of the rental car was totally demolished. She never would have survived and I never would have forgiven myself even though I wasn't at fault.

Minutes before the battle.

I have the Dixie Highway in sight. It's just a few more miles now and I'll be in my on-post quarters and sound asleep. I have a big day tomorrow. Little do I realize just how big and life changing it's going to be.

The battle.

What's that noise I hear? And why is it so dark and cold? "Mr. Volstad." "Do you hear me?" "Wake up." "Do you know where you are?" I'm confused. What's going on I wonder. "You got hit head on by a drunk driver," the voice tells me over the sound of an air compressor and the jaws-of-life. They are cutting me out of what's left of my rental car. All memory fades at this point.

The victory.

Consciousness come back slowly. I start to realize that I'm in a hospital room. I have tubes and wires hooked into my body and metal pins and braces on my left leg and arm. I later discover from my doctor that I was in the OR for 6+ hours and have massive fractures to my pelvis, legs, left wrist, right elbow, and some injury to my brain. I determine to take one day at a time and to make it back! I refuse to give up or give in to the thoughts or people that try to tell me that I'll never be normal again.

The long march home.

It's now been 8 months since my battle and victory. I've gone through a lot of pain and still have much therapy to go through in the future. My first reaction to this battle was what will happen to my military career? I'm pleased to report that I'm back in uniform with the 100th Division (IT) and training soldiers. I started back into my civilian job the day after Labor Day and look forward to the daily challenges of my

job. And after spending five months in the hospital and much outpatient therapy, I have now started to walk again without the need of a wheelchair or crutch. I can't say enough good things about the doctors, nurses and therapists at University Hospital in Louisville as well as the VA Medical Center. Super folks.

Epilog.

I have found that keeping a positive attitude in the face of adversity is essential. I've always made lemonade out of the lemons that life sometimes gives us. I'm a big fan of authors Zig Ziglar and Tom Peters with their positive outlook on life and in the area of leadership. I applied those "Don't give up" principles to this battle. I try hard not to think to myself, "Why me?" I'm alive and in a lot better condition than other people who have gone through a similar battle. Pity parties never help your physical condition.

And lastly I feel that some good will come of this battle. I have had an opportunity to tell my story to many people and they are always amazed at my progress. I would hope however, that they would learn the devastating effects of a drunk driver. Far too many people in this country have experienced what I have experienced - or worse! Please everyone ... Listen up ... Learn from this ... IF YOU DRINK, DON'T DRIVE!