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and wife Jean Elizabeth (Liz)

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October 14, 2015

I agreed on Wednesday morning to drive my wife, Liz, to Lucy's Pilates apparel in Burlingame. I did an aqua-fitness class in the morning and computer work in the afternoon. We left in my car about 4:00. After we parked, I put Jody, our dog, on leash and we walked to Lucy's. Liz entered the shop and I walked Jody about 3,000 steps.

I poked my head into the Lucy shop at exactly 5:00pm and checked my pedometer. It was at 10,560 steps for the day. I had passed my daily fitness goal of 10,000 steps. Liz and I left the store, turned right and walked a short distance to the zebra striped crosswalk. I was on the left. I held Jody's leash in my right hand and the dog was a step ahead of me. Liz was on my right. I looked both left and right and saw no cars in motion. I am absolutely sure.

After about three steps, a large dark car was upon us from nowhere. My first flash of thought was Jody would get crushed. I yanked hard on the leash and flung her backward. At the same instant I felt the car's right tire run over my left lower leg. I remember that my left heel was planted and the car passed over the leg. I spun like a top on my right heel and my injured leg pointed away from traffic. I sensed immediately my leg was broken by the throbbing pain and odd angle of my foot.

At the moment of impact, I heard Liz cry out in pain. The right front bumper had struck her and flung her into the air. The car hit her left leg and she landed on the pavement on the right side of her body.

I stayed on the ground at the urging of onlookers, cheek to pavement. I could not see Liz, but people told me she had survived the impact but she was in pain. The dog was safe and in the lap of a bystander.

Police and emergency services arrived quickly. A policeman took personal information from my driver's license. The paramedics removed my shoes. Then my pants, shirt, and trousers were cut off using scissors. I lay on the street in my underpants. It was embarrassing. The policeman said to onlookers, "Give the man some privacy." The paramedics put both me and Liz on stretchers with heads and necks immobile as a precaution. We both had IVs on our right arms. Once in the back of the ambulance, I was given morphine. The travel to SF General was bumpy with starts and stops. The jostling needle in my arm caused extreme pain.

Liz and I arrived at SF General Hospital about 6:00pm. Both of us were x-rayed. Because Liz had no broken bones and was able to walk, she was discharged from the hospital about 10:00pm. My left leg was severely broken and I was placed in a emergency bed awaiting surgery. It was a lonely and painful Wednesday night with an IV, morphine drip, and catheter.

October 15, 2015

About 6:30am on Thursday, I was wheeled into the operating room at SF General. The surgery was about ten hours because of the difficulty in repairing the multiple fractures in my left tibia and fibula. A titanium rod was implanted in my tibia and a titanium clamp held my fibula together. I will have this metal in my leg for the rest of my life. Because of the great swelling, an eight-inch wound was left open on the outside of my left calf. This was the fasciotomy to combat compartment syndrome of my lower leg.

After I left the operating room, Liz was waiting in my hospital room. I was still on the morphine drip and catheter for that evening. I was uncomfortable, immobile, and in agony. I was given injections of Enoxaparin to resist blood clotting. A vacuum was placed on my broken leg to remove excess drainage from my open wound. A compression pump pulsated on my right leg to assist blood circulation. All this was very uncomfortable and made it difficult to rest.

October 16 to 20, 2015

From Friday to Tuesday, I remained in the SF General trauma ward. I was in a room with a second person which made it difficult to rest and to sleep. The Enoxaparin injections continued every day. On Friday, October 16, the catheter and intravenous arm drip were removed and I was given Oxycodone to relieve pain and Docusate Sodium to loosen bowels.

On Monday morning, October 19, I received a second surgery to close the open wound. This surgery lasted about two hours. The vacuum and compression pumps were then removed. I hoped to be released on Monday, but I was unable to use the crutches. I was covered in sweat after I tried to walk a few steps. I nearly collapsed and a nurse had to push a chair behind me to catch me.

I hoped to be released on Tuesday morning, but I nearly fainted as I tried to walk down the hallway. Finally on Tuesday evening I was stable enough to walk the hallway and walk a few stairs. I was discharged from SF General about 9:00pm and a friend drove me to San Mateo. I struggled up the stairs into my bedroom about 10:00pm on Tuesday, October 20.

October 21 to 31, 2015

These eleven days were difficult because my wife, Liz, was also injured in the accident. My suffering increased because I was not able to assist her in household chores or comfort her in her pain. We have 12 stairs from the ground floor to the second floor where my bedroom was located. It was a trial just to get up and down these steps.

I could not participate in any of the activities that gave me pleasure. It was my habit to exercise at the San Mateo Athletic Club almost every day. I could not do that. I used to walk my dog, Jody, twice a day. I had to hire a dog walker. I once walked or hiked with Liz a few times a week. All that was gone and I felt like a miserable shut-in.

Friends visited and brought by food, but it was stressful being confined to my bed about 22 of 24 hours every day. The other two hours I sat in a chair and used the bathroom. On doctor's orders, I could not drive. I had to rely on friends to take me places, like my weekly men's group, church, and doctor appointments. I had to sit in a wheel chair at these events and endure continued questioning about my injury and treatments.

On Saturday, October 24, my wife noticed blood on the heel of my left foot. Friends drove us to the emergency room at Kaiser Permanente (KP) in Redwood City. The doctor examined my injury and advised us to keep an eye on the fasciotomy that was still oozing blood.

During these eleven days, I wore a big uncomfortable boot on my left leg all day long even while sleeping. I gave myself ten once-a-day injections of Enoxaparin. These self-injections were a challenge for me. Because KP was slow to provide someone for my personal care, I hired a helper out of pocket to help me with bathing. I was embarrassed to have him wash my private parts. He came by every other day for two weeks until I could bathe myself. I took two of the prescribed Oxycodone pills just before sleeping so the throbbing pain and clumsy boot would not keep me awake during the night.

I have two grandchildren that live in Palm Beach, Florida. I had purchased non-refundable airline tickets to be with them and my son over the Halloween weekend. I looked forward to trick or treating with them. I was depressed that I had to cancel this family time because of my injury.

November 2015

My injury continued to heal, but I was still confined to my room most of the time. Friends continued to drop by, bringing meals and walking our dog. I tried to get outside every other day; one day go to church, one day to go shopping, one day go to a medical appointment. My miserable day inside, I called my "pajama day". On November 4, I saw the orthopedist at KP --

Lori Shaw, a Physician's Assistant. She removed the sutures even though my fasciotomy was still oozing blood. I think I will have a permanent scar where the skin did not heal together.

I took the last of my Oxycodone pills on November 6. After that I had trouble sleeping through the night because of the throbbing pain in my leg as I moved from side to side. Over-the-counter drugs helped some, but it was difficult to sleep at night.

Kaiser Permanente provided a contracted Physical Therapist to visit my home. She made six visits about four days apart. She showed me five in-room exercises I could do to aid healing and maintain some fitness. The exercises were challenging, but necessary.

My son visited on November 20. He drove me to SF General Hospital for a follow-up appointment with my emergency room surgeon. However, Dr. Morshed was out of the office and this trip into the city was a waste of time.

Liz and I both had to cancel our plans to travel to Portland over the Thanksgiving holiday. We were sad because both my family (three sisters and a brother) and her family (a sister) looked forward to this family gathering.

On November 27, I contacted Lori Shaw at KP. This was six weeks after my surgery. She said I could bare 50% weight on my left leg and use a single crutch rather than two. She also said that I could drive my car.

November was a season of intense pain and continued suffering for both Liz and me. We often winced when we moved our limbs. We had difficulty moving up and down our stairs. We were both "stir crazy", deprived of our favorite outside activities. We spent hours each day dealing with hospitals and insurance companies. We declined invitations to go out for dinner because sitting for more than few minutes was too painful. Our intimacy and sex life suffered. As a couple we were enduring this ordeal as best we could.

December 2015

On December 2, I visited the KP in Redwood City for my second appointment with Lori Shaw. There was good news and bad news. After examining new x-rays, she said my injury was healing well. She also said the breaks were severe and the biggest bone break would take longer than normal to fill the voids. She showed me the bone growth on the x-ray and the space needed yet to be filled. She said I could use sitting weight machines at the gym (San Mateo Athletic Club) but I could not use the swimming pool until the scab on my fasciotomy healed completely. I would not require further home physical therapy, but would receive physical therapy at KP when I was off crutches. That was my only medical appointment in the month of December.

My brother, Frank, flew down from Vancouver, WA, to visit me from December 12 to 15. We spent some time in Half Moon Bay, but getting around was difficult. He did most of the driving and we stopped off at the coast. I saw the waves, but sadly, I was unable to navigate the beach with my crutch.

In the past, Liz and I would walk around downtown San Francisco and enjoy the holiday season. We spent Christmas 2015 confined to our home and still nursing our injuries.

January 2016

Finally, in January the last remaining scab fell from my fasciotomy wound and I was able to use the pool at the College of San Mateo for exercise and therapy. I made my third appointment with Lori Shaw. The x-ray revealed that the fracture was not yet healed. She said to give the healing process more time. During this visit, I received a walking cane and began using that rather than a single crutch. She advised me to begin phase two physical therapy—recover my ability to walk normally.

I had my first physical therapy session with Peter Shah at Kaiser Permanente on January 25. He measured my leg, ankle, and toe movement and gave me a list of exercises to assist me in walking and to overcome my pronounced limp.

February 2016

I had my second and third PT appointments with Peter Shah at the KP in Redwood City. He coached me on exercises in the equipment room. I explained I still experienced pain when walking on my left leg. I could not do a heel lift from my left foot.

I traveled to Florida from February 11 to 15 to see my son and grandchildren. I required a wheelchair to get from the ticket counter, through security, and to the proper gate. I was disheartened that I could not run with the kids: Lorenzo is 7 and Gia is 5. As my son saw me limping and struggling, he said “Dad, this is the first time I experienced you as an old man.” I was hurt and said, “I’m not old, I’m crippled. And that’s not my fault.”

March 2016

As March began, I put away my cane and began to walk without assistance. On March 7 and 8, Liz and I went to Capitola for our first getaway since the accident. In the past we walked the trails and beaches, marveling at the wonders of nature. We were both sad that our walks were short and we could not hike under the redwoods or along the beach in Aptos.

In March I had five appointments with various healthcare specialists. On March 14, I visited Peter Shah for the fourth and final time. He took measurements on the weight machines and said my left quad muscle was about 80% of my right, my left calf was at 50%, and my left big toe was at 50%. He said it might take a full year for the two legs to be equal again. I received my final list of PT exercises.

On March 16, I visited Lori Shaw. The new x-ray revealed little progress in the bone healing process. She advised me to have patience saying it may take a few more months for the bone parts to join together.

On March 17, I visited my primary care doctor at KP in San Mateo, Dr. Daniel Teng. We talked about my injury. He examined my leg. I asked about the swelling, scars, and deformity. He advised me that the left leg will never match the right leg. By cutting the fascia around the tibia, the leg will always have a bulge. The severe scarring will never go away and the numbness/lack of skin feeling around the fasciotomy will probably be permanent. All of this news was difficult to hear.

Because my bone was not healing, I decided to seek out the opinion of an outside orthopedic surgeon. I visited the office of Dr. Ben Busfield on Friday, March 25. After examining the x-rays from KP, he determined that I had a “nonunion”, that is, the broken bone will never join and heal. He said a second surgery was a distinct possibility. The operation would involve removing the existing metal rod, screws, and clamps; then reaming out the tibia to insert a larger rod. As he spoke, my heart sank. I cringed at the thought of going through all this pain and suffering a second time. O God, please no! This day was Good Friday but it was not good for me.

I was very discouraged over the Easter weekend and on Monday I made an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon from KP. The next day, March 29, Dr. Shannon McDonald at KP in Redwood City examined the x-rays and my leg. She confirmed that the bone break was not healing and a second surgery might be necessary. She said the nonunion was due to the extreme trauma of the original injury. The leg was crushed by a car tire. And by my age. I'm sixty-six years old. Dr. McDonald prescribed a bone stimulator that may help the bone to heal. I am hoping to get that soon.

April 2016

Today is April 1, 2016, five and one half months after the injury. I will speak to my leg function, leg pain, and leg appearance as it is today. I will also speak to my lifestyle and dread of the future.

Leg function. I walk with a pronounced limp. The best estimate is that my left upper leg is at 80%, left lower leg at 50% and left foot at 50%. I cannot do a heel lift from my left leg. My left knee has full range of motion but has lost strength over the past five and a half months. I do not have full dorsiflexion in my left ankle. I usually walk with a flat left foot which gives me an abnormal gait and makes it impossible to run and difficult to walk down stairs or slopes. The best medical advice is that it may take a full year to regain full function.

Leg pain. I still have trouble sleeping and sometimes awake in pain. I cannot kneel on my left knee. I always experience pain when I first stand up to walk, either from a chair or from bed. I always take the first twenty steps gingerly and with a struggle. It gets easier after that. I experience aches at the site of the nonunion. When I walk for several minutes, my ankle and knee begin to hurt. I am reminded of this trauma with every step I take.

Leg appearance. My left leg will never look and feel like my right leg. There is a long ugly scar along the outside of my left calf. There are also smaller scars where surgical incisions were made. The fasciotomy deformed the leg, so that even after all swelling has passed, the leg will bulge in places. I have lost surface feeling in the area of the scar. The nerve damage is about 2 inches by 10 inches.

Lifestyle. Before the injury I led a very active life. In the thirty days prior to the bone-crushing accident, I was in Rwanda for a mission and in Greece for a vacation. A month earlier I camped in my tent and hiked with my wife. I worked out in my gym five or six days a week. On the morning of the injury, I enjoyed a one-hour aqua-fitness class. All of that was taken from me completely for the first few months and is only now returning. Every day when I plan my activities, I must take into account my physical limitations.

Dread of the future. I am not sure what the future holds for me. I have to take as real the possibility of a second surgery—as traumatic as the first. I gave away the toilet seat lift and the walker. Should I try to get them back? I put the crutches and big black boot in storage. Will I need to dig them out again? Will I again spend week after week in misery and room confinement? I hope not, but if my bone doesn't heal that will be my future.

And all of this because Michael Irusalimsky was careless while driving his car down Burlingame Avenue at 5 pm on October 14, 2015.