

Sharing **OUR** Recovery

A quarterly newsletter dedicated to support victims, survivors, caregivers and loved ones of motor vehicle collisions.

SUMMER EDITION 2022

ISSUE 19

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Editor in Chief - Dawne McKay

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Connecting Crash Survivors
One Step at a Time

Hello Sunshine & Warm Weather!

Summer is a time many of us look forward to all year long because the longer days of sunshine allow everyone to enjoy more time outside. Whether you are able to sit out on your porch, go for a short walk, fill a bird feeder or plant a few flowers, these moments can bring such joy and should be on your "to do list" this summer as you recover.

It's always a pleasure to speak with so many brave survivors, businesses and organizations that support crash survivors, and we are so pleased to share some exciting news with you! Last month, the Crash Support Network was nominated for the **Greatest Impact on the Community Award** from the Ramara Chamber of Commerce. What an honour it was to receive this award and the Crash Support Network is truly grateful for this acknowledgement.

We always look forward to sharing a new issue of *Sharing Our Recovery* with you and if you know someone that could benefit from reading our issues, please help us spread the word! In this issue you will hear how a life-changing crash left a man full of love, you will also hear how it is so important to have a team of people who only want what's best for you and your journey, we introduce you to an inspirational man who went from paralysis to the podium, you will hear the 5 steps to navigating medical decisions and how a woman is sharing her recovery to encourage others on their healing journey.

The Crash Support Network is so grateful to *our sponsors* for their continued support. Sponsors are not only helping survivors find their way as they recover from a motor vehicle crash, but they are also allowing us to maintain our advocacy work and provide this valuable resource.

As always, we are thinking of every victim and survivor of a motor vehicle crash that is recovering and we hope that our *Sharing Our Recovery* newsletters bring you some comfort to know that you are not alone in your journey.

- Dawne

Life-Changing Crash Leaves Man Full of Love

Submitted by Kevin MacGregor



Who knew how little control we really have of our lives? I had so many plans for myself as a young 25 year old. I was working on my master's degree in computer science and planning to work overseas in Asia. I loved to travel and learn about other cultures. I had recently returned from a great adventure in London England working at a pub, living with friends and touring the UK. I was doing so well---until the crash.

It really was not much of a crash: car versus pedestrian has a predictable outcome. I was celebrating my birthday with a few friends and it was time to go home. We needed to cross a busy Richmond Street in London Ontario and a nearby crosswalk was our ticket to the other side. We pressed the button, waited for traffic to stop and I led the way across the street. Unfortunately, a young-woman on her way to see her boyfriend did not see the lit crosswalk or the stopped cars and I could not see her so we collided.

Her bumper hit my lower left leg, breaking it badly and propelling me upward, my right torso hit her windshield, breaking most of my right ribs and four of my vertebrae, then I was airborne for about twenty feet, landing on my head.

Of course, I have no memory of the incident. No memory of the ambulance, the CT scan, or the emergency brain surgery. I do remember being on a ventilator and family visiting me in intensive care. I remember that after a few days I had surgery to repair my leg.

I will never forget going to visit the neurosurgeon for a follow-up appointment several months after the crash. I was very emotional: I thanked him for saving my life, and expressed the gratitude of my family.

"Don't thank me," he said, "I have no idea how you survived. Half a dozen times all we could do was sit you up and pray. You are my miracle boy! Anyone who lived through that is alive for a reason."

Rehabilitation was easy for my physical injuries compared to rehabilitation for my brain injury. My body took several years of physiotherapy, two more surgeries on my leg and one surgery to repair my back, fusing two levels of vertebrae together. Like I said, easy.

Brain injury on the other hand is completely different. Understanding the injury, getting quality rehabilitation, attempting to return to work or school are all major issues that involve the risk of loss of self. At the same time watching old friends fade away into their ever-evolving lives, graduating, getting jobs and worse, moving away, begins the journey of isolation.

As the years went by, I became disconnected from society. I was never able to return to school or work as the basic necessities of living were more than enough for me to deal with. Navigating a grocery store was now a major challenge.

I never was able to feel part of society again. Being a young man that was unemployable did not gain me any friends. Struggling in busy environments and needing to avoid malls, outdoor festivals, and large groups was also very isolating. Having no goals other than basic survival was soul crushing.

Fortunately, somehow, I did manage to get married and father two children. My focus became being a stay-at-home Dad. This new role didn't solve my isolation issues as Dads were not welcome at parenting courses, baby groups, moms' clubs, or playground socials. But I had a role, and based on my experience with brain injury, a goal: understand my children's truth; accept them; and love them for who they are.

My big crash was twenty-five years ago. Over that time, I have spoken at conferences, helped start an ABI mentorship program, chaired three brain injury survivor conferences, and most importantly raised two beautiful children. What I learned from my brain injury experience has allowed me to give my kids a rare gift: a father that can see them, be present with them, and always love them.

I get a lot of compliments about my confident, self-motivated, well balanced, teenagers that know how to cook, change oil on a tractor, and tell the difference between Scots Pine and Red Pine. I have teenagers that will hug me and hold my hand. "How did you do it Kevin?"

I wonder about why I was gifted with more life to live. What purpose could I possibly serve? I am disabled, unemployable and a social reject. After 25 years of experience, I can tell you, my friends, what I can do: I can still love. I have loved my two kids; I have loved the kids I volunteered with as a coach; I have loved the kids in the outdoor programs I supported; I have loved the kids at the youth center I helped in; and I have loved writing this article with the hope that I can be of some service to another human being in need.

I think all crash victims have the opportunity to be role models in our communities. To be people that have been through so much yet can still find some small way to lovingly contribute to the larger group. It is not the task people value us for but how we do our task: how we can still smile; how we share our gratitude for being alive; and how we have compassion for people's experiences. Our communities are deeply suffering and maybe we have the cure.

Peace be with you all,
Kevin MacGregor



Who is on My Team?



So it's happened...and it's happened to you ...or someone in your family. A serious car crash or loss, or diagnosis has changed the trajectory of life as you know it right now. Aside from injuries sustained, you are riddled with emotions...maybe misplaced (or well-placed) anger, sadness, longing and anxiety. There seems to be a mountain of information and instructions that leave you overwhelmed and not knowing where to begin.

When it comes to injury or loss, it is often said that the road to healing or rehabilitation is paved with good supports. It is often recommended as we navigate the challenges of rehabilitation or healing, that we ask ourselves this question:

“Who is on MY team?”

It is so very important to have a team of people who are supportive, compassionate and who only want what's best for you and your journey. That team could consist of family members, like your children, your parents, your siblings. Your team could consist of a good friend- even one. Your team could have an involved neighbour, mentor, pastor or lawyer.

But the one key to any “Who is on my Team” list, is a dedicated and compassionate medical rehabilitation team. A professional team of field experts that can assist in getting the very treatment you will need, to help you move forward with your life in a way that is meaningful to you.

Thirty-five years ago, Neuro-Rehab Services, (NRS), a multidisciplinary medical rehabilitation firm, was founded in the Greater Toronto area. Its goal from the outset, was to provide a full range of medical rehabilitation and assessment offerings, to adults and children with brain, spinal cord and other neurological disorders and serious conditions. Due to the multicultural nature of the Toronto area, NRS realized that the best way to reach the most people, was to provide culturally sensitive programming.

Medical rehabilitation firm Brainworks' goal, under the leadership of founder, Arden McGregor, has always been to ensure each person has access to quality healthcare, not just those residing in bigger cities. Given its success in southwestern Ontario since

2003, it was surprising to some that in 2008 Brainworks branched out to the northern communities, opening an office in Huntsville Ontario. By 2018, Brainworks had moved all its operations north, including a second office in North Bay, answering the need for both evidence-based brain injury and mental health services in that region. Brainworks continues to evaluate the need for these services and has outstretched its reach to the most northern parts of the province, in unserved and underserved areas.

Two companies, with the same goal of reaching as many as possible with their services. NRS, by way of multi-lingual programs and services, meeting the needs of a multicultural service area. And Brainworks, territorially and intentionally broadening service horizons to provide services exactly where most people won't go, the most remote northern areas of the province.

So it only makes sense that these two powerhouse, award-winning companies combine efforts: Smarter Together. These two teams are now working together side by side to ensure that those suffering with the effects of acquired brain injury, or other serious injury, loss or disease have the best possible supports in place, despite culture, language or location. These companies together, provide all manner of medical rehabilitation both in person and virtually: Psychological, social work, occupational therapy, rehab therapy and much more. Individually and now together, both NRS and Brainworks are on the “Who is on my team” list of countless clients all over Ontario, and beyond.

No matter where you are on your rehabilitation journey, pull out your journal, a vision board or your phone or laptop and caption the top of the page: “Who is on MY team”. List the friends, the family, the supports, the resources that you KNOW you will be able to count on. *Seeing* a visual list can be encouraging and motivating in a time when you need strength the most. You are not alone. Together, along with the other members of your team, you can and will achieve your goals.

For more information on Brainworks please visit their website at: [Brainworks - Client-Centred Rehabilitation \(brainworksrehab.com\)](http://brainworksrehab.com)

Walk Ride Rodeo

After her motor vehicle crash, the doctors told Amberley she wouldn't ride again and after four months of rehab, she proved them wrong.

“I feel like sharing my story gives me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of many people. And this movie has opened the doors to my ability to reach even more people.”

Walk Ride Rodeo is a story filled with such courage and inspiration. Amberley shares her personal struggles that any crash survivor can relate to when a life-changing collision takes place. We reached out to Amberley and thanked her for filming and sharing her courageous story which is available to watch on Netflix.



5 Steps to Navigating Medical Decisions

Adapted from "Unthinkable"

My mother was hit and killed by a concrete truck while crossing a street near her home. Her death was an unthinkable tragedy, and my family is far from alone in suffering such a loss. But in my professional life as a personal injury lawyer, we encounter many more families who are coping with the catastrophic injury of a loved one rather than their death.

In terms of practical challenges, a catastrophic injury involving a loved one raises its own problems and concerns. You have a potentially long road ahead, especially when it comes to helping them heal from their injuries. To help with that, let's look at five steps you can take to navigate the medical decisions you'll be faced with, especially if they are incapacitated and can't make decisions about their care for themselves.

Before we dive in, though, I want to point out one very important fact: as terrible as catastrophic injury is, the person you love is still here, among the living. It doesn't necessarily make it better or easier in the moment or thereafter—but they're here, and thank God for that.

#1: Determine if They Can Make Medical Decisions

The first questions on a family's mind after a loved one has suffered a catastrophic injury are almost always medical: what's the nature of their injuries, what's their prognosis and treatment choices, and when (or whether) can they go home?

At the heart of these questions, and one potentially even more pressing, is another one: given the nature of their injuries, is your loved one capable of making medical decisions or not? In the short run, they might not be able to, even in a case with a promising prognosis. They could well be in a hospital's Intensive Care Unit, unconscious, in a medically induced coma, or intubated to help them breathe.

If they can make their own decisions, of course, they should. (If you're worried about their capacity to make decisions and they insist on it, you should discuss your concern with their doctors.)

But what if they can't make decisions? Then, you'll need to turn to their advanced directive, assuming they have one.

#2: Find Their Advanced Directive

Advanced directives, also known as living wills, aren't cookie cutter—but in general, they serve to capture your loved one's wishes in the event they aren't able to make their own medical decisions.



Their purpose is to spare family members the burden of making life-and-death decisions for someone else while in a time of turmoil and tremendous pressure.

Advanced directives can't address every medical situation, but they should address the issues that are most important to your loved one. They're a binding legal document, just like a will. If your doctors have a copy of your loved one's advanced directive, they are obligated to follow it.

That's why the first thing the medical staff will want to know is if your loved one has an advanced directive. If you don't know the answer, you'll have to look in the same places you'd hunt for their actual will or a life insurance policy: their files, their desk drawers, and their safe. In many cases, you will find these documents in the same place.

An advanced directive could also be filed with their attorney or their primary care doctor. If they were conscious when they arrived at the hospital and needed immediate surgery, the hospital staff may have asked them to complete an advanced directive before putting them under.

#3: Determine Their Designated Decision Makers

Usually—though not always—an advanced directive will also include a document called a "durable power of attorney for healthcare." It may go by a different name, but its purpose is to allow your loved one to appoint someone to make medical decisions if they're unable to do so themselves. They may even name a backup.

Put the documents together, and you effectively have a binding statement from your loved one indicating under what circumstances they want medical care to stop (or just the opposite) and, in all other circumstances, the spouse, parent, brother, sister, child, or whomever they want to make medical decisions for them.

Someone who creates the first two documents may also create a third: a revocable living trust. In essence, it will appoint someone else to make financial decisions on their behalf if they become incapacitated.

It may require a doctor to declare them incapacitated before taking effect, and once your loved one recovers, the authorization ends. But while it's in force, the person they've designated has the authority to access their accounts, pay their bills, and handle other financial matters that arise.

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#4: Designate Who's In Charge

If your loved one has prepared all these documents, bless them. But what if they haven't? Typically, the doctors and the staff at the hospital will work with the family to make medical decisions for your loved one. As part of that, they'll encourage the family to designate a decision-maker or decision-makers with whom they'll consult.

It is possible to go to probate court to have a judge designate a medical decision-maker on behalf of your loved one. However, think of that as a last resort. It's always better to work together as a family if you can.

Whether your loved one had an advanced directive or not, your interaction with the doctors and staff often begins with what's called a "family meeting." It may not happen until your loved one's condition is stabilized. And if your loved one is likely to be released quickly or transferred somewhere else, it may not happen at all.

If it hasn't happened within 24 to 48 hours after your loved one is stabilized, though, I'd strongly urge you to request a family meeting yourself if you have any questions about their condition and the plan for treatment. It's especially important if there is no advanced directive to guide everyone involved.

#5: Hold a Family Meeting

A family meeting is a structured gathering. It's not typically held in the Intensive Care Unit or at your loved one's bedside. Instead, the meeting may be held in a nearby conference room. The leaders of the medical team will attend along with immediate family members who are adults.

The caregivers will identify themselves, provide a summary of your loved one's situation and their medical recommendations, and

assess your desire for information and how involved you wish to be. They will also answer whatever questions you have.

If you haven't already, the meeting is a great opportunity for you to designate a family member the doctors and staff should reach out to first and a backup. You can ask for their names and contact information—a number of specialists may be involved—and discuss who will be providing you with updates and choices to be made and how frequently.

It can be a difficult and emotional meeting, but it can also be very empowering. Without it, you'll be left watching as waves of people come and go as they care for your loved one, without any idea of what they're doing or the seriousness of the situation.

Where There is Hope, There are Possibilities

As hard as it is to navigate the medical process when it comes to catastrophic injury, I want to say this: I am continually amazed by the willpower I see in victims of catastrophic injury events and their families and where it can lead, regardless of how terrible circumstances may be at the beginning. There are no guarantees. But where there is hope, there are possibilities.

The road ahead may be long, but I encourage you to remain hopeful. In the years I have spent working with families, I have seen some remarkable recovery stories. Commit to taking one day and one step at a time, and in most cases, things will get better. That doesn't mean life is ever going to be the same, but it will still be worth the trip.

For more advice on what steps to take if you or a loved one are catastrophically injured, you can find [Unthinkable on Amazon](#).

For more information please visit [KyleBachus.com](#).



From Paralysis to the Podium

Submitted by Kevin Rempel



We are so pleased to introduce you to Kevin Rempel who has an incredible story of overcoming a tremendous amount of adversity. In 2002 his father Gerry fell from a tree while deer hunting leaving him a complete paraplegic one year from retirement. Four years later in 2006, after a motor crash that paralyzed Kevin, he had to learn how to walk again at the age of 23. Adding to this, he also had to deal with his father who was also living in a wheelchair.

After six weeks, however, Kevin willed himself to move just one toe, then another, and another, until he not only learned how to walk again, but was able to become one of Canada's best Paralympic athletes earning a Bronze Medal at the 2014 Paralympics in Sochi, Russia. Kevin Rempel is a 2013 World Champion and 2014 Sochi Paralympic Bronze Medalist in sledge hockey who has faced a difficult but optimistic journey from paralysis to the podium.

Today his inspiration is to help give back to the sport and community he loves so much, making the world a better place for people who live with disabilities. Kevin is the author of the book, *Still Standing – When you have every reason to give up, keep going*, where he shares his journey to the Paralympics, the post Olympic Crash and what do to do when you feel like you have lost your purpose and direction in life.

Prior to building the *Sledge Hockey Experience*, Kevin's career helping lead others began as a keynote speaker. After learning

how to walk again, dig himself out of depression, and reach the Paralympic podium, Kevin was constantly asked what he did to achieve those goals, and so, The Hero Mindset Keynote was born.

“Each of us have Hero Moments, Hero Decisions, and Hero Actions where we can all step up in our personal and professional lives to become the hero of our own movie. It's about focusing on the small things that make a big difference, and the same strategies Kevin has used to propel his life and business forward, you can use too.

Kevin is also a blogger, and strongly believes that individuals and organizations thrive by not placing blame on other people, their surroundings, or external circumstances. They thrive recognizing the importance to choose the right mindset as they develop resilience when facing uncertainty.

For more information on Kevin's book, *Still Standing* or if you are interested in booking him to speak at your next event, please visit kevinrempe.com or if you are interested in a Sledge Hockey Experience, please visit playsledgehockey.com or follow his journey on Facebook [Kevin Rempel](https://www.facebook.com/kevinrempe) and Instagram [@kevinrempe](https://www.instagram.com/kevinrempe).



Acceptance and finding purpose after a traumatic accident

Submitted by Katy Parker

When the doctors told me after my accident that it would take a long time to heal, I never imagined that 18 months later I would still be on my recovery journey. But those 18 months, however frustrating and tough, haven't been wasted time. They helped me discover a purpose and find a silver lining to the dark cloud.

Six weeks before the end of 2020, a van hit me as I was crossing a road on my way home from work, only a few minutes from our house. As I laid on the ground, I couldn't move but was glad that I could at least open my eyes. Everything seemed very blurry, but I was grateful I was alive, and it wasn't long before two ambulances arrived. The next day, after a couple of hours of sleep, the pain woke me up. I was in the hospital with a fractured back.

The first time I tried to move my legs I had tears rolling down my face. It wasn't just the pain but also the relief that I was actually able to move my legs. After 24 hours, I finally got up off the bed and managed my first few baby steps, I felt the pain but also the determination. I wanted my life back so badly.

Since then, 18 months have been gone past, and I still sometimes find myself grieving for my old life. It may be the grief we often feel when we have lost what we have loved. It doesn't always have to be a loved person. Sometimes it can also be the life that we may never have again. There is still so much I can't do. I am still on a staged return to work, I am still afraid to drive, I am still in pain almost every day...

It's hard to accept it, but I did find out that beating myself up doesn't make things any easier. It actually makes them worse. Acceptance doesn't come easily but being honest with ourselves and our emotions, rather than suppressing them, helps us to move on. Acceptance doesn't mean that I will never show my raw emotions or get frustrated with my situation. Life is a rollercoaster with ups and downs, and as humans we just learn how to ride it. For me, it means acknowledging and managing my feelings whilst also seeing the progress I'm making. I haven't lost my hopes for the future and having something to look forward to is important. It will not always be this bad. Yes, it may have been a tough 18 months, and the progress may have seemed very slow at time, but I will get there one day.

Living in the present moment, allowing myself to enjoy the time that I'm not in unmanageable pain, is helping me accept the stage I'm at now. Immersing ourselves in the present moment and acknowledging our feelings without judging ourselves is the key aspect of mindfulness.

Practising mindfulness is also a way of managing my PTSD symptoms. I was diagnosed with PTSD about two months after my accident. Whilst still in the hospital, I started to get flashbacks and have nightmares. I was terrified of going out of the hospital. Between those four walls, I felt so safe. Yet at the same time I also longed to return home so I was grateful for the support I received from the hospital staff who helped make this possible.

And it was also the hospital staff who encouraged me to get professional help when I started to show the symptoms of PTSD a week after my accident. I was in the hospital almost two weeks during the second Covid lockdown. As my head felt so heavy with all the negative thoughts and emotions, I took a pen and paper and emptied my head onto it. Whilst I couldn't walk, I had two hands which served me well. After a break from writing that had lasted many years, I returned to it. Writing didn't become just my therapy it was also something that gave me a new purpose. It was my silver lining.

As I researched more about PTSD, I also created the [Journeyofsmiley Blog](#). I am sharing my story to hopefully encourage others on their healing journey. This was also the reason I created the PTSD: My Story Project, a safe place for trauma survivors to share their own experiences. I wanted to give others a chance to share their stories so we can encourage each other both in our recovery and fighting the stigma that unfortunately is still attached to mental illness.

I believe that everyone has a purpose, and sometimes it can be found in our pain. Whilst we may not ever find the answer to why the accident happened to us, accepting and deciding how to live with our pain is essential.

Katy is a wellbeing writer, blogger and mental health advocate who lives in England (UK). She has worked hard to overcome her trauma, and she writes about her experiences to help others in similar situations. For more information please visit: [Journeyofsmiley - Smile Through The Pain, Dance In The Rain](#)



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Articles/Stories:

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Want to share?

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Our Mission is to provide online support, resources and to raise awareness for survivors that have been affected by a motor vehicle crash.

Meet Dawne McKay – Founder

Dawne McKay is a survivor of a horrific motor vehicle crash and is the creator and editor of *Sharing our Recovery* as well as the Founder of the **Crash Support Network**. Dawne is not shy about what happened to her because she has become an advocate for other crash survivors. She had to go through her own struggles to create a community of courageous survivors who continuously fight everyday. Dawne resides in Ontario, Canada and manages both the *Sharing our Recovery* Newsletter and the **Crash Support Network Group** virtually from her home. The Crash Support Network Group consists of members from all over the globe and her highly informative one-of-a-kind website is attracting thousands of visits a day.



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