

Sharing OUR Recovery

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

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Editor in Chief - Dawne McKay

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Connecting Crash Survivors
One Step at a Time

Welcome 2023!

We hope the year has been good to you so far. As we start to embrace the warmer temperatures in the next few weeks and say goodbye to winter, spring is the perfect time to think about how you are doing with your recovery. Are you aware that even just 10-15 minutes of direct sunlight every day can greatly boost your mood? If you are not able to get outside on a sunny day, try to sit close to an open window as you may feel energized and inspired by the spring air and sunshine.

As we embrace a new year, I always look forward to seeing what is on the horizon for the [Crash Support Network](#). Working hard at raising awareness to the challenges we face during our recovery journey after a motor vehicle crash through networking and our online social presence, we believe this will be our loudest year yet!

We are so thankful for your continued support and to our sponsors both for the Crash Support Network's Website and the Sharing our Recovery Newsletter. Sponsors are not only helping survivors find their way as they recover from a motor vehicle crash, they are also allowing us to maintain our mission which is to raise awareness to the recovery journey that many people face after being affected by a motor vehicle crash and to provide online support and resources. Thank you for believing in the Crash Support Network!

In this issue you will hear how a victim who lost her loved ones in a fatal crash started her own Organization and has become an unintended advocate, you will also hear what a Canadian should do when they are injured in a motor vehicle crash in Florida from an attorney that specializes in cross-border accidents and our Guest Crash Survivor Blogger explains how he found purpose years after his catastrophic motorcycle crash. We also introduce you to our new "Post Crash Tip" which is a highly informative piece that will be included in every issue!

As always we are thinking of every crash survivor that is recovering this spring and wish you brighter days ahead!

- Dawne

Catastrophic Motorcycle Crash Survivor - Who Are You?

Submitted by Andrew Lawlor, Crash Survivor Guest Blogger



who am I

I was wrong. Most of you do not know me personally. If you did, that first sentence would be jarring. Wrong is not something I admit often – or at least often enough. It was early in my recovery; I was speaking to a group about learning to live with the changes the crash had imposed on my life. I believe my talk was called “My Nose Runs When I Eat”, which is still true today. I lost a leg, most of an arm, an eye, a bunch of abilities, memories... and I led with a runny nose. The talk went fine, and the host led a quick Q&A. Some questions were interesting, all were respectful, then someone asked:

“What’s The Worst Thing He Took from You?”

The ‘he’ in this question was the driver of the other vehicle, who had been fully at fault for our brief get-together. I took a minute to think, I had to - I’d never been asked that. Looking back, I’m sure the audience was expecting me to cite one of the physical injuries, or maybe something I couldn’t do anymore, like walking, playing ball... I answered truthfully, it was the first thing that came to mind and no amount of thinking could unseat it:

“Purpose”

One word. I said one word and just let it hang there. You could hear a pin drop... and then it was over. I knew I was no

Nelson Mandela, but I’d done a decent job, and I knew that answer landed. I didn’t think about that answer again for months, maybe years. I was in some form of therapy every day and I spent the rest of the time resting or enjoying the company of my family and friends. Then the music stopped. Both the frequency and duration of therapy had dropped off - the ‘business of recovery’ had shifted to the ‘business of living’. That’s when I really felt the absence, and that’s when I really felt the anger.

I had dealt with the injuries in stride, my purpose was getting better but it was only a temporary fix. The closer I got to my new steady-state, the wider that chasm grew. I had been declared permanently disabled, the knock-on effects of my TBI made regular employment impossible. For 30-odd years my career and purpose were synonymous, so tightly interwoven it was hard to distinguish one from the other. Then the crash - in an instant they were both gone, like a seven-ten split (I don’t bowl, but I’m told that’s a thing). Yes, I was a husband, father, son, friend - but if someone asked who I was...

[Who Am I?](#)

This isn’t a research paper; I’m not going to cite sources. I think it’s fair to say, though, that research has consistently

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shown strong links between employment status and self-identity (self-esteem, self-worth). Both physical and mental health issues have been shown to be more prevalent among the underemployed and chronically unemployed. Divorce rates, mortality, substance abuse – across wide sets of data the correlation seems fairly consistent.

Admittedly, finances have a lot to do with this, but so do societal factors. We place value on titles, applaud those who sacrifice their personal lives for their professional ones, and keep score with the kinds of cars we drive, the size of our homes. And I did it too, I played the game. But I was on the sidelines now, and I was lost.

Music had always been an important part of my life. I was a fan, a participant. I had been a mediocre but enthusiastic drummer, and no matter how many people reminded me of the drummer from Def Leppard (who got back onstage despite having lost an arm in his own crash), that didn't really feel like an option anymore. I knew I wasn't tone-deaf, but I'd never really had a great voice – sort of a combination of Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen and a misfiring lawnmower engine. I loved music though, so I started exploring my options and found salvation in the most unlikely place. I had always viewed School of Rock as a great idea – for children. But as I searched online for 'adult music lessons', 'adult music programs, etc.', the local School of Rock kept popping up in the results.

I Found My Calling

A few phone calls later, I sat in on an adult-program rehearsal. The room was filled with people like me – people who loved music and wanted to be part of something. They were all new to their instruments, relatively. Some were pretty good, others were struggling. They all supported each other, everything they said to each other was encouraging, even when I didn't seem warranted. The energy was infectious, none of them seemed to feel silly or awkward because they were among kindred spirits. They had found their tribe. I joined.

Within weeks I was yelling into a microphone – I was no Eddie Vedder or Robert Plant, but for two hours every Tuesday night you couldn't have convinced me of that. My 'band-mates' were so encouraging – telling me wonderful lies every week that kept me coming back. I've heard some recordings from those early days – if I'd actually had a day job, I'd have told myself not to quit it. I kept going though, and slowly I graduated from awful to not-as-awful. Then we got to performance time. The way the program works, we learn a set of songs (often organized around a theme)

and rehearse them until it culminates in a live performance – usually in a public forum in front of family and friends. We took the stage, I tortured a dozen songs, the audience clapped, and I was hooked. Music wasn't my purpose, but it did open my eyes.

“Purpose is a very personal thing, and I am not judging how anyone else handles it. But I have figured out what it means to me. What I do for a living no longer defines me as a human being – what I do with my life does.”

Purpose is a very personal thing, and I am not judging how anyone else handles it. But I have figured out what it means to me. What I do for a living no longer defines me as a human being – what I do with my life does. It allows me to feel like a full participant in the human experience, not a spectator.

My Purpose Now Takes Many Forms

I give back – I sit on some boards and committees, I'm a patient advisor on several research panels addressing issues faced by trauma survivors.

I advocate – I am a member of the accessibility advisory board in my city. We address issues that affect people with all forms of disability. For most of my life, I never really thought about disability, then I defined disability by my plight alone. Now I'm starting to comprehend how far-reaching that term is, how challenging

life is for so many in our communities. I'm not particularly proud of how self-absorbed I may have been in the past, but I also don't dwell on it.

I create – I write, I sing, play harmonica. I've sung well in front of large (to me anyway) crowds, poorly in front of small ones. I even got to sing in one of Toronto's most legendary venues – under the same roof where The Rolling Stones and The Police have played. I don't think I make Mick or Sting worried for their jobs, but when the lights come up and our drummer counts us in, I don't think my experience is much different from theirs.

I am a Guest Crash Survivor Blogger – a space where I can share my personal struggles and meet a deadline in hopes that fellow survivors might find a new perspective.

I was wrong when I said someone took away my purpose. The actions of another may have taken away many things, but not purpose itself. That was something nobody could take away if I didn't let them.

Andrew Lawlor is a motorcycle crash survivor. Since July, 2018 he has drawn on the love and support of his family and his community, working to repair body, mind and soul. Andrew knows everyone's journey is unique, and hopes that fellow survivors might find a new perspective, or encouragement in the stories he tells. For more information on Andrew's journey please visit: [The Catastrophic](#).



Grief Leads Victim to Become an Unintended Activist

Submitted by Pam O'Donnell, Founder of Catch You Later Foundation

On February 22, 2016, a routine afternoon my beloved husband, father and high school math and science teacher, Tim O'Donnell as well as our 5-year-old daughter Bridget, lost their lives in a horrific car crash caused by a habitual drugged driver. My now 13-year-old daughter and I are left to wonder how this happened and why. This was a tremendous loss to not only our family but to the community of Bayonne, New Jersey. Tim was the consummate professional and had been a high school softball coach for many years. He was loved by many as being a wonderful friend, father, and husband. He was the kind of person that would help anyone in need, if he couldn't he still would find a way.

Bridget was a 5 year old beautiful little girl that twirled, skipped, danced and smiled her way through life. She melted the hearts of everyone she came in to contact with and she brightened every room she entered. "Bridie" as she was affectionately called by those of us who loved her was a compassionate little girl. She did not like to see other little kids excluded for feeling like no one wanted to be their friend. She saw no color, race or creed, and she was friends with everyone. Tim and I as her parents, would often joke that Bridget would be brought home by the police before she finished high school but for the right reasons. What I mean by that is, we would not be surprised if she got in trouble for helping out the underdog. She would stick up for those who could not stick up for themselves.

She Was Such a Caring Sweet Girl

She had already shown that redeeming quality a few times in her short life when her older sister was taunted on a few occasions, Bridie would have none of it and set the record straight. Bridie had been a caretaker to me when I was going through my cancer journey and almost lost my life, till the



very night before she died. She would wake me twice a night to see if I was alive and breathing. It was a worry that no 5-year-old should have gone through but she wanted to make sure that her family was safe and in tact at all times. Bridget's hero was not the typical princess or superhero; in fact, it was my doctor. It was no secret to those who had asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up that her

answer was "I want to cure cancer and sing while doing it". There is no doubt she would have succeeded had this crash not occurred.

Grief, I learnt is an everyday occurrence. It just doesn't go away after the funeral is over. In fact, it sneaks up on you

every day you wake up when you realize they are gone... all over again. The only similarity I can relate it to is that "it's like walking through a minefield when an IED goes off, each of us damaged in our own way depending on how close you were to the explosion which determines the loss and the pain."

My daughter and I have this mental battle of just getting through the day with our grief. It isn't just the holidays or the anniversary of the crash, it is every-single-day. Being a softball coach, Tim had a saying "**one inning, one base, one out at a time**", who knew that would become our tiny family mantra now. With everything left to lose I had to do something as I could not stay stagnant because I had another child to care for. I am no help to her if I do not take care of myself and find an outlet to be somewhat sane.

"Being a softball coach, Tim had a saying "one inning, one base, one out at a time", who knew that would become our tiny family mantra now. With everything left to lose I had to do something as I could not stay stagnant because I had another child to care for."

In Their Spirit She Became an Unintended Activist

It was that thought process that led me to becoming an Unintended Activist, in the spirit of Tim and Bridget that the "[Catch You Later Foundation](#)" was formed. It is only AFTER

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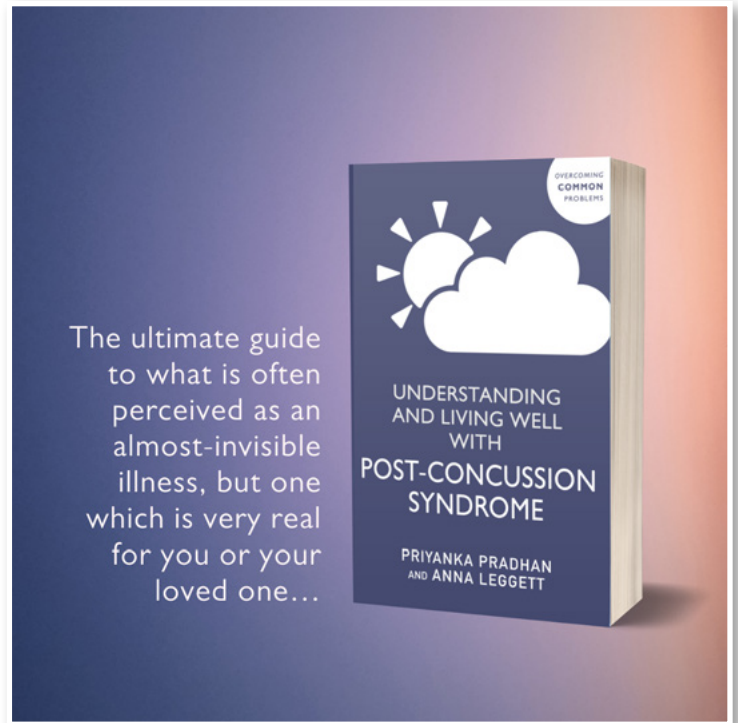


the car crash that witnesses came forward to tell their stories on how they saw the driver speeding and weaving in and out of traffic. Catch You Later Foundation is a non-profit organization comprised of those who love the O'Donnell family most. Former students, friends, and the grieving wife and daughter, Pam and Ali O'Donnell that are left behind. It is their hope that they can help send a senior high school student to college with a small scholarship because college is something Bridget always wanted to do but sadly no longer has that chance.

It is now the only way I know how to face my grief and breathe, by going out and speaking up, even though I typically come home crying hoping I reached someone. I have since spoken to thousands of high school and college students across New Jersey and the United States. In fact, I am now the only civilian Police Trained Commission Certified Instructor that goes to Police Academies and explains why it is so important for Law Enforcement to pull over these erratic, distracted, and impaired drivers. I refuse to let my family die in vain.

The positive feedback from these presentations is what now helps me in my grief. It pushes me to keep going, keep living for our family and the thousands of others across the world so that hopefully one day we have a world of no crashes and fatalities.

The Catch You Later Foundation was created to spread awareness of the New Jersey State #77 Aggressive Driving Program. For more information please visit catchyoulater.org.



Help with Post-Concussion Syndrome

If concussion or an mTBI are affecting you, there is much in this book to help. UK neuropsychologist, [Dr Priyanka Pradhan](#), has pulled together the latest research to provide a complete manual for overcoming the impact of any mild brain injury, while writer and coach, [Anna Leggett](#) shares her own experiences with post-concussion syndrome. Their book not only explains what a concussion is and how it may present, but also gives practical strategies for managing persistent symptoms. These include how to ask for professional and specialist medical help (and where to get it from), and also simple self-management techniques. [Understanding and Living Well with Post-Concussion Syndrome](#) also explains the importance of sleep and diet, and includes significant psychological and emotional support for mental wellbeing and recovery, support that is often missing from the clinical pathway for post-concussion syndrome.

This book is an essential resource for anyone who needs insight, practical help and emotional support for this 'invisible' condition which is very real for you or your loved one.

Many thanks to Anna Leggett for mentioning the Crash Support Network in her new book. We are so touched at her kind gesture and her thoughtfulness. ❤️



“During one of my home visits with an Occupational Therapist she mentioned to me how crucial it was to save every document that I received pertaining to my motor vehicle crash and suggested placing every document in an empty box. She also told me that I would be surprised how quickly the box would fill up and she was not kidding. The box filled up in no time and I was so thankful she told me to do this as I had a billing discrepancy with one of my treatment providers and I was able to easily retrieve invoices that were already paid.”

As you recover from a motor vehicle crash it's so important to have a team of medical professionals helping you along your recovery journey and with this team comes a lot of paperwork. Always remember that even though medical treatments may be paid for through your insurance company, it's still important to keep every document you receive and to ask them to print you a statement of services rendered every few months for your records.



15 Things Every Survivor of a Collision Should Know



When we find ourselves recovering from a motor vehicle crash, we have no idea what lies ahead for our future. From one crash survivor to another, I share important tips in our Crash Survivor Blog that every crash survivor should be aware of when starting your recovery journey.

We encourage you to read these **15 things every survivor of a collision should know** by clicking [here](#).

For other tips and captivating stories, subscribe to our [Crash Survivor Blog](#).



What You Need to Do if you are a Canadian Ontario Resident Injured in a Florida Car Crash

Submitted by Attorney Andrew Iacobelli

If you are a resident of Ontario Canada and have been involved in a car accident in the United States, you may be wondering what to do now. If the injuries from the accident are serious and you require emergency medical attention, you may be concerned about how to pay for your medical bills. Here are some tips for Ontario residents injured in a Florida auto accident:

Seek medical attention if needed or recommended and you are unable to immediately return to Ontario.

Advise the Hospital or Treatment Provider of all available insurance you have, including any travel insurance, extended health insurance and automobile insurance.

Contact your insurance companies, including travel insurance, extended health, and auto insurance to advise them of your accident and the need for medical attention - they may offer further instructions to ensure your medical expenses are paid.

Contact our law firm for a complimentary consultation and advice if you are uncertain how to proceed or if you need assistance advancing a claim for your losses in Florida and Ontario.

When you return to Ontario, immediately follow-up with your physicians to continue treating for your injuries.

What Insurance Covers You?

When an Ontario resident is involved in a car accident in Florida, they will often have access to Canadian and US insurance benefits. It may surprise you to know that when a Canadian is injured in a car accident in

Florida, very often the claims for losses are primarily paid by a Canadian Auto Insurance Policy. Even if you do not have travel or extended health insurance coverage, an experienced personal injury lawyer can assist with ensuring your medical bills are covered by auto insurance.

Ontario residents usually have claims against the at-fault driver's insurance in Florida as well as their own insurance policy in Ontario. The claims need to be coordinated in order to ensure that you are accessing all available benefits. Attorney Andrew Iacobelli has offices both in Ontario and Florida, and is highly experienced in cross-border claims. Andrew is often referred to as the Lawyer for Canadians, the Snowbird Lawyer or Snowbird Attorney because he has helped countless Canadians that have been injured in the United States. Andrew is also the author of "Are You a Canadian Injured in the United States? Claim the Damages and Insurance Coverage the Right Way". Contact his office to see how you can obtain your free copy. For more information please visit: www.thesnowbirdattorney.com.



Andrew Iacobelli is an experienced personal injury lawyer who established Iacobelli Law Firm with offices located in Ontario, Canada and Florida, U.S.A. Andrew restricts his practice to the representation of personal injury victims in claims involving serious injuries and wrongful death in Canada and the United States. Andrew is the author of "[Are You a Canadian Injured in the United States? Claim the Damages and Insurance Coverage the Right Way](#)".



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Articles/Stories:

We are always looking for articles or stories, and we would love to hear from you!

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Our Mission is to raise awareness to the recovery journey that many people face after being affected by a motor vehicle crash and to provide online support and resources.

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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