

Opening my eyes, looking around, all I could see was the inside of a vehicle, the roof of a van maybe. Struggling to move my head I saw cables, monitor screens, tubes, cylinders and to my dismay, lots of needles. Where was I, what was going on, then it hit me; I was in an ambulance. I tried to move my arms and realized I was tied down, not that it would have made any difference since at that time I couldn't move any parts of my body anyway. Movement down towards my feet caught my eyes and my vision was drawn to a large shadow in the back of the ambulance; looking that way I saw this big guy in a blue uniform with a stethoscope draped around his neck sitting there. I mouthed the words as much as asked, "where am I"? Turning away from the monitors looking towards me, he said, "you're on your way to rehab." "Rehab" I said, "what happened?" "You were struck by lightning", he said, "a month ago". As the ambulance made it's way to the Health South Rehab facility in Braintree I looked around and realized my life, and the lives of my family had been changed forever. That scene took place on June 15, 2000, 38 days after I had been struck by lightning on a Cape Cod golf course, it was also my daughters 2nd birthday.

It was a typical May day on the cape, slightly overcast with fog and mist all at the same time, with the potential to be hot, humid and hazy. The crocus had come and gone, replaced by the cherry blossoms and lilac blooms that give the cape it's intense early spring colors. It was obvious that summer was fast approaching, the heavy traffic and increased time it took to get everything accomplished meant that the summer influx had begun a little earlier this year and soon movement would be best attempted by boat, bike or just plain walking. As was typical of any Monday, I was running behind schedule, what with all the projects thought up over the weekend plus the ones left over from last week I was moving in 10 different directions. By the time I hit all the regular stops, gas station, dry cleaners, and a quick one to see Phil, our attorney I was in the office about an hour after the market opened. You see, I am a stockbroker, actually a vice-president of investments for a national brokerage firm, and in the spring of 2000 the markets were high and life was good.

It was a charity tournament to benefit the local YMCA, which was being held at Pocasset Golf Course. Our foursome, included Dick, a Vice President, Bill, another Vice-President, and Jim, the husband one of the ladies who makes the office work. Bill and I drove together, he lived down cape and the tournament was in Falmouth, which is at the other end of our beautiful sand spit. Dick and Jimmy were going to meet us at the course. It actually worked out ok, since I ended up needing someone to drive my car back. We got to the course a little after 12, unloaded our clubs, slipped into our golf shoes and went up to the clubhouse to have lunch with the rest of the players. It was your typical golf course lunch buffet, cold meats, cheeses, and potato salads, with a helping of raffle tickets and a side of mulligans being purchased for charity. After lunch we all assembled outside of the clubhouse to hear the rules and get our carts. The starter told us that there was good news and bad news, the bad being that there were thunderstorms in the area, the good that we would get in the round before they got here. It seemed a simple decision. We had all come to play in the tournament and there was nothing in the starters report to

change our minds. It was one of those little things in life that we often don't pay attention to and some of us live to regret.

It was a shotgun start, best ball tournament and we started on #6. We had played 4 holes, none of them very well by the time we came to number 10; a short dogleg left with an elevated green. After a decent drive, we couldn't put our wedge close and were left with about 25 feet from the pin. As we approached the green, the storm clouds off in the distance were filled with the sounds of thunder and the occasional flash of lightning. It was right about here that Bill asked Dick if we were walking up to the highest place on the course. Being familiar with the course, Dick thought it was either the highest or the second highest. Bill said something to the effect of "oh great and so you think we should be here" and we continued up to the green. As what was typical for our round that day, none of us dropped the long put, nothing had been going in all day, it seemed like we couldn't buy a putt, and we were left with a 12 inch tap in for the par.

Jimmy was standing over the put when the sound of the horn blasted through the air, the horn that's heard all around the course, the one that warns us, the one we trust to keep us safe, the one that was just a little bit too late that time. Dick said lets get out of here, Jimmy dropped the put, I put the flag back in the hole and was about 10 steps behind the guys as we hurried off the green. Just then they heard a loud bang, 'the loudest sound I ever heard' according to Dick, an ex major in the marines, who has heard some loud bangs in his life. They turned to see me stumble to the ground, smoke coming from my body. When they reached me, I was laying in a lifeless heap, similar to a broken doll. My hair and eyebrows were burnt, my zipper blown open, my shoes had been blown off, a hole in the ground marking the spot. At this point I had suffered cardiac arrest, had no pulse and my chances for survival were something between slim and nil.

In the foursome behind us, Peter was swapping his sunglasses for his regular glasses when the horn went off. A sailor most of his life, he has spent countless hours looking at the clouds and the weather, mostly from the water, and this deadly thunderhead moved faster then most. He looked up to

Right about here I need to thank Dick's wife, Mary, not for putting up with him for so many years, but because she had recently persuaded him to take a refresher course in CPR, and boy did he get to use it on this day. He was on me as I hit the ground, all that Marine training taking over, blowing oxygen into my mouth, yelling for Billy to start pounding on my chest, and for Jimmy to get help. As an ex-hippie left over from the 60's I never thought I would thank the Marines for much, but the training they gave Dick played a major part in saving my life. Within moments the sky darkened and opened up, it started to rain and hail. The rain pounded into the ground as Bill pounded on my chest, scanning the sky on the lookout for more deadly bolts. Dick kept forcing air into my lungs, stopping only to roll my head so he could clear my airwaves by pulling the raw onions leftover from lunch out of my mouth. He was quoted as saying "somebody better remember to tell this sob what I am doing for him". Not fond of onions before he certainly doesn't like them now. Meanwhile Jimmy was trying to flag down someone to

help as the carts zoomed by heading for the clubhouse. He was surprised that in the entire group he couldn't find one doctor and that no one stopped to help as they bolted for the safety of the clubhouse.

They worked on me in the pouring rain and hail for what seemed like an eternity but was only about 10 to 15 minutes before the EMT's got to us. The storm had come in off the ocean with speed and power, the heavy rain causing severe flooding and several traffic accidents, all of which taxed the Falmouth Emergency System to their limits. All I have to say is these guys and gals worked like the pros they are and it's because of them I am here to tell this story. When they got to us I had no pulse and the operating phrase was '.....'. It's here that they saved my life the first time. Because of the flooding they couldn't get the ambulance out on the course to where I was, so they strapped me onto a gurney, carried me down the hill, through a back yard and into the ambulance. I'm told that they brought me back again in the ambulance on the way to Falmouth Hospital.

All my life I have pushed the envelope and sports were certainly no exception. I was far more likely to get hurt skiing off a cliff with skinny skies on somewhere in the backcountry outside of Park City Utah. Or stuck a mile or so offshore in the ocean after being blown off a windsurfer, or maybe fall through the ice while ice boarding, but get hurt playing golf, no way, you must be crazy. Golf is one of the safer sports out there, right, you might throw your back out trying to kill the ball, sprain your ankle coming out of a sand trap, maybe even fall off a cart and break your arm, but a high risk sport, I think not. It's not one you look for on the extreme sports channel, it's not one disallowed in insurance contracts of other sport professional athletes, but as I lay there with steam coming from my body, it became a deadly game that changed my life in an instant. All of a sudden the skills that I would choose my playmates for other sports became important in golf. No longer was coming off the tee well, or having a good lob shot a plus, now it became your survival skills, emergency medical skills, did you know CPR, could you do mouth to mouth, not something I had previously considered important in a golf partner.

In the spring of 2001 I was invited to speak to the PGA at the Buick Invitational held at Westchester Country Club to help kick off the first National Lightning Awareness Week, sponsored by NOAA, the National Weather Service and the PGA. One of the things that I said was that the players should have it in their contract with the caddies that the caddies know CPR, I also think the caddies should have it in their contract that the players know CPR. I never considered golf dangerous, now I know it can kill you, or worse yet, leave you a shell of what you were, resigned to watching not playing. Not a great way to go though life. Now I urge all golfers not to play with people who don't know CPR, the life you save could be your own. It only took about 15 minutes for the EMT's to get to where we were, but believe me the mind after that much time without oxygen is not a pretty sight. I owe my life as a functioning person to those guys, without them getting oxygen to my brain, I probably would not have wanted to wake up.

It was about this time that Tom, my manager, and Lisa, my assistant pulled up to the front of my house. My wife, who had watched the storm come in off the ocean with my

daughter from her bedroom window, looked out to see them get out of the car and start up the hill towards the front door. Instantly she knew something was wrong, here it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and these people, people who don't leave the office when the market is open, are coming to the house. Within minutes our niece Sofia was taking care of our 2-year-old and Tam was on the way to Falmouth hospital. Her first call was to her sister Tania, an oncologist just south of Boston.

Tania met my wife at Falmouth hospital and they started a journey through ER's, hospitals, ICU's and rehab facilities that her experience as a Doctor proved invaluable. Having worked at CC Hospital, Brigham & Women's, Mass General, she was able to help my wife both navigate and negotiate our way through the medical maze, we wonder how those not familiar with it get through it. Right here and now I want to say that you need to take control of your medical care, no matter what injury you have it is unique to you and you need to be involved in your treatment. I am sure my wife and her sister saved my life several times through this whole process. No one loves you like your family. Anyway they were told things like 'brain dead', 'quadriplegic' and all kinds of 'positive' outlook things like that. Lucky for me I didn't know what was happening. The severe weather hampered the life flight operation and I was sent up to Brigham & Women's in an ambulance

By now, thanks to cell phones, my wife and family kicked into gear. Sofia had overnight bags packed for my wife and took charge of the household and our 2-year-old daughter. A big responsibility for a junior in high school, for the household included several properties, a bunch of assorted animals, and all of a sudden a phone that didn't stop ringing with people looking for info, but one that she stepped up to and handled very well. And here is where I say something else, without help from your family you will not make it through one of these traumatic experiences. As my wife and Tania headed to Brigham & Women's in Boston, Sofia was on the phone to her mother in Utah and another part of the family kicked into gear.

By the time I made my way from Falmouth Hospital up to Brigham & Women's in Boston the word was out. Many of my friends were on a golf course that day and the fast moving weather cell had caught everyone's attention. It had also been a slow news day and combined with an extremely large lottery prize, it immediately brought up the 'odds' angle of the event, and most news shows could not resist the tie in. One announcer even suggested that with my luck I should buy a ticket, unfortunately I wasn't able to get to the ticket window.

"Ms Lingos call on line 1" came over the loudspeaker and Tasha, a teacher in Utah who didn't want to leave her last period class for the couple of seconds it would take to answer it, said 'please take a message', the reply 'It's your daughter and it's an emergency !' caused a lump in her throat and the normally loud & reckless class to instantly go quiet. "Mama, Uncle Michael's been struck by lightning, and they think he is dead".Within 24 hours, lesson plans, substitute teachers, grades, house sitters, the works were taken care of and Tasha was on a plane bound for Boston.....

For the first couple of days in ICU I had friends coming and going in every direction, everyone was in a state of shock or confusion, my injury was rare and the prognosis were all over the place. No one knew what the future held and they monitored me constantly. I was tied down because I would flail around and rip the tubes from my body. I had an intense thirst and would yell at my visitors to “get me a glass of ice water” or “cut these ropes, get me a cigarette and get me the hell out of here”. I was convinced that the stainless coffee mug that I used for not only coffee but also ice water all day long was under the bed and I would scream and make my visitors look for it. And visitors I did have. It became a familiar pattern, when the nurses would turn their backs, someone would sneak in to the room, they would look around and my room would be full. They would chase them out and within a short time they would sneak back in, you see I am very lucky, I have tons of great friends. It became a game, see who could get in to ICU, past the current guards on duty.

I started to get better for the first couple of days; I would recognize people and even have muted conversations with them, since I had a trach I couldn't really talk. It wasn't until the 5th or 6th day that I slipped into a coma, or should I say slipped in and out of many mini-comas. “Initially he was able to move all extremities, but then 5 days post onset he developed quadriparesis and decreased bulbar control”; in other words I turned into a vegetable. It was at this point that my wife had my parents fly in and started to make more somber plans. At one point they considered taking me off life support, whisking me to the cape and letting me make my good-byes with my daughter. Actually, the plan was for my brother in law, Drew, to kidnap me. He was going to throw me over his shoulder, hustle me down the back stairwell, into a waiting van and I would be gone. The problem was that we never put anything in writing concerning life support, pulling the plug, etc, that kind of stuff. The state said that since my brain was still alive certain things were out of my family's control. Another thing we tend to overlook, do I want to spend my life as a vegetable, my answer was and is no, but I never put in writing. That's why they considered abduction, that's why I came very close to leaving, not just the hospital, by the backdoor.

My ability to swallow was gone, the lightning had fried my autonomic system and I had to be fed through a tube, no food or water through the mouth. Now I will tell you here, one of the worst things to happen is not to be able to swallow, that means no water or food for that matter. Not being able to eat is one thing but not being able to drink is another altogether. It's much worse. People would be around me drinking and I would go nuts, they would stand just outside my room and have a big gulp in their hands and I wanted it. I would scream for a drink and they would put a wet sponge on my lips, believe me that ain't drinking. One of the vague memories I have of ICU is of a male nurse with a pony tale, who's name I later found out was Carlos, who gave me some ice chips, not a damp sponge, but real ice. I thought I died and went to heaven, it was the best thing I ever had.

My first memories of the rehab facility were also pretty interesting. During the transfer to the rehab I had spiked a fever, something around 105 I believe. While I was in my new room I was drifting in and out of consciousness and I heard whistling coming from the hallway, it was getting louder so I knew it was getting closer. It was the tune 'the saints come marching in', and it was being whistled by a large, 6 foot 7 or so, black, bald guy. This guy was not only bald, he shaved his head and had big round eyes, and as he turned the corner and entered my room he scared the living shit out of me. His name is Glen, and he became my best friend, he washed me, fed me, shaved me, even cleaned me after I dirtied myself. I shared things with this man I shared with no one else in my life. But the first time I saw that man my eyes grew so big that my wife thought they were going to explode right out of my head. We spent many hours together, him teaching and me relearning all the basic things we do everyday without thinking about them.

Rehab is where my memory comes back and where my family had to face new dilemmas, instead of wondering weather I would make it through the night, they had to wonder if I was destined for a life as a vegetable, one in a wheelchair like George Reeves. I was never one to watch, always wanting to play instead, and they now they were hearing that I might spend the rest of my life stuck looking on as everyone else played the game of life.

I awoke in a hospital bed, still tied down so I wouldn't pull any tubes out, to look across the room and see something familiar to us all. Remember the school clock, the one on the classroom wall, the standard school issue clock. Well I had one in my room, right across the room from me; it was the first thing I saw in the morning and the last thing I saw at night. It's how I kept score, I was determined I would do more each day than I did the day before, and I kept score each night looking at that clock. It moved so slowly you wanted to scream, one second at a time, one minute at a time, and one lousy hour at a time.

In the beginning it was the small victories, moving a finger, lifting a hand, or getting my toes to wiggle a little. As I concentrated on those types of things I was also trying with all my energy to relearn how to swallow. The lightning had knocked out my autonomic system, the part of the body that does things that happen automatically, the main consequence so far was that I couldn't swallow, so I couldn't drink. The one biggest problem in rehab was just that, not being able to drink, you don't know how much you miss it till its gone and I did miss my ice water.

The ski trip to Sugarbush was my first real trip away from the safety of my family, I would be out and about without my wife to remind me to take my pills, make sure that I didn't overextend too much, basically to keep me out of trouble. It was boys weekend in the mountains and all the boys were coming, these were the kids I played in the winter with, the ones I skied with, both the mountains of new England and those of Utah. They were a good 10 to 15 years younger than I was, as it seemed most of my playmates were. The trip for me started with the drive off cape to Rob's office in Braintree, where we met Ed who came in from his office in Brockton. It seems that in the last 12 years most of my ski trips started with this scenario, leaving the Cape, stopping to meet Rob and Ed who have become my best friends and playmates. This was my first big trip with the boys and

everyone was going, the 'condo at the bush' was going to be full. It started with an evening of entrances, everyone coming in from different places at different times with different stories; we stayed up waiting and talking till the early morning. I look back and wonder what I looked like coming down the mountain, I felt like a cross between a monkey and a short stop, I was in that low ape like stance and combined with the jerky movements of someone just out of rehab it must have been an interesting sight. I would take off down the mountain, feet wide apart, arms spread out for balance, and go awhile and then fall down. That's where the problems started, I couldn't get up, no matter what I tried I couldn't get up, talk about frustration. I started skiing when I could walk, the joke in the family was that I took my first steps from mom to dad, and was in ski boots for the steps back to mom. I started teaching when I was in high school; we would finish school and head to a small ski area in northern New Jersey and teach till 10pm. Anyway thank God I had good friends, these guys were all hard core skiers, the skill level was pretty damn high, for the most part these guys could ski anything. I had taught a bunch of them how to play in the woods; ski trees so tight that you had to block you face with your arms to get through, you hoped it would open up and there would be a turn on the other side. I showed them how to fly off small cliffs and land it, to ski snow so deep you needed a snorkel, I took them to places they never dreamed of. Now they were returning the favor, coming down the beginners hill, in full regalia, helmets, backpacks, ropes, fancy water systems, two way radios with head sets, all decked out for full on back country adventuring, picking my sad ass up off the snow because I couldn't get up by myself. I often wonder what it looked like from the life, that poor spastic guy trying to learn how to ski.

They talk about traumatic experiences, well I didn't have one, at least not in the sense of what people think of one. I woke up in rehab, looking at the 'institutional' clock, you know the ones we all had in school. Well when I opened my eyes in rehab, the first time and actually every time afterwards, the first thing I saw was that clock, it was also the last thing I saw. I had short term or short range physical goals, to move a finger, wiggle a toe, lift an arm or a leg, all physical challenges that I could focus on, get lost in concentration on and most importantly make progress towards. That is a very important component, making progress, if you don't do it you go crazy, . It was easy compared to what my family went through. They watched something happen that they could not change, they watched someone change in an instant, no longer who he was, bang just like that turned into someone else. They had to make the life and death decisions that they would have to live with. I had the easy part, all I had to do was get better.

Now I get to relearn my golf swing, something that I needed to do for a long time, so in one sense it's not a bad thing that this happened.

Struggling to come back from a physical injury that puts you into a bed for a couple of months is not an easy thing, and add to it that your internal system has taken the shock of it's life does not help any. You need to relearn all the basic things that you took for granted.

