

21 Days: A Mom's Journey of Fear and Hope

By Sampson Briggs

On June 15th, 2015, my mom was told **“your one and only son might not survive”**. On that day, I suffered a severe accident while working at my summer job. I was removing an old 4x4 off a roof that had been glued down, and it broke free. I took one step back and fell over the edge. I then fell a total of 30 feet to the concrete, landing primarily on the left side of my face and head. After falling 14 feet, I hit a metal bar on my neck and then proceeded to fall 16 more feet.

This is my story from my mom's perspective; one that is unique to her; one that she will never forget. It all started on a normal summer morning, not long after I graduated from high school. Friends had spent the night before, and we were all headed out to work. I told Mom **“goodbye, and that I'd see her for dinner”**. Not long after, Mom received a call notifying her about what had happened, and that she needed to get to the ER at Littleton Adventist Hospital right away. She was also told, **“Your son might not make it”**.

As soon as Mom showed up to the ER the shaking began, which lasted three days due to the adrenaline rush of fear. Lots of questions filled Mom's head, the big one being **“how could this have happened, did I lose my son?”** Mom did not have any idea what would happen next. An ICU doctor came and got my family, and they finally got to see me after I was stabilized and moved to the neuro ICU. My mom found me bleeding and broken, but still breathing. There were tubes, IV's, a bolt installed in my head to control my brain pressure, and too many probes to count. My mom told me that **“I wanted to hug you, grab you, and take you from that place. However, I was thankful you had gotten help so quickly and was being taken care of.”** To my mom **“things moved in slow motion; she had no sense of time; it was as if time had completely stopped.”** This unfamiliar place, a place a family never wants to be in, continued to bring up the question **“How could this have happened?”**.

“My son's strong body had survived a devastating accident; a fall that most cannot live through.” The next 72 hours were crucial. My family, friends, and doctors did not know if I was going to survive these next three days. The fear of excessive pressure building too quickly for my brain to survive, without severe permanent damage, stayed with Mom for these 72 hours. Mom knew it was bad, but kept asking herself **“how bad?”** and the wait continued. **“I had to be with him... or know that my husband was by his side. I feared that if I left, I might not see him alive again.”** My family was updated on my injuries, which were; extensive facial fracturing, one side of my face being crushed, a depressed skull fracture, broken mandible, a severe traumatic brain injury, and more to be determined. To Mom the only thing that mattered at that time was that our family be together and close.

Friends near and far began praying as soon as they heard of my accident. My family began to feel these prayers instantly. Still shaking, Mom kneeled by my bed, listened to me breathe with assistance noting the sounds of medical devices hooked up to me, and occasionally an alarm that would go off notifying the nurses that my brain pressure was increasing. Mom prayed over me while kneeling by my side and felt an indescribable peace. She believed this peace came from God as she heard His words **“I love him more”**. After my first surgery, which lasted eight hours, subtle responses to commands such as **“open your eye” – “wiggle your toe” – “nod your head”** began to bring hope. Mom saw these responses as me saying, **“I am here; I am trying”**. Unknowns filled Mom’s head; **“would he stand, walk, talk, see, be able to use his arms and legs, live a normal life?”** but, my mom was thankful that my body was fighting!

As days passed, I was surrounded by prayers, angels, friends and love. As I recovered, I continued to show amazing signs of improvement, which was a miracle. I was now able to speak, stand, walk, see and breathe on my own. The very first words that came out of my mouth were **“I love you”** to my mom. My family and friends thanked God for this. Many days passed and my family lived in the ICU, literally around the clock. They took turns sleeping there and would return home just to shower and change clothes, but they returned quickly. My mom was glad I would not actually remember any of these first 21 days. They were rough, painful, scary days that are engraved into my mom’s brain forever. **“During these 21 days, it felt as though I was in a tunnel leading between our home and the hospital,”** Mom told me. The unfamiliarity of the ICU no longer existed to my mom, it actually began to feel comforting. **“The nurses and doctors had become family now.”** 21 days after my accident, my brain began to retain new memories. Due to amnesia, I did not remember anything that took place in those 20 days of recovery. I believe this was **God’s protection**.

On day 21, I moved from Littleton Adventist Hospital to Craig Hospital to begin rehabilitation. My mom knew it would still be several weeks before I could walk through the front door of our home and live there, but she knew **this time would come. The night of day 21 struck fear into Mom’s heart. No family** could stay at my room at Craig Hospital overnight. Although I made it to day 21, this story was nowhere near over. A new journey began.

I continued to live and rehabilitate at Craig Hospital for eight long and challenging weeks. Each day brought recovery and healing. The fear that had gripped my mom was gradually replaced with a hopeful heart and eternal thankfulness.

2/16/16