

a true story



just an accident

amy montgomery

Doctors and therapists brought Scott Remington back from the brink.

Regular folks brought him back to life... twice.

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by

Amy Montgomery

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To Charlie

For opening my eyes to a new possibility
and for the freedom to run with it.

The family

Scott's parents

John "Bull" - father

Gertrude - mother

Scott's children

John "Roscoe" and Jenna

Scott's siblings

Earle - brother

Denise MacGlashan - sister

Bill MacGlashan - Denise's husband

Miranda, Christopher, Jeffrey, and Jeremy - Denise and Bill's children

Stephanie Wood - sister

Keith Wood - Steph's husband

Adrian and Dakota - Steph and Keith's children

Renee Smith - sister

John Smith - Renee's husband

Joss-Elyse - Renee and John's daughter

Introduction

The weirdest part is that there wasn't a mark on him, not a bruise, no black and blue marks, no cuts or scrapes, not a drop of blood.

But when the top of a massive beech tree snapped off unexpectedly and smacked into thirty-three-year-old logger Scott Remington—who was standing on the ground at that moment securing a bunch of freshly-cut trees to his skidder cable—it crushed his insides. "I was tying up the last tree of that hitch," says Scott, shaking his head from the irony of it all. "Everything was all cut, and I was just hooking them up."

The treetop hit him in the back, and Scott guesses that he lunged forward, hit the downed tree that he was tying, and was thrown back by the impact. His older brother, Earle, would eventually find Scott lying face-up in the woods beside his chainsaw and skidder, whose motor was still running, with that huge piece of beech cradling his neck like a pillow. Earle thinks that when Scott felt the impact of the tree, "He musta fought it back." No one will

ever really know what happened in that split second of impact, but one thing's for sure, says Earle, "Scott's pretty strong."

So was that treetop. Beech is a particularly dense and heavy wood, and this was a section maybe twenty-five, thirty feet long and almost fourteen inches in diameter. An ice storm the previous winter probably weighted the treetop until it partially snapped, hanging by one live thread "way up in the canopy," says Scott, waiting for something or someone to finish the job. "Whether I dislodged it when I felled another tree near it or the wind blew," he says, "I don't know."

No telling how long Scott lay there before his father, John, got worried and sent Earle to have a look-see. Father and sons, all loggers, were working a job deep in the woods up near Blue Ridge, New York—sixty to seventy miles from the Canadian border and about twenty miles north of the Remingtons' hometown of Brant Lake. John was stationed on the gravel logging road, waiting to cut up the trees that the boys brought out to him from different parts of the woods. The brothers always worked separately. "You never work together," says Earle, "so you don't hit each other."

It could have been an hour, no one knows, that Scott lay there with his back and neck broken, all but three ribs in pieces, his sternum cracked, his lung pierced, and internal bleeding so bad he was drowning on dry land. Earle recalls perfectly how the professionals would later explain it: "When the tree hit him, it was like somebody took a shotgun and shot him, but inside. No blood coming out; it wasn't gory or anything. It just blew his bones and his ribs right apart."

After initially losing consciousness, Scott came to, and, for a brief window of time between the hit and the chaos and unspeakable pain that would kick in soon, there was silence.

There's a lot about that morning that's just a blur to Scott, but he distinctly remembers looking up into the thick ceiling of leaves. It was a wet, foggy spring morning, sometime around 8:00 on May 25, 1999. He also knows for sure that, "I didn't hear nothin'. It was just misting a little that day. I hear the skidder idling, and I'm thinking, *I gotta go to work*. I thought, *I have to get up for work*. But then the sound just keeps getting louder and louder, and I realized I was in trouble. I couldn't breathe. And y'know how people say they see the light? I actually did. It was like, I had to make a choice: come or go. I'm not lying to you. It was like a big, bright light. And it felt real comfortable. I had the sensation that I could go toward it or not. But I knew I really had to see my wife and kids again. I had unfinished business or something. The whole thing was, I wasn't alone there, even though I was. And I wasn't scared at all during the whole thing. I was never scared. I'm lying there and I can't breathe and I can't move and I wasn't scared."

You can think of it as a gift really, that Scott got to float in that brief space in time, because it was that space that would forevermore bookmark his life as the dividing line between "before" and "after." And the immediate "after" would be as rough as a life could get—one extreme after another of pain, terror, embarrassment, humiliation, frustration, anger, sadness... it goes on and on. But for that one pause, he was alone without feeling alone.

No matter how many people you talk to about Scott, you hear the same thing over and over: "I don't think I could handle it the way he has." It is a visceral, understandable reaction to the horror of what he experienced. It's just impossible for people to imagine how they would respond in a similar situation, and, except for his sister Renee, no one wants to find out, ever. (Renee has said time and again that she wishes the accident had happened to her instead of him.) They also say it out of respect for and amazement at how Scott has handled the aftermath. Knowing him and the life he led, not a single person would have blamed him if he hadn't managed quite so well.

"You've got to remember who you're dealing with," says his cousin, Bud DeMatties. "He's a logger, a guy who ran his own business and did everything himself."

"I've known Scott all my life," says brother-in-law, Keith Wood. "Being a lumberman is awful hard work, and it has to be hard knowing that you can't do your own work anymore. I think that would bother me the most, facing the fact that you can't just get out there and do all your own stuff."

"I enjoy what I do. I look forward to going to work every morning," says brother-in-law, Bill MacGlashan, also a logger from a family of loggers. "Scott was the same way. He and I talked it over, and, if the roles were reversed, he would have done the same as me—he would have gone right back to it."

Scott is and always will be a man of the woods. Growing up, he was and, in a lot of ways always will be, an Adirondack kid. The youngest of John and Gertrude's five children, he never cared much for school—hated it actually—but he loved sports, and he loved to work.

He was an especially gifted soccer player, earning MVP honors his senior year at North Warren High. And from the time he was thirteen, Scott, like Earle, learned from his dad to drive trucks, and began helping out in his dad and Uncle Jim's gravel business and, later, in the family logging business, Remington Brothers. Scott thought that running big equipment was just the greatest, and as he got older, he also found that he had an extremely good head for business. He bought Remington Brothers from his dad and uncle before he was thirty.

Scott didn't just live to work in the woods, he lived to play in the woods. He has craved hunting, camping, and snowmobiling since he was little, and can tell you one story after another of wild times and near-death experiences.

"Killed his first buck at fourteen and his first bear when he was sixteen!" beams his mom, Gert.

Scott remembers that bear plain as day. "I was on this rock. I had a Thirty-two Special, the kind you see on the Westerns. I saw it coming toward me. I shot and the thing stood up on its hind legs and growled. Then it ran right straight at me. And I hit it four times and saw blood coming out both sides. It dropped not more than a hundred paces from me. I was terrified! *Terrified*. I was shaking. Then my dad comes up and says, 'What are you *doin*'?' I said, 'There it is, Dad!'"

Then there was that time "when we were younger. I was driving a Jeep with my cousins down Hickory Hill Mountain. Rolled it, went over five times. Threw us all out."

And just a year before the accident, camping with his best friends after some serious partying: "My friends, we set up a hunting camp over in state land, took dead trees,

threw a tarp over it, had a wood stove, and almost died in there one night. Yeah, the ground caught fire under the wood stove. It's the middle of the night, and my friend, Ted Meade, says, 'Hey, it's smoky in here.' And I said, 'Naa, go back to sleep, we're all right.' I didn't even open my eyes up, but I tell you, when he turned the flashlight on and said, 'No, come on!' you couldn't see from me to you. We ripped the sides of the tent off and immediately got out. My brother-in-law starts puking, 'cause once you hit the oxygen with all the smoke, y'know. *Real* terrible. 'Course, the alcohol probably didn't help either. If we didn't wake up, we probably woulda died of smoke inhalation. Teddy saved our lives that night."

Scott's not kidding when he says, "I got a lot of stories."

Now Scott's making a different kind of story. It's about how he clawed his way back from a nightmare—an accident pure and simple—that shattered his body in one unfair, unexpected moment. It's a story of the sheer guts and determination that he dragged out of God-knows-where, deep within himself, on just another day at work, when he came face-to-face, first with death itself, and then with a paralyzing outcome that felt like death to a guy who could never sit still.

"He's one of probably the toughest individuals I've ever run into," says David Osterberg, who was operations manager for Finch, Pruyn & Company, the mill that Scott was subcontracting for when he was hurt. "To have gone through that and still have the attitude he's got, *that's* resilience."

"I think anyone, even on the fringes of Scott's accident, had to realize they've witnessed a miracle," says cousin Bud. "You really don't have to be that close to the issues and know the in-depth details of what happened. If I tell a friend about what happened in the briefest conversation, I think they realize it's just a miracle that he even survived."

A lot of people look at Scott as something of a miracle. But this is not just the story of one man. It's also a story about the magic and transformative power of human connections. It's a reminder that life is a busy, two-way street, and that maybe the whole reason we're put on this earth is to reach out to others and *allow* them to reach in to us. That's why this is also about what a family did, what a town did, what a bunch of friends did to give strength to a guy who needed it, and to help drain the tragedy out of a tragic situation. And it's about what Scott has turned around and done in return for his friends, family, neighbors, and millions of other people who, for one damned unlucky reason or another, ended up in the same boat as he did.

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Part I

By many measures, logging is the most dangerous occupation in the United States. The tools and equipment used in logging, such as chain saws and logging machines pose hazards wherever they are used. As loggers use their tools and equipment, they are dealing with massive weights and irresistible momentum of falling, rolling, and sliding trees and logs. The hazards are even more acute when dangerous environmental conditions are factored in, such as uneven, unstable or rough terrain, inclement weather including rain, snow, lightning, winds, and extreme cold, and/or remote and isolated work sites where health care facilities are not immediately accessible...

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