

## **Survivor Story: Hope** ***Staying Outside for Fireworks Backfired***

In the summer of 2004, Omaha, NE, was hit with a ton of storms which seemed to develop out of nowhere. Friday, July 2, was no different. Just as every year my grandma and I had been camping out at Memorial Park holding a spot for the family for that night to enjoy the annual Celebrate America Concert and Fireworks Show. At around 5:30 pm that evening my grandma pointed east in the sky where it was completely black over a suburb of Omaha which lies across the river in Iowa called Council Bluffs. "The Bluffs is sure getting hit hard," she told me. Within minutes the storm had traveled west (instead of east like they normally do) across the river and half way through Omaha. My grandma and I not having a car at the park with us were forced to stay at the park and seek shelter from the rain and wind under our tarp, like the countless others who had decided to wait out the storm.

It was about a half hour into the storm that my grandmother recalls hearing what she calls a "blood curtailing scream" coming from me as she looked over to see me lifted from about 6 inches off the ground and dropped back down again. At first she thought I had just become scared and jumped as she could tell that the lightning had struck not too far away. Then as I continually repeated "my teeth feel like they are going to shatter and my hair feels like it is going to fall out," she realized that in the position I had been sitting in it would have been impossible for me to jump. It was then that the reality of how close the lightning had really hit set in.

Within seconds of my scream a lady sitting not too far from us rushed over and lifted up the tarp. She wondered if everything was ok. My grandma told her that I had been hit by the lightning. She said that she would run for help, but instead a younger guy not too far away said he could get there faster and ran off. My grandma then called my mom to tell her what was going on.

All she had told my mom by the time the paramedics had gotten there was "We're taking Hope to the hospital." My grandma upon the arrival of the paramedics automatically hung up the phone leaving my mom in question and worry about her only child not knowing what was going on. The paramedics asked me a series of questions. "What is your name?" and "What is today?" to which I quickly answered Hope and Friday, but when they asked me about my age all I could say was "Uh..." My grandma quickly told them I was 18 and then I responded "oh I'm 18."

Being that we were in a huge crowd the paramedic scooped me up in his arms and carried me out to the drive where the medical golf cart was waiting. It was too wet to lay me on the gurney so the paramedic sat me in the seat next to the

driver as he stood holding on to the side of the golf cart and to me to make sure I could sit up. My grandma followed in a medic cart behind to the police bus where I was examined while they waited for the ambulance to make it through the traffic.

In the police bus the entrance wound was determined to be my right foot. There my big toe nail was now missing. The exit wound was a scar on my face where a year and a half earlier I had surgery. The scar on my face was bright red. When the paramedic touched it he immediately jerked his hand away and said "ow." My scar was hot enough to burn his fingers. My mom would later do the same thing at the hospital when she too noticed how red my scar was.

I remember the sheer pain and being dropped back down to the ground. After that the first thing I remember is fighting with the paramedic in the ambulance. I am scared to death of needles and he was trying to put an IV in me. I kept making the argument that I was going through enough pain, I didn't need an IV in me to make it worse. I finally relented after he explained that the way he would do it and by him putting it in the fold of my elbow it would be much less painful than getting it put in at the hospital.

I was taken to the ER at University of Nebraska Medical Center where 3.5 hours and countless MRIs and Cat Scans later I walked out. Limped out is more like it actually. For the next couple of weeks bending my right knee was impossible as much of my right side was temporarily paralyzed. Since the strike I tire more easily and have been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. My migraines which I have had since I was 4 have also become more severe and frequent. I feel lucky though that my injuries weren't as severe as they could have been. However, it can be lonely sometimes when I need to nap or go to bed early while my friends are all having fun. I would much rather join them, only I lack the energy to at times. And sometimes people don't understand that I can't push myself to stay up for the fun. But that's life and I'm lucky to still be living it.

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