



Read about the most recent adventure from our Road Trippers as they cross the country.

road trip
itinerary
past stops
[click here!](#)

every day/
everywhere →

slide show →

itinerary/index →

roadies →

city
hot spots →

office pool →

Team Pages

NFL ▼

Every day/Everywhere

Near-death experience sheds light on life, luck and love

December 19, 2000

Dawn Reiss

The Sporting News

GLEN ELLYN, Ill. -- I'm very lucky. I should be dead right now.


Two weeks ago I was in a car accident near Foxboro, Mass. Every doctor I have seen shakes his head in disbelief. Most tell me I'm a walking miracle. Some call it luck. Others call it the hand of God. I believe I was given another chance to live for a special reason, even though I don't know what that reason is yet. One thing is for sure, not many people come close to death and still have a chance to talk about it.

It all began when Brian, Jeff and I were 15 miles away from Foxboro, Mass. We had covered the Monday Night Patriots game the night before and were heading to Indianapolis to catch a flight to Miami.

I don't remember much of the accident, but this is what I have been told.

Brian was driving on the interstate, when a car driven by an elderly lady started to swerve into our lane. Brian honked. She overcompensated. Her car went up on two wheels. She hit the guardrail and spun around toward us. To avoid a head-on collision, Brian swerved into the other lane in front of an 18-wheel oil tanker.

The truck driver tried to stop, but couldn't. He plowed right into us. The Chevy Impala's large trunk was diminished to mere inches. I was sitting in the backseat at the time of the accident, typing on my laptop. The impact of the truck crumpled my body and thrust me into the driver's seat. The seat belt, which saved me from flying through the windshield, was choking me. Jeff hazily called Brian's and my names, but there were no responses.



The truck driver is the real hero of this accident. The tanker flipped, and 8,000 gallons of oil spilled on the highway. Its driver jumped from his rig and cut the seat belt loose from around my neck with a knife as I lay unconscious. They pulled out the driver's seat and lifted me out through the front because there wasn't a backseat left after the crash.

Brian and Jeff were taken in an ambulance to a different hospital than me. I awoke in the middle of a CAT scan. I didn't know where I was or what had happened. They told me I had been in a bad accident, but everything was going to be OK. I went unconscious again.

My mother frantically tried to call the hospital to find out what was going on, but all they would tell her was that I had been in a bad accident. My dad and boyfriend caught the next flight to Boston.

When I awoke again, my dad and boyfriend were sitting in my hospital room. Three of my ribs were broken, and I had a punctured lung that possibly needed a chest tube. But I was alive.


Brian, Jeff and my boss, Barry Reeves came to visit me. The guys were released from their hospital stay after a few hours. Jeff had a large bruise on his forehead where his laptop hit him. Brian kept getting sick from his concussion, but he and Jeff were OK. The next day, they left for Miami.

For the next three days I stayed at the hospital. My face was bloodied from the seat belt. My neck, arms and shins were badly bruised, my vision blurred and my jaw a bit crooked. I couldn't raise my arms. No matter how I turned, every position was uncomfortable. I had IVs in both of my hands. A quick press of a button, and I had all the morphine I could handle. But it made me sick to my stomach. I couldn't keep any food down and just wanted to desperately get some rest. The nurses woke me up every few hours for more X-rays. They told me it was a miracle I was alive.

I spent part of my hospital stay walking around with my IV pole. I didn't want to sit still. I walked down to the gift shop and admired a few of their Christmas items. The next day, the gift shop owner brought me an angel I had been looking at as a gift. It now hangs on my bedpost at home.

My hospital roommate wasn't as lucky as me. She had just given birth eight weeks earlier and was in the hospital again to have her appendix removed. She couldn't sleep for more than an hour, so the light was left on for most of the night. Every step she took brought on a look of agony. Her husband was nowhere to be seen, except on the very last day. He showed up and argued with her that she didn't need to be in the hospital. She left later that day.

Now I was in a wheelchair and everything was different. People looked at me. The world seemed so large, especially for someone who normally stands tall at 6-1. It was time for me to fly home. My dad and I were flying home to Chicago on one flight and my boyfriend was flying to Indianapolis on a different flight. Logan Airport in Boston, which was under construction, wasn't very handicap accessible.



The two flights were at different terminals, and the only way to reach one from the other was through a bumpy, quarter-mile path outdoors. When my dad asked a security guard if there was an easier route, the guard replied, "If she can get out of that wheelchair and walk, she should."

So my dad struggled to push my wheelchair on the makeshift ramp, while my boyfriend carried all of our luggage.

After we said our goodbyes, my dad and I headed to our flight. We boarded the plane before anyone else, but the takeoff was delayed an hour. Once we were airborne, the flight was long and difficult. I tried putting on a sweatshirt when I heard something pop. From that moment on, I was in more pain than I had been to that point of the ordeal. When the plane landed in Chicago, I had to wait some more. The attendants made me wait until everyone else was off the plane before I could leave.

When I arrived, my mother immediately knew something was wrong. That night, I went back to the emergency room. After a few more X-rays, the doctors found two more broken ribs. They aren't sure if I broke them on the flight, or if I just strained a muscle that made bone rub against bone. Either way, all I wanted were some pain killers.

During the next few days, my mom helped me bathe. She had to help me undress because I couldn't take off my own shirt. I slept with five pillows to help my back, which constantly ached. Flowers and emails came in faster than I could believe. Everyone wished me the best and hoped for a speedy return.

Now I must wait for time to heal the wounds. My goal is to be ready for the Super Bowl.

I've seen several doctors since I've come home. They say I will need physical therapy for my arm, which I still have problems using. They say it will take at least 6-8 weeks for me to heal, maybe more.

As Christmas approaches, I'm even more grateful and thankful for what I do have. I'm not starving. I have a warm place to lay my head, and I'm surrounded by people who love me. Many people have called or written asking if there is anything they can do for me. The one thing I ask is to think about others. Think about the important people in your life and take time to say something extra special to them.

Take time to look out for someone in need, someone who might be hungry this Christmas. To me that is what people remember: Not how much money you had or what type of beautiful things you own, but what you have given to others. That lasts more than a lifetime. Please remember this because I am one of the lucky ones. I have been given a second chance.

Dawn Reiss covers the NFL to TSN's Ultimate Road Trip. Email her at tsndawn@aol.com.

► [Previous Stories](#)