

My Visit With Two People Who Made **Bad Choices**

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Every now and then, we all see things that tend to make us stop and think about how precious life is and how our whole world can change in an instant. My wife and I own two English cocker spaniels that are registered therapy dogs, which we take to local hospitals and nursing homes. Our purpose is to brighten the day of those who need all the love and attention they can get.

A visit last weekend is one I'll remember for a long time. In a room normally filled with senior citizens sat a 30-something man at a table with a lady. He stood out from all the others because he was wearing a muscle shirt that revealed tattoos—mean ones—on both arms, from hands to shoulders. The lady at the table waved for us to bring over the dogs.

Navy photo by JOC David Rush





Photo by Matthew J. Thomas

...and drivers who don't always buckle up may find themselves in the same pickle as the two victims in this story.

As I neared, I noticed that huge rings—each one emblazoned with skull and crossbones, knives, and guns—adorned the man's fingers. The lady introduced us to Ron, who, she said, was recovering from a brain injury he had incurred five months ago in a motorcycle mishap.

Since I'm a safety manager, I knew there had to be more to this story and thought quickly on how I could get all the facts without seeming too forward. "Did the motorcycle helmet malfunction during the mishap?" I asked.

"He wasn't wearing one," she replied.

Ron then said something while petting the dogs, but I couldn't understand at first because his words sounded like those from an intoxicated person. As I would learn, he had said, "I had dogs once." The lady explained that Ron hadn't been expected to live at the time of the mishap, but that now, hopefully, he would recover enough to take care of himself one day.

We then were directed to a 30-something lady with a shaved head, who was rocking back and forth in her wheelchair. She had a smile that would brighten anyone's day. Because her body was curled partly into a fetal position, I gently placed one dog on her lap. Her face immediately lit up with excitement, and she tried her best to laugh. I became concerned that the dogs might be too lively for her when I noticed a fresh surgical incision in her head. Staples ran from one ear to the other. My wife, who is a nurse, took over and made sure the dogs didn't hurt her.

Meanwhile, I stepped back and talked to one of the nursing assistants and asked about the lady's condition. I learned she had been a typical soccer mom several months earlier, but a vehicle mishap had left her with a brain injury from which she likely never will recover. She wasn't wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash. I learned her two young children and husband had been in earlier that day to visit but that she doesn't recognize any of them.

I had a hard time concentrating the rest of that day; I found my thoughts constantly going back to those two people and the lifestyles they once had led with their families. Their unfortunate conditions made me realize just how fast one's whole world can change.

In our society, those who have suffered injuries dictating long recovery times often tend to disappear from life's normal day-to-day activities. This situation is compounded when we forget about them or fail to learn from their experiences.

I couldn't take photos of those two people at the nursing home to use as examples of what can happen when you make a wrong choice. I only can tell their stories to others and include a reminder that life as you know it this moment can change in the next tick of the clock's second hand. ■

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