

Recounting the Worst Motorcycle Wreck in AZ History



Third in a series of installments

by survivor Ernie Lizarraga

The one biker the dumptruck did not take out was Will.

While this is going on, less than a mile away E56 is on N. 23rd Dr. for a fall injury. The Captain, Garry Pfaft, hears the call come out on his radio but Engine 56 isn't dispatched because of the call that they are on. Garry walks outside and can see the smoke, so he runs back in the house and tells the Paramedics Mike Estrada and Pat Burcham that he's going to the fire without them. He will pick them up later at the hospital that they'll go to with the patient. He jumps in the truck and has the Engineer Richard Sutter drive to the fire. They are the first ones to arrive on the scene and it looks like a battle ground with bodies laying in the middle of the street. Injured people are on the side of the road and in wrecked cars. He knows other units will be arriving soon. He has

Richard direct water to the hose he's pulling to fight the fire, then all of a sudden officer Mike Smith comes running out of nowhere to help him.

Back on 23rd Dr. the patient decides she doesn't want to go to the hospital. So Mike and Pat have her sign a refusal, grab their medical boxes, and start running towards the accident scene. After running a couple of blocks they reach Carefree Highway and see a police car, so they flag him down and catch a ride the rest of the way in the back seat.

As Capt. Garry Pfaft and officer Mike Smith are fighting the fire, Daisy Mountain E145 drives past them. They stop and conduct their triage. First they run to me, Jason, and Dayle in the road; then to Terry, Julie, Will, and Todd on the side of the road; then to the people across the street in the cars that were hit. They determine me and Dayle need to be worked on first so they run back to us. A few minutes later other fire apparatus start arriving and soon there are about 50 to 60 EMTs and paramedics on scene. After a few minutes Daisy Mountain Paramedic Jeff Henricks notices a Maltese cross with a Phoenix bird tattoo in the middle on my arm and a Fire Department union sticker on the bike laying next to me, so he yells out, "Do any of you Phoenix guys know our patient? We think he might be a Phoenix Fire Fighter." Danny Walls off of Ladder 50 comes running over but doesn't recognize me due to the blood and swelling on my face. He pulls out my wallet and sees it's his Captain and the same guy he goes riding with.

A few minutes later there are 6 helicopters circling just above the scene and two of them are medical, looking for a place to land.

Medical Native Air lands on 27th Drive just north of Carefree and Airevac lands on Carefree east of the scene. Dayle is put into Native Air and I'm put on to Airevac. After my helicopter lifts off, a Paramedic on scene that knows me and my brother-in-law Vince

Marinez who is also a Phoenix firefighter calls Vince up and tells him what has happened and where I'm being flown to.

Vince calls my sister. My sister calls my wife Lorri at her work. When Lorri hears she runs out to her car and drives the 3 miles to St. Joe's Hospital. When she gets there she runs to the front desk. They tell her I did arrive by helicopter but she can't see me right now. They tell her the hospital has been contacted by the media asking about a firefighter Captain injured; but the hospital will not be giving out any information. Fire Department Chaplain Father Carlucci was talking to the Doctors and he was told I might not make it past the day. He finds Lorri and comforts her. Lorri's devastated.

To be continued next month in the December 2019
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As shared by Ernie Lizarraga, in memory of dear friends gone but never forgotten.

Betsy & Bruce



As it turns out, the owner of the boots in this striking photo is Ernie. They were removed by the paramedics when checking for injuries & in prep for his transport to the hospital.