

HELLO

Chapter 1

Hello. My name is Sean Michael Stevens.

I am not sure that anyone will find this interesting, but here goes. I am recalling a spring day, back when I was a commercial truck driver, traveling through the Southeastern United States, ending around Nashville, Tennessee. North, just in to Kentucky where they have a lot of truck stops. The day was Friday, May 2, 2014. I was hoping to deliver Saturday, but I would not be able to until Monday. When I parked, around five hours from my delivery location, I knew I had a lot of time on my hands. So, even after a long day of work, I took a shower in the truck stop and grabbed some food to take back to the truck to eat. I did some paper work, cleaned, and called a friend who was getting off night-shift work. Still talking around dawn on Saturday, May 3, I lost the feeling on my right side. That is when I lost the Bluetooth headset in my right ear and my speech to go with it. My friend thought I had fallen asleep. But, in reality, my life had completely changed forever.

I had had a stroke. The stroke I had was a hemorrhagic stroke--the type where a blood vessel pops in your brain, an aneurism (rather from a blood clot). I lost my speech, and feeling and control of my entire right side instantly. But, my awareness seemed intact. After a conversation revisiting the incident, it seems I had mentioned numbness in my right hand about 5-15 minutes before, like it had fallen asleep. But, since I was tired after a long day, I really didn't think too much of it until I lost the rest. I was not prone to daydreaming, but I was hoping this was a dream. The sun had just started to peek out, I was very tired, and I knew, IF THIS IS REAL, I was in a bad way.

As it was a typical spring day around Nashville, the nighttime was chilly and afternoons were warm. As a result, my windows were closed in the chill of night when I went to sleep around dawn. I would imagine sometime in the afternoon, I awoke feeling sweaty. In the heat of the day it felt like an oven with all the windows shut. I then realized, obviously, that I had not been dreaming about losing my right side and my voice. I grabbed my phone and tried to do something, but all that happened was gibberish--random numbers pushed. I guess "HELP" did not transfer from my brain to do anything useful on the phone. So, I thought "Now, I guess I've got to get out of the bed and try to get help." One small problem, though--just because I couldn't feel my right side did not mean it wasn't attached. And it was quite heavy. With great difficulty, I crumpled onto the floor. Then I had to take a break.

Every major move I undertook involved pain and exhaustion--a period of extreme strenuous activity, or trying, and then a break, or napping, and then extreme pain that aroused me for another try. I dragged my right side, which had been my dominant side, with me. I squeezed by the gear shift and got as close as I could to the driver's side door. I tried as hard as I could to get the door open. No luck. Collapse. Pain. In most commercial trucks with a sleeper berth, you can lift the steering column out of the way so you can go back and forth from the driver's seat to berth and vice versa. I tried to hit the horn. With my right arm and leg dragging behind me, I could not reach high enough to push the horn. Collapse. Exhaustion....Pain!

At this point, I was right next to the QUALCOMM unit directly in front of the gear shift. When you park with the engine off, the unit only comes on for a few minutes then goes back to sleep, then stays off for an extended period of time to conserve battery power. The only way to send a message to get a response involves pushing more buttons than the cellphone, and that hadn't gone so well. Now I had to push my dragging right half out of the way so I could try to get around the gear shift and try to open the passenger side door. You can already guess: no luck. Collapse. Exhaustion...

I have to admit, I might have cried a bit at this stage. My ideas for getting help at this point were gone. I knew it was only Saturday--getting near dusk--and my delivery was not scheduled until Monday afternoon. Since I had been on the other side of the desk as an Extra Coverage Team member filling in for bosses or helping them in busy times, I knew that the company would not worry about me until late Monday morning when it would look like I was running late for delivery in the computer.

...PAIN! I thought if I could not alert anyone to my predicament I should try to get a bit more comfortable. So I worked myself out from between the gear shift and the passenger seat and dragged myself to the bed in the sleeper berth. The floor was not very comfortable, even when not wedged around the gear shift. I tried to get myself up on the bed. That right side was so very heavy when I had no feeling and no control of it, it was like my dead half. I tried excruciatingly hard to get myself on the bed. If I could not get help any time soon, at least it would be more comfortable up there. No luck. Collapse. Pain. I tried to yell out, but nothing came out. Maybe a quiet moan at most. I'm pretty sure I cried again. I gave up, but there was no end.

Truck stop parking lots generally have quite a bit of lighting so I could see little peeks of light around the drapes on my windows, but not much. And, I had run out of ideas. Even without the gear shift in the back sleeper berth there is still not much room on the floor to spread out, definitely not enough to get comfortable anyway. As night set in, the temperature got cooler and quite chilly by morning. I tried to curl up as much I could to save heat. I was pretty miserable.

The sun brought warmth, light, and new motivation to try again to get help. I shimmied myself towards the passenger door. I tried to open the door. No luck. I moved myself around the gear shift to open the driver's side door. No luck. I tried to honk the horn. No luck. All of this took quite some time because it took all my energy to try each time and ended with the inevitable collapse with exhaustion until the pain made me move again. I gave up on getting help, again. I got away from the gear shift, headed to the sleeper berth, and tried one more time to lift myself onto the bed. No luck. Never-ending frustration.

It was quite hot by now—the sun had been out a long time. FINALLY--something happened. A knock at the door. HOPE! I tried to yell. I think the best I could muster was a low, quiet groan. I don't know if the one who knocked could hear me or not. After several times knocking there was silence. Heartbreak! Tears. But, still hope.

A bit later, it was still very hot in the truck but I could tell from the sunlight that the evening was approaching soon. Another knock! "HELP!" I tried to scream but only a low, quiet moan came out. This time someone started smashing the passenger window in. FINALLY!!!

After 34 hours since the onset of the stroke, the first chapter finally ended for me.

I encourage all trucking companies to adopt (what is already possible and exists) a simple alert system. [ABC's 20/20, Season 40, Episode 33, My Reality: A Hidden America.] It is already being pushed for adoption on behalf of women truck drivers who have been assaulted. I would not have needed to survive so long before getting help.

Created: 4/2/2016

Developed: 4/2/2016-6/17/2019

Printed for Feedback: 6/17/2019

Edited: 6/17/2019-01/01/2020

Published: 01/01/2020

Cleaned and Added this Page: 1/9/2022