

# 'IT'S A CRAZY STORY'

**MCMURRAY SHARES  
LONG ROAD BACK TO  
RECOVERY AFTER  
CRASH-INDUCED  
MEMORY LOSS**

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Memory: it's something we rely on daily and often take for granted. But Georgetown's Jonathan McMurray knows just how precious and fleeting memory can be as he looks back on the day his mind was permanently altered by a traumatic injury.

A quarter century has passed since the local man escaped a brush with death, only to be left with no recollection whatsoever of his life before that moment.

"It's a crazy story," he said. "At that time, it was so unreal and unbelievable to me, I thought that my life was a movie. I was looking for the cameras."

It was August 29, 1995, and McMurray was driving with friends through Quebec, on his way back to finish his fourth year at Acadia University in Nova Scotia.

"It was late at night, close to midnight, and it was my turn to sleep," he said. "So I was sleeping in the back seat, with no seatbelt on because I was laying down. Then a tire popped and the car flipped. I was ejected and landed on my head."

McMurray was rushed to the hospital, where he spent a week in a coma. In those early days, doc-

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**- Jonathan McMurray**

tors weren't sure he was going to make it. His parents and brothers rushed to Quebec to be at his bedside and hope for a miracle.

When he finally woke up, it quickly became apparent that not only had all of the memories of the first 22 years of his life been wiped out of his mind, but he also couldn't remember how to talk, walk or identify anyone or anything.

"I had to use a wheelchair until I learned to walk again. I couldn't even name an animal, colour or shape," he said.

Amazingly, one precious thing had stuck with him — his recollection of song lyrics.

"Music was a great tool for me, a great gift. I didn't forget any of the music that I'd ever heard," he said. "My family could play my old records, and I'd be singing along, but when it stopped I'd be like, 'Who are you?'"

Discovering everything all over again as an adult was a strange process, said McMurray, who felt almost like an alien who had been dropped into an intense place called earth.

"Being introduced to the world again in 1995 as a 22-year-old 'infant'... It's crazy, it's insane," he said. "Twenty five years ago, I was thinking, 'What's red? Is red a colour, or an animal, or a fruit, or a vegetable? What's a vegetable?'"

But being in the hospital for a prolonged period and seeing the hardships of others gave McMurray a new perspective on life — to live in the now and not dwell on what might have been.

"I can't change the past; I can't un-pop the tire. It is what it is, and you have to move on," he said. "I just try to be as present as possible and pay attention to what's happening now because that's what you can change."

The long road to recovery went on for years, and McMurray might tell you the "reconstruction project" of his mind is still going on to this day as he strives to learn new things.

His memory still isn't the greatest, and he often keeps track of daily routines by making notes in his phone or on a notepad. He struggles with a condition known as visual agnosia, where he can't always recognize someone or something just by looking at them.

But for those who just meet the Georgetown native, they would be hard-pressed to tell he had ever been through such an ordeal.

McMurray is married with two children and leads a typical suburban life, becoming a familiar face to many as he works at the local Beer Store. He's written a book about his experience, called *Mind the Gap*, and dreams of seeing it turned into a movie one day.



Melanie Hennessey/Torstar

**Jonathan McMurray celebrates the day he woke up from a coma - September 4, 1995 - as his other birthday.**

Now, he's ready to celebrate what he calls his other birthday — the day he woke up in the hospital, September 4, 1995.

"I had to start over again from scratch that day, so it's kind of like

I'm 25," he said. "Twenty five is a big one. I think I'll buy myself a beer."

For more on McMurray's experience visit [jonathanmcmurray.com](http://jonathanmcmurray.com).

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