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Jeff Lumby's view from the country

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"The Incident"

Some anniversaries are good, some are bad. The one I'm about to tell you about is most inauspicious. Actually it represents the worst day of my life.

A number of years ago, my good friend Dan called me up complaining about a felled oak tree that had landed across his back yard. Why did Dan call me? Simple, I was the only one he knew who owned a chainsaw. So, we set a date to carve this behemoth up. It was July 4th, 1997. Independence Day. It would nearly involve leaving his nose independent of his face.

When I arrived at Dan and Jackie's that fateful Friday night it was evident that my little trimming chainsaw was no match for this 75 year-old oak tree. There was a lot of clean up stuff we could do though. I began lopping off the small branches so that the trunk would be ready to cut up when we were able to get a hold of a larger chainsaw. We quickly developed a two-man system for this process that I will never use again. I cut all the branches off at the trunk and Dan would then pick each branch up and hold it while I cut it into smaller pieces. One branch was being particularly stubborn so Dan reached over the chainsaw to grab the other side of the branch in an effort to snap it upward. The effect pinched the branch on the chain and it kicked up into Dan's face.

The whole thing happened so quickly at first I thought Dan was faking his response. Then he pulled his hands away from his face. I had cut Dan from the bottom of his nose all the way up and around to his eyebrow, narrowly missing his left eye. My first reaction was a fortunate one. I ran into the house to call 911 as if I had witnessed someone else doing it. It was the first of many good calls made from that point on. The ones that follow I'll be forever grateful for. Instead of panicking and taking meat cleaver to me, Dan's wife Jackie turned out to be the voice of calm and reason in a blur of panic. She took charge of the emergency call in as composed a manner as you could ask for. Within minutes the fire department was there to help stabilize Dan. Paramedics followed soon after.

I don't really remember the drive to Toronto Western General Hospital. I do remember a teary phone call to my wife while following an ambulance for 20 minutes. When we got there, more important decisions had to be made. The first, and

most critical of the evening, involved holding out for the head surgeon who was off that night. Dan makes his living with the face I just carved up. At the time, he was hosting an entertainment show called E-now, and a co-host on The Dini Show. We weren't about to allow an intern to sew Dan's face up like it was an old pair of jeans. Maybe he would have done a great job but we couldn't take that chance. Instead we insisted on them trying to contact the head surgeon. They did, and reluctantly at first, he came to our aid. I would consider the work Dr. Dimitri Anastakis did on Dan's face legendary. The stitch job he performed that night on a chainsawed face has never required supplementary procedures. Dr. Anastakis spent hours with Dan to make it perfect and he did.

Meanwhile, friends and relatives began trickling in to the waiting area where Jackie and I were. A lot of confused looks went my way and needless to say I'd never felt smaller. Then our mutual friend Howard showed up, gave Jackie a kiss on the cheek, looked at me and said, "So, how's it going Jason?" It was just the icebreaker the evening needed. The stress factor, from then on, was dramatically reduced.

Dan eventually emerged from surgery smiling and we all began the healing process. One of these moments involved a guest appearance on The Dini Show, with chainsaw in hand, to re-create the incident. I didn't realize before hand, but the people in the studio audience were Dan's biggest fans and anyone who had designs on hurting Dan would have them to answer to. When I stepped on to the stage they looked at me like I had two heads, both of which they had problems with. It was not what I'd call friendly turf.

The ultimate payback occurred at my 40th birthday the year following. My wife had arranged an open mic and all my radio friends took turns roasting me about this and that. Then came Dan's turn. In, clearly the funniest moment of the night, Dan slowly strode up to the mic, looked out over those gathered, paused and said, "Jeff chainsawed my face!" Then calmly made his way off the stage to huge applause and laughs.

I learned a few things that night in July. First of all, when you're using a chainsaw a simple rule applies. "My saw, my wood!" Secondly, that I have the best friends a guy could ask for.



God's wood saw or Satan's scalpel?



PHOTO BY MANDI HARGRAVE
Natalie Fielding (6) from Toronto uses the larger sifter outside to sort through her dirt and find tiny artifacts she couldn't find by digging during an Archaeological Adventure Day at Crawford Lake.

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