

Neighbours rallying around OPP officer hurt in ATV crash

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with a tree. When Mrs. Fraunberger came to, she saw blood coming from his ears and mouth and started screaming.

"What happened in three minutes is unbelievable," she said, eight months after the accident that left her with bumps and bruises, but her husband with brain damage.

"It was the wrong thing to do. But it was such a short distance. ... I'm stupid, made the wrong decision," Mr. Fraunberger admitted.

"We've never, ever, all those years, never got on a machine without a helmet," Mrs. Fraunberger said. "One hundred per cent he would not have the injury he has" if he had been wearing a helmet, she said.

Mr. Fraunberger suffered a catastrophic level four brain injury, otherwise known as diffuse axonal injury (DAI).

"That tree, for the damage it did to him, it saved us because it was (otherwise) a 150-foot drop," Mrs. Fraunberger said. "There's no way ... I don't think any one of us would have walked away."

Following the accident, Mr. Fraunberger spent the first 10 days at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in a coma. He then went into a vegetative state.

An MRI five weeks after the accident revealed he suffered the brain injury.

Mrs. Fraunberger said at the time, the doctors told her to put her husband into an institution because he would never be able to walk and/or talk again.

"I told them they were wrong," she said. "I think I was the only one who believed it, but five days (after the MRI) he said my name."

A few days later, Mr. Fraunberger took his first steps. He then continued to re-learn

how to walk and talk.

For people who did not know Mr. Fraunberger before the accident, they would not know, save the for slight slur in his speech.

From the minute her husband was transported to Sunnybrook, Mrs. Fraunberger sat at his bedside touching him and speaking to him. Mr. Fraunberger said he could hear her and feel her hand on his, but couldn't respond.

"I love her so much. Somebody sent her down here," Mr. Fraunberger said of his wife, with tears in his eyes.

DAI is one of the most common and devastating traumatic brain injuries, according to brainandspinalcord.org

It is also one of the leading causes of death in people with traumatic brain injuries.

DAI is the result of the brain being moved back and forth in the skull from an acceleration or deceleration, such as car accident, fall or Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Broken connections prevent proper communication between brain regions and neurons with damaged axons tend to die, according to Jordan Antlick, outreach lead for the Ontario Brain Institute

LOST WEIGHT, MEMORY

Mr. Fraunberger hit the tree with the right side of his head and frontal lobe area, which has affected his short-term memory, emotions and personality.

The lower half of his right ear was sheered off, but has been surgically repaired.

"I'm much more easy going, respectful of life," he admitted.

"Suddenly, what bothered you a year ago doesn't bother us now. Who cares if the dishes sit for two hours," Mrs. Fraunberger said.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Peter Fraunberger and Tanner at home.

noting the couple, who has been together for 15 years, also laughs a lot more now.

He also speaks an octave or two higher. "I'm working off different cylinders now," he joked.

But what has not changed is Mr. Fraunberger's determination and he's channeling all of his energy into getting back to where he was before the accident, which was a 204-pound, muscular OPP officer.

Mrs. Fraunberger recalled doctors telling her that due to the impact of the accident, his neck should have snapped, leaving him a paraplegic.

What saved Mr. Fraunberger was his physical fitness.

The former jiu jitsu competitor worked out daily, something his wife always teased him about saying he was 55 years old, he didn't need to lift all those weights.

"I'm glad I was in good shape," he said.

As part of Mr. Fraunberger's rehabilitation, he takes his eight-year-old golden retriever Tanner out walking, he also spends 20 minutes a day on the elliptical machine he recently hauled up a flight of stairs by himself so the family could have a Christmas tree on the main floor.

Mr. Fraunberger used to spend 30 minutes a day on the machine but doctors told him to cut back because he was losing weight. He stands 6 feet, 1 inch and weighs 176 pounds.

Mr. Fraunberger's rehab has become a family affair. His son Erik gave him a Nintendo DS and brain games for Christmas. One of his daughters gave him a balance disc, as he has lost about 20 per cent of his balance.

"He's not the only one with this unfortunate invisible injury. It affects the entire family," Mrs. Fraunberger said.

While Mrs. Fraunberger was with her husband in the Toronto hospitals all day, every day from May to September, neighbours brought meals over to their house throughout May and June for their daughters, Elissa and Stephanie, who still lived at home. Erik was in university.

They also cut their lawn and did whatever else was needed around the house.

Elissa walked away from a new job after just graduating from college so she could help care for Stephanie, who is in elementary school.

"It's tough. A lot of emotion. There's no normalcy here and that's hard with kids," Mrs. Fraunberger said.

The ATV the Fraunbergers were riding was uninsured. They bought it at the end of the previous season and put it right into storage with plans of insuring it in time for the cottage opening. Without insurance and disability payments being a fraction of Mr. Fraunberger's salary, money is tight.

Mrs. Fraunberger has picked up extra shifts at Shoppers Drug Mart and two of her neighbours have held fundraisers for them.

REHAB AT HOME

"Things are tough, I have to admit. ... We're watching our pennies, but that's OK," Mr. Fraunberger said.

Jim Brown, a neighbour the Fraunbergers never met, paddled a kayak in a nearby lake eight hours a day, six days a week throughout the summer to raise money for the family.

"I was blown away," Mrs. Fraunberger said.

In September, Norma Cardinal organized a fundraiser.

More than \$4,000 was raised that day, which helped pay for Mrs. Fraunberger's gas and parking at the Toronto hospitals.

The first year post-DAI is crucial to recovery and a lot of time is spent on regaining the person's physical and cognitive skills.

The second year, according to Mrs. Fraunberger, is about adapting to the injury. After the two-year mark, she said it is unlikely he will change.

Mr. Fraunberger could retire from the OPP but he wants to go back.

"I believe he'll do it, but to the capacity he was doing it, I don't think so," Mrs. Fraunberger said.

"I'm trying my hardest every day," he said.

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Kindergarten registration begins February 1, 2013.

Children born in 2009 are eligible for junior kindergarten this September. Children born in 2008, and currently not attending public school, are eligible for senior kindergarten.

Documents required for kindergarten registration include:

- Proof of child's age (Birth Certificate/Passport)
- Proof of residency

Where space is limited, children may be required to attend a school outside their neighbourhood.

Please call your local public school for full details about required documents and kindergarten orientation sessions. Visit our web site for a full listing of our elementary schools and kindergarten registration information at: www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca

We want to welcome your child and family as you begin the process to enter school!