

THE NIGHT THE MASK CRACKED

On August 9, 2002, at 1700 hours, my husband Les and I were on our way in to Edmonton from our home, west of Stony Plain. We were driving on the Yellowhead, a divided four-lane highway. It was a rare occasion that Les and I were both working the same shift, so it was nice to be able to drive in to work together. But our plans were about to change.

A GMC Jimmy – gunning it to get across two lanes of traffic – did not see us. The next thing I knew, we were in the ditch having been hit just short of the passenger-side door. He had hit us so hard that the impact had moved the motor off its mount.

An ambulance ride, an emergency room visit and finally a doctor to check us out. No broken bones, just some bruising; but as anyone who has been in a motor vehicle accident can attest to, there are some things that do not show up right away. I had torn all my abdominal muscles and had a serious shoulder injury from the seat belt. I went to work the next day, tried to work a couple of dayshifts, but then my shoulder seized and I could not even turn my head. I had to stay home and rest.

I had been home for a couple of months when one dark night at about 0300 hours, I found myself sitting in our living room. Everyone in the house was asleep; there were no lights on and I sat in my chair silently crying, wishing I had died in that car accident. It was as if a mask that I had been wearing for so long, one that helped me do my job as a police dispatcher without falling apart while taking the calls, cracked and all of those suppressed emotions were coming up at once. I had had a glimpse of those emotions a couple of weeks before, when one of my coworkers had come over and mentioned a file where a child had called the police when her father had been injured in a farming accident. The father had died before help could get to them; I had started to cry.

Thankfully, I was able to recognize that I needed help and sought it. The first psychologist was not a good fit so I went looking for another one. Fortunately, I found a good match the second time. During my visits with her I developed tools to help me recover. While I still could not do much, I did a lot of reading. Books can be very healing. One of the books I read changed my life: a book by David Schwartz called the Magic of Thinking Big.

There was a line in the book where two men were conversing. One man was a clerk and wanted to be a manager but was giving all the reasons why he could not go back to school or start working toward becoming a manager. The other man looked at him and told the clerk that now that he had heard all the reasons why the clerk *could not* become a manager, he wanted the clerk to go home and come back in two week and explain to the other man how he *could* do it. Just that one thing shifted my thinking.

The motor vehicle accident was the fourth car accident I had been involved within 10 years. I like to believe that after the first three I still was not heading in the right direction, so God made sure I was immobilized long enough this time to listen. My knowledge came from the books I read because I was unable to do anything else. It took a long time and a multitude of treatments but I was fully mobile and, except for my shoulder bothering me occasionally, I was able to go back to work full time and carry two or three university courses a semester while working those hours.

I count the accident as a blessing now. Because of the accident the doctors found some medical issues that had not yet made themselves known and I was able to have those dealt with. In fact, the accident probably saved my life.

Sometimes it takes being hit hard to wake us up. I learned that I was much stronger and smarter than I thought I was; I learned to live in the present and enjoy the moment because it only takes a moment to lose everything. Life is for living, the past is behind me and the present is a gift.

As I finish writing this, I glance up at the clock. It is 0338 hours and I am sitting in my living room and everyone in the house is asleep. This time though, there are no thoughts of tears and the lights are on.

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jwyszowaty@shaw.ca