

The 150-year-old **Oak tree**, magnificent and tall ...



Me, high on the **ladder**, cutting so many limbs large and small ...



... until **the fall** ...



So, I fell to the 'Ert ...

... my “*back story*” dissertation ... penned by Bil. Alvernaz

====> Copyright © NOV/DEC 2021

... this being what happened on the final day of cutting limbs on two Oak trees.



Every descent shall have an ascent ... Persian saying ... (that says it all for me!)

My life changed in a shattering, momentary flash. On a sunny, brisk fall morning. November 5th, 2021 at 9:05 a.m. It was eerily similar to half a century earlier with my skiing accident in Andorra (bordered by France to the north and Spain to the south). I was injured (torn meniscus, left knee & four broken ribs from slamming into a tree that stopped me from cascading further down the mountain). Then helicoptered to a trauma center. Only this was a 150-year-old Oak tree ... that had had enough after three weeks of me “*sawing off*” big and small limbs. My life changed in a micro-second both times. Here’s what happened this time around ...



It was a “*taking me to the edge of death*” instant. From over 20 feet up on a ladder, I slammed to the ground. Causing major damage to my spine. A crushed sternum, too. There was also the aorta “*issue*” that was the most perilous “*wild card*” (as in me probably not surviving). But I’ll get to all of that, including finding myself in a **Level 3 ICU Trauma Unit** at UC Davis Medical Center. The care I received there sets a global standard for the way healthcare systems should function ... with so many amazing people working there.

It happened with the final not-too-big (but big enough to change my life) limb on the Oak tree I had been “*working on*” for close to a month. I’d spent several days eyeballing how I was going to make sure cutting that final limb fell right where I wanted it to go. The same way I had dropped countless other limbs and branches with a **hand saw**. Only this limb jackknifed sideways more than 20 feet as it dropped. Then it slammed into the base of the ladder I was standing on, knocking the ladder and me back down.



I just reacted out of instinct though I couldn’t really tell you anything that I did or didn’t do. I had no idea what was going on until I thudded **HARD** on the ground! It all happened in a surreal, slow-motion, flickering way. I first tumbled down the ladder a bit until I was “*thrown free*” ... **BOOM!** I immediately went into shock once I hit the dirt. I couldn’t catch my breath or even see or think clearly.

Brief flashes of memories are still coming back to me about my **descent**. The saw blade glistening in the sun as it “*floated*” downward next to me. Not a sound. Actually, I don’t really know that it felt like falling ... that is until I hit the ground where I moaned and rolled over to clasp my hands on my knees. I kept squinting my eyes because I just couldn’t focus. The main issue was trying to breathe as I kept raising my eyebrows. There were lots of people around as our new fence was being put in. But I couldn’t hear or relate to anything ... with me in a state of shock!

And before I knew it, I was in an EMS vehicle on the way to Modesto after Samantha talked me into “*going for a ride.*” She has been in EMS three decades

and there was no way she was leaving without me. After \$134,000 worth of “*medical care*” (in a little over four hours) at a hospital in Modesto that I can only say “*they seem to just go through the motions*” ... and not much more, I was flown by helicopter (a 42-minute trip billed at \$64,000) to UC Davis Medical Center (Level 3 Trauma Unit in the ICU) in Sacramento [where they SAVED MY LIFE.](#)

Ah, but the stabbing pains. Those are the real story here because they still plague me to this day and will for another 10 to 12 weeks (at the very least). I'm taking Oxy (yeah, that one!) but much less than the recommended dosage. No way am I getting hooked. Though I can definitely see why so many people cave in and “*take 'em like candy.*” **NOT ME ... no way ... no how!**

Zen, controlled breathing, and only taking Oxy to sleep at night ... if I absolutely need it. That's my formula for moving forward ... well, all of that and PT & OT.

It's important to point out that ALL the cutting I had done on both Oak trees was done with a hand saw. A 24-inch, “*chew 'em up*” lumberjack blade where I used every inch of that blade ... with each back and forth stroke ... all of which really built up strength in my upper body.

The upper body strength “*training*” was great with the small limbs as well as the ones that were as thick as 18 inches ... those took about five days and over 5,000 strokes to drop each limb. On average, I cut several limbs per day, over three weeks.

The limb that “*got me*” ... that one that never should have went sideways, but it did. It never should have knocked the ladder out from underneath me, but it did. I had purposely left that limb until the very last. I just had a feeling it would be different to drop from all the others ... and, well, it definitely was! It dropped and took me down with it!

This is what my back looks like now ... with rods, pins, and who knows what else “*anchored*” with a bunch of screws. It will ultimately be a *tattoo*/scar to symbolize that I'm now a little “bionic” and, well, just happy to be alive.

So lucky and grateful. The doctors and staff couldn't believe I survived such a fall. But I did. Simply put ...

“It's the Universe!”



Now about that aorta “*issue*.” The term for what happened is “*Blunt traumatic aortic injury*” (BTAI). It is the second most common cause of death in trauma patients. **Eighty percent of patients with BTAI die before even reaching a trauma center.** For patients who make it to the hospital, 50% will die within 24 hours. This significant mortality rate is related to the high incidence (40%) of severe associated injuries. The primary mechanism associated with BTAI is motor vehicle crashes (70%); however, BTAI also occurs as a result of motorcycle crashes, **falls from height**, auto versus pedestrian, and thoracic crush injuries.

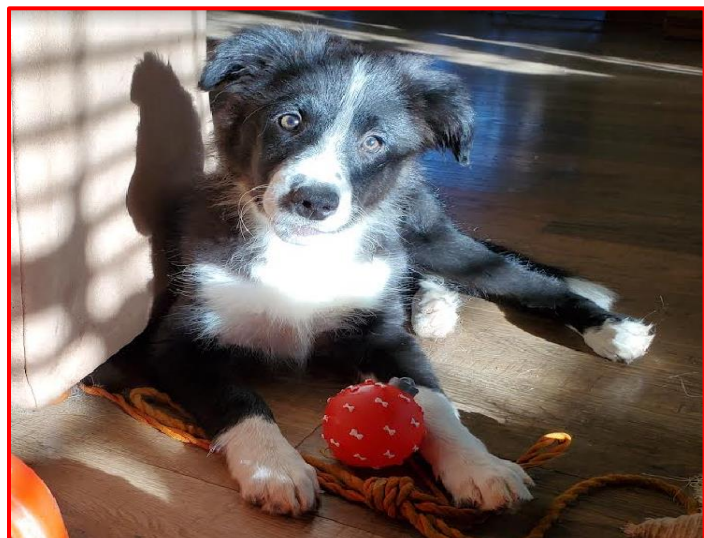
The surgical team did my aorta surgery first. That’s where they go up to the aorta from the groin area. And they fixed everything just fine with a stint. Everyone was amazed I was still alive. I can’t count the number of times I was told that! As for me. I had no clue what was going on for four or five days/daze. Diana handled everything, including giving approvals for my surgeries and critical care.

Other things were going on here ... on several different levels!

I strongly believe that the Universe (that most people refer to as God or powers we can’t begin to understand) was at play here. I know the Universe carried me (and Diana) through it all. Why? There are too many “*things*” for which there are no explanations. The Universe is always “there” ... taking care of me ... and YOU!

The spot where I landed

We have two Border Collie puppies (Scout on the left, Chance on the right) who love to dig in the dirt. Their one particular favorite spot where they always kept coming back to “*dig away*” was one that we just couldn’t keep them from doing it.



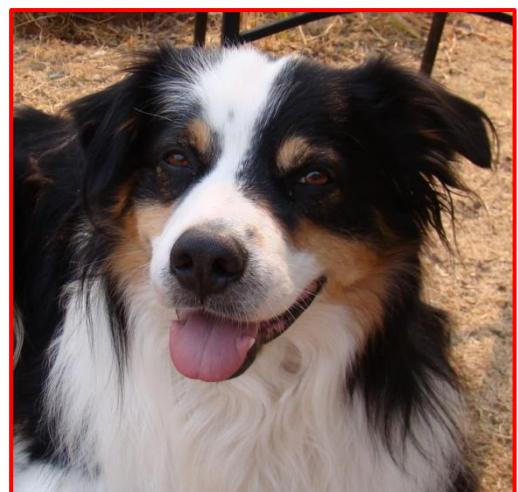
We kept putting leaves and dirt “*back in the hole.*” For weeks and weeks, they focused on that one spot ... to the point of Diana and me saying, “BAD DOGS!” as we continually filled in the hole over and over again.

But here’s the thing. **That’s where I landed!** In the middle of where they had been digging. The spot that was filled with leaves and fresh dirt that, in effect, cushioned my “*landing.*” So, just try and explain that. In the expanse of our big backyard, the only spot those puppies were “*excavating*” was precisely and specifically where I hit the ground. And we have no doubt that was the first instance (of many) in this long, drawn out “*episode*” that saved my life ... over and over again.

Yeah, the fall was still bad ... horribly awful. But because of those puppies, along with Lucky, the place I hit down was not hard ground. Those dogs are just part of the picture in me still being alive ... Samantha, doctors, surgeons, and staff ... they all played important roles. And there were (and still are) many people and factors getting me back on my feet after such a devastating injury.

I need to mention “Uncle Lucky,” an Australian Shepherd who is seven years old. We lost his brother Max this past summer.

That’s when we got Chance and Scout. Or to be more precise, that’s when they found us, quickly wiggling their way in our hearts. Seven years earlier, when we lost Sparky, Max and Lucky found their way to us ... and into our hearts. Now Lucky is showing Chance and Scout “*the ropes*” for being good dogs!

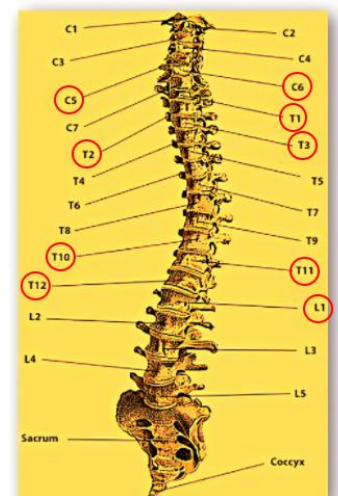


My Spine ...

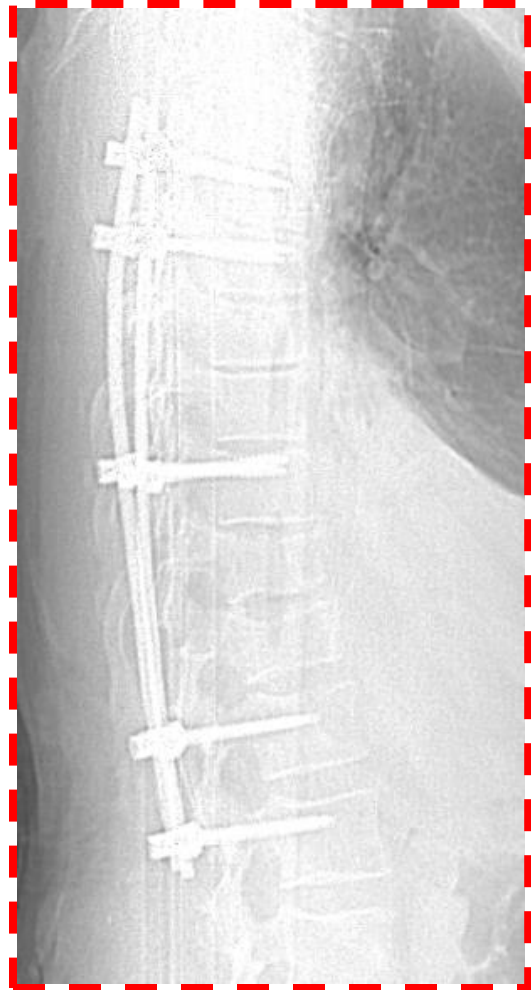
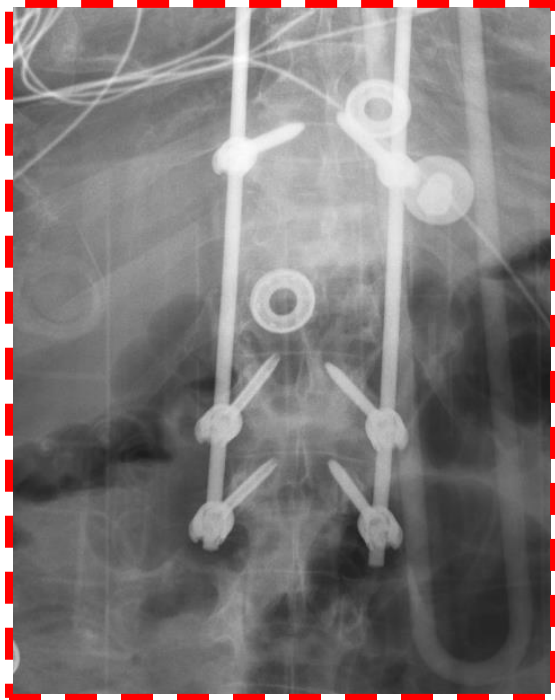
This “map” shows the damage to my spine ... and where the repairs were done.

The details that follow will give you a clear idea just how close I came to dying ... or never walking again.

Yeah, I’m still constantly in severe pain (just look at the x-rays). But I’m still on Planet ‘Ert to continue doing what it is I’ve always done. **Following the sequences and patterns of the Universe** to make life all the more special and precious ... for many others as well as me and Diana.



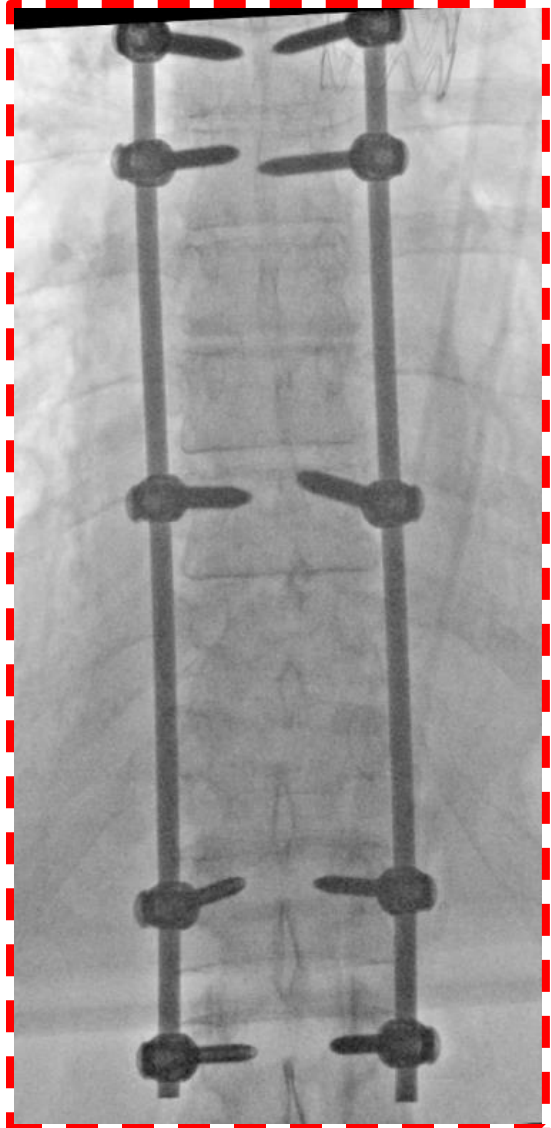
This is how everything was “screwed” back in place!





My first reaction at seeing these x-rays was ...

WTF!!!!!!!



These x-rays made me realize even more so just how serious my injuries were. I'm amazed at how "*things were put back together*" in all of this. With all of this hardware holding my back (and, well, me) together ... WOW! These images are permanently etched in my mind ... and they still freak me out!

Then I thought even more about Samantha and how, in her words, she wasn't leaving that day without me. She knew it was bad and, boy, was she ever right!

But now into Week #7, I have more movement and range of motion in relation to my back. Of this I am sure, I won't ever be riding any bucking broncos in a rodeo! And I damned sure am NOT climbing back up into that Oak tree! I can't anyway, because Diana got rid of the ladder (which I'm glad she did)!

What did all of this cost us?

Absolutely nothing ... as in ZERO.

The Veterans Administration took care of it all, as they have been doing for me ... for serving our country in the Air Force (3 years, 5 months, & 21 days) in Syracuse New York and then Madrid, Spain (where Diana and I got married).

So Many People To Thank!

Thank yous! So many more people than I can even recall. After all, I was on drugs, with consciousness coming and going on a regular basis! I don't remember much at all from my days/daze in the Trauma 3 Center at UC Davis Medical Center. And because of pain meds (that I'm still taking), there are large memory gaps from my 10-day stay in the hospital.

Those I do recall who made everything extra special for my care and recovery ...

- **Samantha ... she saved my life** talking me into “*going for a ride.*”
- **Dr. Humphries** ... TEVAR surgery to fix my aorta issues.
- **Dr. Ebinu** ... Posterior lumbar spinal fusion ... putting my back together.
- All the other **doctors and staff members on the surgical teams.**
- **Nurses, specialists, and support staff.**
- **Mark** in ICU ... with a wickedly wonderful sense of humor.
- **Ryan** ... who oversaw things in the regular ward.
- **Erica** ... who made sure I got a juicy steak on Veterans Day!
- **Wacoco** ... so amazingly kind, caring, helpful, and insightful.
- **Claire** ... who was so compassionate and helpful.
- **JoJo** ... the RN from Home Care who makes sure things happen!
- **Maggie** ... the RN who took over for JoJo.
- **Joe** ... for OT and getting me back to exercising.
- **Anna** ... for PT and working muscles.
- **Katelin** ... EMS-Part Two on November 30th ... PANIC ATTACK!!!
- **Bob** ... the “fence guy” who called 911.
- **Stacie Kennedy** ... played an important role in all of this from “*a-far.*”
- **UC Davis Medical Records** ... for getting my x-rays to me.

Were it not for Samantha ... my life would have ended!



[December 11th, 2021 ... five weeks and one day after the fall.]

Samantha on the left, me, Jordan, and Jannah (learning from the best).

After falling over 20 feet and then slamming into the dirt, I turned over, clasped my hands, and rested my arms on my knees. I kept trying to catch my breath but couldn't. I found it impossible to focus. Everything was a spinning, hazy fog. I now know I was in shock. But at the time, I thought the wind had been knocked out of me. One of the guys putting up the new fence in our yard immediately called 911 (thanks for doing that Bob!). And as stupid as this sounds, I honestly thought (or somehow wanted to believe) I didn't need to go to the hospital.

That's where **Samantha**, with EMS, comes into the picture. After Diana hung up with 911, in no time at all a firetruck pulled up in front of our house along with the EMS vehicle. Then Samantha was immediately by my side. I kept telling her I was fine. She firmly but gently kept urging and mentally nudging me to "go for a ride" with her. I couldn't concentrate. I kept shaking my head. A guy from the fire department asked me what day it was and I honestly didn't know. Then Samantha put her hand on my back and firmly told me I was in serious trouble.

That's when I realized **THIS WAS ALL BAD**. I had fallen from way up in that Oak tree to the ground, landing on my back! It turns out that I sustained injuries to my spine and sternum, and my aorta was about to rupture. The blunt force of my injuries (and there were plenty) instantly kills people eighty percent of the time.

So, if Samantha hadn't focused like a laser beam somehow directly into my brain and hadn't got me into the EMS vehicle ... **I ... would ... have ... died!** I'm not trying to be over dramatic here. Several doctors told me that there was no way I could have survived such a fall ... but I somehow did. Later, putting all the pieces of this puzzle together, we'd see how our Border Collie puppies played a BIG part in all of this with that hole they kept digging ... and that we kept filling in with fresh dirt and leaves, all of which would be the exact spot where I landed. WOW!

Looking back on those initial moments, including the micro-second memory flashes during the fall ... and then the moments immediately after ... I can only say that the Universe was "*at play*" ... to send Samantha my way, for all the right doctors, nurses, and staff to be in the right places at the right times. It almost short-circuits my brain when I think about it, including the images in the x-rays! But then there's no point in asking any questions! Is there?

I'm here. I'm alive. On the way to getting better and recovering ... all of which would NOT be happening **if it hadn't been for Samantha!** I live my life looking at each day as "*did I make a difference?*" And Samantha made a monumental difference that day for me NOT to die ... for which I'll be forever grateful.

The real Superstar in all of this ... DIANA!

Yeah, I went (and am going) through a lot (something I wouldn't wish on anybody). Ah, but **Diana is the superstar** here. She held things together, figuring out each day what needed to be done, working with staff and the doctors, giving permission for the surgeries. And, well, just keeping things going for us while driving 150 miles round-trip each day to be with me at the hospital. This was all quite traumatic for me. I honestly feel it was more distressing and stressful for Diana, especially with our two new rambunctious puppies "*in the picture*."

I look at all of this as I was as careful as could be cutting limbs on that tree, being safe, and smart. But then things went south despite all my planning and mapping things out. If I had it to do over, I wouldn't change a thing.

Am I angry or mad at myself? NOPE.

It's just something that happened where I'm now moving forward. There is complete Home Health Care with an RN (JoJo the Dynamo and Maggie, too) assigned to my case to make things happen that should happen ... with Maggie taking over in JoJo's absence. And then there is Joe - the MAN! ... my OT guy who I'm working with to regain my upper body strength. Anna handles my PT and she is great (having "*been in the business*" for 37 years) ... they all COME HERE to the house ... NO COST! **Thank you, Veterans Administration!**

I don't know that I've ever been happier or more up about life. I'll be splitting wood come January or February (whenever the doctor approves it). And, hey, those Handicap parking spots. Diana went to the DMV and got a disabled placard (six bucks for six months). So we can park right up front ANYWHERE we go.

I adapted to using a walker and now a cane ... all with Diana's help, of course. We were both trained by hospital staff for all that would need to be done once we got home, especially when it comes to "*living with*" the straight-jacket back brace. Diana is truly a saint helping me through all of this. I've stopped apologizing to her when I need to have her do things (large & small) for me, because I know she gladly does all of it. With limited mobility, I just can't do much on my own. If the situation were reversed, I'd be doing the exactly the same to assist and help her.

I've always believed in miracles ... ever since the one that evolved when Diana came to Madrid, Spain (May 1970) where we then got married 60 kilometers to the north in Buitrago de la Zoya. But what happened to me with my "*swan dive*" out of that Oak tree ... and that I survived it ... a 20-foot fall from that tree ... well, I look at that as three miracles ... one for Thanksgiving, one for Christmas, and another for the New Year ... to get things going ... better than ever ... for 2022.

Oh, and, hey, the **United States House of Representatives** recently passed what has become my mantra from here on out ... so there's just no stopping me now, not with this legislation that even has my name in it ...

The Build Back Better Bil.

A few other points ...

I truly believe what sets me apart from others is what I have come to know as one of the true secrets in life. And that is not looking at what happened but closely examining what didn't happen ... or could have happened ... you know, like me not surviving or not ever being to walk again! It stuns me when I think how lucky I was even though what happened was bad ... it could have been much worse!

If you **pay attention to the patterns and sequences** all around you (that most people just completely keep missing) then you'll see how the Universe is always working in your favor to help you (if you'll just pay attention and stay out of your own way). For over three weeks I had been hand cutting two different Oak trees. That strengthened and built up my upper body - arms and core. Now all of that new-found strength is vital for me being able to more easily use the walker ... getting up and down are the tricky parts. But that really isn't a problem at all.

So that's my "back story" ...

Well, actually, there is a *deuxième partie* ... to my "back story" ... it happened November 30th, just 25 days after "*the fall*."

The monster panic attack!!!!!!

This was a panic attack to end all panic attacks. The Xanax my doctor at the VA prescribed for me hadn't yet shown up ... which added to my state of panic. Finally, Diana and I agreed we'd call 911 ...

Within just a few minutes the fire truck was here (same guys who were here on the day I first fell from the tree). EMS was right behind them. And Katelin picked up right where Samantha had left off a month earlier. When all was said and done, with my BP 122/72, oxygen level at 99, and all my other vitals perfectly normal, Katelin knew I didn't need to "*go for a ride*" that day.

By days/daze end I had Xanax and the panic attack was quelled.

Here's what all happened ... the damage done ...

What follows are the details of my spinal injuries, as well as what happened with my sternum and aorta (where the real danger lurked) ...

I have very little recollection from my first four or five days in the hospital after the fall ... filled with all manner of drugs (including fentanyl and a constant morphine drip). In the ICU I accused Diana of being part of the "*conspiracy*" ... for who knows what drug-induced hallucinations I was having.

This also was the point where I tried to take off my gown and attempted to remove one of my IVs (I had two!). Diana got a nurse to calm me down. The only thing I can remember is the green button for the morphine drip. Whenever that light lit up,

like Pavlov's Dog, I pressed it for another "*hit*" (probably salivating, too, like Pavlov's Dog). By the time I was moved over to a regular room in the hospital, things were much more sane. And by Veteran's Day I found my appetite just in time for the juicy, rare steak (on a bed of mash potatoes) that was presented to me with a great ceremony and flair (thanks to Erica in Hospital/Patient Relations) ... this at the point my mind became more clear (sans the morphine drip).

Stabbing pains in my back (like ice picks) were and still are relentless. They never let up ... though the doctors say they will. I truly want to believe that!

But enough about all of that.

Here are the details of me being Humpty-Dumpty and what all the surgeons needed to do to put me BACK together again ... without the need, of course, for all the king's horses and all the king's men.

C5-C6 INTERSPINOUS EDEMA (swelling)

In between C5-C6, the C6 spinal nerve exits the spinal cord through a small bony opening on the left and right sides of the spinal canal called the intervertebral foramen. This C6 nerve has a sensory root and a motor root. The C6 dermatome is an area of skin that receives sensations through the C6 nerve.

T1-T3 COMPRESSION FRACTURE

T1 refers to the 1st thoracic chest bone, T2 to the 2nd thoracic chest bone, T3 to the 3rd thoracic chest bone, and so on, until T12, which is the last thoracic chest bone.

T8 CHANCE FRACTURE (an unstable spine fracture)

A Chance fracture is a type of vertebral fracture that results from excessive flexion of the spine.

T11-T12 BURST FRACTURE (vertebra severely compressed)

A burst fracture is a type of traumatic spinal injury in which a vertebra breaks from a high-energy axial load, with shards of vertebra penetrating surrounding tissues and sometimes the spinal canal.

L1 FRACTURE (front part of the vertebra collapsed)

A compression fracture is a collapse of a vertebra making the bone look like a wedge.

TYPE 3 BLUNT AORTIC INJURY (this was the worst part of it all)

Blunt traumatic aortic injury (BTAI) is the **second most common cause of death** in trauma patients. **Eighty percent of patients with BTAI will die** before reaching a trauma center. **For patients who survive to the hospital arrival, 50% will die within 24 hours.** This significant mortality rate is related to the high incidence (40%) of severe associated injuries. The primary mechanism associated with BTAI is motor vehicle crashes (70%); however, BTAI also occurs as a result of motorcycle crashes, **falls from height**, auto versus pedestrian, and thoracic crush injuries.

NOTE: this issue with my aorta is what the surgeons fixed first with a stint, as fast as they could (after thinning my blood to avoid clots). They went up through the groin (and through the arm, too ... YIKES!) in a 3 1/2 hour operation. And, yeah, it still hurts like a bitch where they went in.

The second operation, close to six hours, was on all the damage to my back listed here. I was completely "*out of it*" for my whole time (five days) in ICU. The first thing I recall being told by not one surgeon, but several, was, "**You're lucky to be alive! And walking!**" This would be said to me many more times ... and, hey, I know how lucky I am. Especially for all the "*little things*" Diana does ... like her immediately giving away the tall ladder I was standing on when the tree decided to "*knock me down*" at notch or two!

STERNAL FRACTURE

A sternal fracture is a fracture of the sternum, located in the center of the chest. The injury, which occurs in 5–8% of people who experience significant blunt chest trauma, may occur in vehicle accidents, when the still-moving chest strikes a steering wheel or dashboard or is injured by a seatbelt ... from a fall.

And then there's this ...

There's really no way explain two very positive "*direct result*" aspects of me falling out of the Oak tree ...

Two unexplainable phenomenon came about after my fall:

1. My vision improved significantly (from 20/40 to 20/25). So much so that my ophthalmologist gave me a new prescription for glasses.
2. I'm no longer experiencing tinnitus. I first noticed this after "*coming back*" from all the "*heavy meds*" that took me out towards Neptune the first four days or so in the ICU unit. I couldn't figure out why things were so quiet. Then it hit me ... no more buzzing in my ears. And I ain't asking any questions about this either!

Maybe I'm nuts! But, hey, I don't know that there is any way to explain this other than the fall "*jarred things a bit*" ... in a good way. And I don't care either. My vision has improved significantly as well as no more "*noise*" in my ears. Also, my senses of smell and taste are incredibly heightened.

I'm just not asking any questions. You know, because that's the way Universe works ... a) if you pay attention, and 2) if you stay out of your own way!

And, of course, I wouldn't recommend anyone fling themselves out of a tree to cure certain "*conditions*," maladies, or ailments. I just know I'm not imagining these improvements to my vision, hearing, smelling, and taste buds. The how or why of it all ... doesn't really matter. I'm not even interested in such details anyway. I just know I'm happy the way things are now.

November 23, 2021 ... 16 days after the fall and both surgeries ...



Axe in hand, with Chance in my lap, I'm ready to start splitting wood, at whatever point I'm released to do so (and with Diana "*looking & watching, knowing how I tend to push things*" so I make sure I take things slow & easy). You can bet I WILL NOT rush things for getting back to my "*wood working*." What you see in this picture is just a small amount of the wood I cut by hand over three weeks (altogether it's over two cords of Oak wood). Oh, yeah, I won't swing that axe until my spinal surgeon gives me the "*green light*" ... which is probably going to be in the January timeframe or soon thereafter. That's Scout in the bottom left corner. Uncle Lucky (our other dog) is off somewhere in the back yard.



A whole new paradigm ... (week #7 in all of this)

The reality of the way things are now ... it's simply a matter of adjusting and adapting to change. Something I know how to do and have been doing my entire life. *The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.*

And, hey, change is a constant in life. You either accept, adapt, and adjust or you get “*bowled over*” in it all.

I know things won't be like this forever, but at points I get discouraged because in my mind, I feel that I should be much further ahead of where I am. I've made great progress “*bouncing back*” from the way several doctors put it ... “*this is like if you fell backwards off a two-story building, landing flat on your back!*” That statement was usually followed up by, “How you survived such a fall is a miracle.”

And when I look at things from that perspective, first of all, I'm gratefully stunned to still be alive ... and walking. I know I get impatient, but that's just me. And, hey, I'm a recovering perfectionist anyway. My physical therapist keeps telling me to walk slower ... that's when I realize that “*slow & easy*” is the better, more careful way to go. It's going to take months for my spine, back, and sternum to heal.

So for now I'll be happy showering while sitting on a special bench we ordered. That same order included the elevated toilet adapter that raises where you sit on the toilet by several inches (making it much easier getting up and down).

I'm now graduating from the walker to a cane. My balance is getting much better, too. Ah, but you just don't realize how much you take for granted in the way of mobility and freedom of movement ... until falling out of tree changes all of that.

While it might sound like I'm whining ... not really. Well, maybe ...

It's all me adjusting and adapting to the way things now are ... knowing that it's getting better all the time! And I will be splitting Oak wood in early 2022.

Mementos from a 10-day hospital stay ...

November 5th to November 14th, 2021 ...

My wrist bands and Diana's visitor badges.



Whatever comes next ... Diana and I are ready to actively participate in it all!
Because, hey, the best is yet to come! All with the Universe “*carrying us along.*”

Extra Credit Reading ...

One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin. He lay on his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections. The bedding was hardly able to cover it and seemed ready to slide off any moment. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, waved about helplessly as he looked.

"What's happened to me?" he thought. It wasn't a dream.



That's the opening for **Franz Kafka's** allegorical novella, **The Metamorphosis**, first published in 1915 ... where a man wakes up to find he has somehow become a huge beetle-bug, stuck on his back in bed.

And that is exactly the way I felt when I finally “*came to*” in the UC Davis Med Center ... after a 96-hour rollercoaster ride of two major surgeries and a constant morphine drip ... where I was “*out towards Neptune*” most of the time and not really aware of much of anything (that I can remember). As soon as I realized where I was, what had happened (I really fell out of that Oak tree!?!?) ... my first thought, as I tried to move and felt the excruciating, icepick-stabbing PAIN from the vice-like grip on my spine that was now part of my entire back, I thought, “Oh, man, this is like I’m Gregor in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*!” I had first read that book in high school (Mr. Fink’s American and Comparative Government class) and then again in college for a philosophy class.

And, still, today I feel like that beetle-bug in the novel because with any movement, there it is ... the intense pain in my back. Sure, it isn’t as bad as it was, but from what the surgeons told me, I’ve got another 6, 8, 10, 12 or more weeks of “*adjusting*” to my newly configured and “*metal re-wired*” spine and back.

I know how fortunate I am that the “*end result*” of what happened didn’t turn out to be worse. If I had crashed to the ground a little bit higher up or a tad lower on my spine then I’d either be dead or not able to walk.

So I’m very thankful to be putting up with rehabbing things with my “*screwed together metal spine*.” And, like the Beatles sang ...

*I've got to admit it's getting better (better)
A little better all the time (it can't get no worse)
I have to admit it's getting better (better)
It's getting better*

I'm still scared at many points (anxiety fueling the annoying “*feeling lost*” panic attacks), wondering if things will ever get back to normal (whatever that new normal might be). The doctors all assured me that I'll be pretty close to back to the way things were ... only it's going to be a “*long road*” to recovery.

Despite the panic attacks, some of which are so frighteningly-ugly, and for just about everything else ... it's slow-going getting back to physical exercise (and movement), I'm quite “*up*” and definitely happy.

I don't know what I'd do without Diana. She has always been there for me (just as I always am for her). But these days, she has to help me with everything. “*Taking a shower*” being the most logistical challenging feat of all ... with the special bench we now have in the shower for me to sit on (no way could I stand/balance for a shower ... not yet anyway). We've now got a system for everything. I can't even get “*up & down*” in bed without Diana's help. It's all from the perspective of “*slow & easy*” with me making uncontrolled sounds and odd, never before uttered noises as we maneuver our way through things ... step by step, one day at a time.

I definitely want to get to where I don't feel like Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*. And I truly feel that day is coming. For now, I'm so happy to be alive and moving and walking and, most importantly, being with Diana and Lucky, Scout, and Chance. Though the images from those x-rays of my spine haunt (scare the crap out of) me.

This might sound crazy ... and even I'm not quite sure I even believe it!

What I'm about to tell you could be my mind playing tricks on me. Or something born out of two surgeries back-to-back (on the 6th and 7th of November). Or the result of so many drugs, including fentanyl and morphine.

I only know that I'm pretty sure this is what really happened. But then again, I can't say 100% this is “*what's what*” in recalling that micro-second of my fall from the high up on the Oak tree.

Again, I'm not sure about this being what actually happened. But I'm sure enough to share it with you even though it is quite surreal ...

As the last limb I was cutting started to fall, I could see it was headed for smashing into the base of the ladder I was standing on. “*Oh, shit!*” I don’t know if I thought that or said it, but I knew what was about to happen would not be a good thing ...

All of what subsequently unfolded are just split-second flashes of memories and I can’t be sure if they are real or imagined from (or within) a state of shock and/or hallucinating ...

There was the saw blade flicking in the morning light, floating downward next to me. I know that was real. Then time seemed to be suspended, me somewhere in between what was happening and, well, something else ... some other place.

It was all so serene and peaceful ... beautiful and calm ... like it (and me) was somewhere between our world and somewhere else (maybe even another dimension), though I’m not sure just what was going on. I know that first I hit the back of my head on the ladder or the tree. Just as I recall the sensation of my chest slamming into the tree ... before I started to fall. Of that I am sure, just as sure as there was no sensation of pain. I didn’t feel anything other than knowing there was a hard-slamming, blunt impact. No discomfort though. Nothing bad. It was like time and all worldly sensations just stopped ... or no longer mattered.

It actually felt like I was hovering. This all being in the fraction of a second it took before I hit the ground. But here’s the thing. It seemed like an inordinate amount of time, not minutes but completely immeasurable ... some alternate dimension or plane of existence (maybe even the threshold of death) ... and I experienced that for an extended period time. Then the flicking, strobe-light phenomenon started. I felt like I was gently being held upright in some way, carefully guided downward. By then I was facing up to the sky and I could see all manner of clouds ... which really isn’t possible because of the dense growth in the Oak stretching far above me.

I felt like I was hovering ... for a LONG time. There was no sensation of falling or fear or anything. It was such a peaceful, quiet time ... until I felt bones in my spine and back crunching ... as I hit the ground. But still no pain.

Then reality smacked me hard as I as I rolled over to my hands and knees, moaning. I think I saw Diana, but I was clearly (or unclearly) in a daze, trying to catch my breath.

What really happened in those dreamlike moments of my fall? I’ll probably never know for sure. But something beyond our reality was going on. I’ve wondered a lot about if this could be one of those existential moments of being between two worlds ... one living and one, well, I’m not really sure ... the “*other side*” maybe? Whatever it all means is a mystery and conundrum. There was something going on in that instant as I fell, before hitting the ground.

Time stood still. I had fleeting moments of consciousness over the next five days after I was taken to the hospital, had two operations, and then was “*in & out of it*” until I became conscious enough to realize that I, indeed, was like Gregor, in Kafka’s novel, flat on my back where nothing was the same ... AND IT WAS REAL, not a dream. But now I’m getting mobility back. Though I have a long way to go, I know I’m going to make it, with Diana right there with me ... like always. Together we are an unstoppable force.

And so we come back to ...

Every descent shall have an ascent ... Persian saying ...

Whatever really happened (real or imagined) on my way down from that tree - the **descent** - that then led to, without me even realizing it, my **ascent** ... mentally and physically. I do know for sure that the Universe is right in the middle of all of this, carrying me forward, onward, and upward. It’s truly that simple.

I’m not asking questions about any of this. It could have been so much worse. I’m alive. Able to walk and function (with A LOT of help from Diana). My focus now is getting better, stronger, and still heading in the direction I’ve been going in all my life ... **following sequences and patterns** (the obvious as well as the hidden ones) ... with a new and improved “*heavy-metal, reinforced*” back and spine ... leaving all those thoughts of Kafka’s Metamorphosis far, far behind me.

That’s my “*back story*” ... I would more than welcome your thoughts on all of this, so shoot me an email, if you like ... bil@alvernaz.com ...

Bobby Kennedy’s quote is how I have lived my life ... and it means even more to me now ...

“Some see things as they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not!”

Diana and I have been in self-imposed exile for the seemingly forever duration of Covid (after getting both vaccines AND the booster shots), so now we just continue going nowhere and not really doing much of anything (beyond playing Scrabble, GIN, and working on jigsaw puzzles), because I can’t really go anywhere anyway. And who NOSE when I’ll be able to drive the car!

<> Published to alvernaz.com 22XII2021 <>