



## OPEN

As much as anything, life is about making choices.

Over time what we choose defines who we are.

Life weaves itself, despite our best efforts to control it. Who we are, what choices we make, the experiences we have, what we know with our senses are the warp and weft of our life. They come together, break apart, inter-twine and overlap until the fabric of who we have become is turned out in its fullness.

Nov. 17, 2010 was the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims in Canada. It was a day of quiet reflection for me. My Day of Awe. Not just because my brain injury was the result of a car accident, but because of a man who made the choice to aid me afterward.

## NOVEMBER 17, 2010

Today I'm thinking of the man who ran down the side of the mountain and pulled my daughter and me, trapped inside, out of her little old baby blue Volvo. After rolling several times the car had landed upside down, stopping abruptly at the tree-line.

The roof was smashed close in to the body of the car, hugely distorted and twisted from rolling. The only way out was through a small triangular window on the driver's side. I couldn't squish myself through the space. It seemed too small. I didn't understand how it would work. I didn't understand what was happening.

I remember very little from that day—mostly sense-memory things, snippets, how surreal it all was.

Most vividly what I remember is the Man in the Plaid Shirt.

We heard him first. Panicked shouting. Who knows what he was saying? I heard:

“Rawr rawr rawr rawr rawr!” I remember frantic arm waving. He was running toward us, almost stumbling downhill. From inside the crushed car, as I looked crookedly outside, I remember a bright flash of pink plaid careening down the embankment. “Rawr rawr rawr rawr rawr!”

Then a face I didn't recognize at the small window, peering at me.

“Rawr rawr car rawr gas rawr rawr get out get out get out!”

Someone pulled my arms through the window and then my body was pulled out. I fell to the ground. Hands pulled me up. My daughter was there. Thank goodness, she was

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alive. And there was the Man in the Plaid Shirt. His voice was urgent. We had to run away. Move now move now move move move!

Another man appeared. They walked/carried us back up the embankment. Collapsing on the ground at the edge of the highway, I lost track of The Man in the Plaid Shirt. I understand that he stayed until things got sorted out, gave his name and number to the RCMP and continued on his journey.

About an hour later he himself was killed in another car accident.

I didn't find this out until nearly five years afterward, when my lawyer was preparing witnesses during my litigation. Over the years I have thought of him; my daughter and I both often spoke of him with affection and our name for him—The Man in the Plaid Shirt—was always said with thankfulness. I wondered about him but did not pursue these thoughts.

In my own brokenness, my chronic disorientation, exhaustion and focus on making a life for myself despite my injuries, I didn't act on my questions about him. I pulled my sadness about his fate into my own accident sadness and carried on with my life as best I could.

## OPENING

Last March I began treating my post-brain injury difficulties differently, using supplements (adaptogenic herbs) that would address the core problems my brain was having, in order to feed my brain back to health. The results have been astounding, providing me with conscious time and the mental capacity to pay greater attention to less immediate needs.

November 17<sup>th</sup> rolled around and I thought not only of my accident but of the man who helped me. I didn't even know his name. Feeling finally strong enough to cope with going over it, I went back to the scene as written in my legal papers; to the day The Man in the Plaid Shirt irrevocably linked his story to mine. After eight years of struggle I felt prepared to truly open myself to this knowledge.

I found his name: Rudy Mervin. For the first time since my accident I read all of the reports. The day my life changed forever engulfed me in a new way. Time-distance with more normalized cognitive and emotional capabilities provided me with a fresh perspective.

When our car hit the first boulder and became airborne I reported I'd felt a massive total mind-body-spirit rush of adrenalin beyond any power I had ever felt before. Instantly I began thinking: "I will not die today! My daughter will not die today!" I repeated this for as long as I can remember. We hit another boulder as we reached the ground; the car flipped at that point and began to roll. I don't remember the rest until we stopped.

We had a full spare gas tank in our trunk because we were up in the mountains in the middle of nowhere—I learned years ago (the hard way) that having extra gas when you're vacationing in the mountains is a good idea. Unfortunately, it had split open during our descent and everything in the car was covered in gasoline. Okay, so not always a good idea...

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Other witnesses reported that Rudy Mervin had said he could smell the gas all the way up at the highway and that's what made him come running down to us. At first the people on the road thought we must be dead after such a catastrophic crash, but Rudy insisted they should go to the car and make sure. "What if someone's alive?" he'd asked.

This is where I am grabbed by his choice. Where I am shaken up and hurled around and flung down in front of the hugeness of it. At this point it hardly matters whether or not the car was in danger of exploding. Rudy had no way of knowing it was not the car's gas tank that was leaking. What matters, what matters to me, is that this stranger, this person who had no emotional investment in me, who had never met me, acted completely selflessly on my behalf.

What matters to me is that Rudy Mervin believed the car could explode at any moment and he still came down to help. His sense of imminent danger, of life-threatening harm, was absolute and still he came. As I open myself to the enormity of this I am transformed by it.

That he died within an hour of risking himself for my daughter and me very simply floors me.

It occurred to me that probably the last significant act of his life was running into the face of his own fear, of his very real sense of danger in that moment to his own life, to help a stranger. Powerful enough on its own, this fact takes on enduring significance to me. In a world that is often unkind, cruel, where people increasingly abandon their humanity and commit atrocious acts, there are still those who live their compassion.

I am in awe of it.

It creates feelings of deep, all-encompassing warmth and security in me that are new. This is the greatness of who we are. This is the best we have to offer. This deep humanity is our emotional genius.

Life after brain injury is often isolating. It's a solitary journey for those of us who have experienced the trauma directly. We can only tell those of you who are whole, we cannot bring you into the broken place with us. So we are describers and you are listeners, but we are not brothers-in-arms. You who have not been injured will always be removed from what we know, learning about it in a second-hand way.

Because of this we who have brain trauma frequently feel completely alone. Rudy Mervin cracks my aloneness and in recognition of his choice, in the deep understanding of what he was prepared to sacrifice on my behalf I have an unending feeling of connectedness to him.

So I have completely opened myself to that understanding, felt the breadth of it, let it envelop me. It is an active thing, growing and changing as I do. Something I can (and will) carry with me as long as I live. In my moment of greatest need I was not alone. This has changed how I see myself and my life. This has buoyed me; lifted me up, forced me to view my inherent self-worth in an entirely new way.

Rudy had no idea who was in the car so his effort on my behalf was unconditional. He risked himself because he felt whoever I might be was intrinsically worth it. My sense of

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value, simply because I exist, soars and I get to live the rest of my life with a conscious understanding of what unconditional **feels** like.

Therein lies the profound; the crux of my awe.

Rudy Mervin will be my symbol, my visual and emotional reminder to stay open to others, reach out, ask for support when I stumble.

Through all of this I have thought that being quietly thankful for Rudy's intervention, discussing it in the kitchen with my daughter, is not enough. Other people ought to know. Often I have wondered if he had family and so decided to find out about him. To let his people know what he had done before he died.

## A POET

Born in Saskatchewan in 1939, as an adult he lived on the west coast for two years, then Malaga, Spain for ten, where he married Emily at the Great Cathedral in Marbella.

Together they owned and operated a leathercraft shop. Rudy and Emily had one son.

Returning to Canada, Rudy again settled in B.C., where he lived for the next twenty years, continuing to sell the leather goods he made.

He became, by all accounts, a great astrologer. First an avocation and then his work of choice when he retired from leathercraft. He wrote epic poetry in the Medieval tradition. The final paragraph of his obituary is beautiful:

"We will never forget Rudy's zest for life, infectious laugh, quick wit, soft voice, wise counsel, kindness to everyone he met, his poetry, stories and good conversation. He was central in the lives of so many and a friend of the most remarkable kind. RUDY WILL LIVE FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS."

I found Emily. Long divorced from Rudy, they had remained close until his death. I sent her an email, introducing myself and explaining what had happened immediately following my accident. I said I thought someone who loved him should know. I was hoping his courage and generosity of both person and spirit could be told to their son.

Emily answered me straight away. Warm, emotionally accessible, her response was lovely and touching—as much a gift for me as she had said my story was for her and their son. She sent me a wonderful collection of photographs—she and Rudy before they married, Rudy with their son, their lovely family together when they were all young...

Emily shared personal treasures, stories, filling in bits about Rudy. She confirmed the importance of my information to their son and asked that I keep in touch. I will.

Life is full of mysteries and the older I become the less I feel I understand the great eternal 'why?' of anything. What I know is this: I am glad for the mysteries. I am truly grateful for the unexpected treasures, like Rudy Mervin. I open myself to them and give thanks that I survived, I am here, I can go on and become more.

## [National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims | The Brain Injury Association of Canada](#)

UPDATE ON SUPPLEMENTS

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The changes are now more subtle than they were initially and I see that as a sign of normalizing. As it repairs itself I figure my brain will need less supplemental support. Whereas before taking the supplements I had plateaued in a place of broken, I now find myself in getting-betterness. Incremental getting-betterness. Inching toward consistent good brain health and capability. The supplements haven't eradicated the post-brain injury symptoms I experience but they have made me more capable of managing them. My energy level has increased enough that I am now building reserves—it takes longer to hit a wall and crash when I am tired. Tired feels more like what it was before my brain injury. I can accomplish many things throughout the day; am increasingly going out into the community.

Word recall and memory have improved dramatically. I become continually less dependant on lists in order to complete tasks. My executive function functions, allowing me to plan, organize, adapt to the unexpected. I am more mentally and emotionally flexible—better able to think on my feet, be spontaneous; operate outside of the rigid infrastructure I have needed these past eight years.

Strength builds on strength just as failure and loss stalled me previously. I am learning more about neuroanatomy, understanding the how and why of my broken brain—what happened physiologically and how to address it at the root of the problem.

This idea to identify what parts of my brain broke, based upon the difficulties I was having, and targeting each area specifically with relevant nutrients/supplements is proving to be beneficial. For now, I have finished experimenting with different supplement combinations and have found a consistent mix that works well for me: Siberian Ginseng, Rhodiola, Holy Basil (Tulsi) and L-Theanine.

But more on that later.

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