

Story of Larry's Accident
August 27, 1987
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It was the last of August in 1987. We lived in Palestine, Texas. My two sons and I had been in Mena, Arkansas visiting my parents a few days before school started. Meredith was 15 and Landon 4 years old. My husband, Larry drives a truck for Wal*Mart. He had got a load coming through Mena so he stopped by and picked me up and I went with him to Fort Smith. I always enjoy going with him in the truck even though I don't get to go very often. We came back to Mena and he spent the weekend there with us. We all went to church with my parents Sunday morning. After lunch he left going back to Palestine to work.

On Thursday morning, August 27, 1987 the boys and I left Mena going home. We stopped in Tyler, Texas ate lunch and did some shopping not realizing that we should be in any hurry to get home. When we drove in the driveway that afternoon the phone was ringing. It was Wal*Mart telling me that Larry had been involved in an accident in Houston at 10:00 o'clock that morning. I was told that his left leg was broken but other than that he was fine. She said she would have one of the Wal*Mart drivers to drive me to Houston. Larry had told them that we would be driving home from Arkansas and would be tired but I said no we would make it okay. Meredith had his driving permit and could help me drive if I needed him to.

I called my parents, our Pastor and my Aunt Mary in Conroe. We had not taken anything out of the car yet so after I made the phone calls we took off for Houston. I stopped in Conroe and left Meredith and Landon at my Aunt Mary's. She didn't want me to go into Houston by myself at night so she had arranged for my Uncle James and two cousins Debra and Kay to go with me. I picked them up and we arrived at Hermann Hospital in Houston at 9:00 o'clock that night. I didn't know how to get to Hermann Hospital so I was glad to have Uncle James with me to give me directions.

One of the Wal*Mart drivers had been in Baytown that morning so Wal*Mart had asked him to drive over to Hermann Hospital to check on Larry. He arrived at the hospital about 10:30 that morning while Larry was still in the Emergency Room. The driver had stayed with Larry until they took him to surgery. That night when we walked into the ICU waiting room the driver (Gene) was still there waiting for me to arrive.

I had gone there expecting to bring Larry home in a day or so with a cast on his "broken" leg. Well, I was in for a shock. Wal*Mart did not tell me the extent of his injuries but Gene begin to tell me about Larry's accident and injury. He had delivered a load to a store in Houston that morning and was leaving, Houston on his way back to Palestine. He was north bound on I 45 at Rankin Road driving in the middle lane and listening to a tape of Gospel music when a Dodge Ram Pick-up truck somehow went air borne and "flew" over the fence and hit Larry head on, he hit above the bumper on the driver's side of the truck. The other driver was still in mid-air when he hit him. Larry was driving a big cab over tractor trailer truck. It ripped the driver's side of the cab off of his truck. The floor board, brake, and clutch was gone, he was looking down at the pavement through where the floor board had been. His seat was

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broke loose from the floor but he was wearing his seat belt and it kept him and the seat in the truck as the seat belt was still bolted to the floor behind the seat.

I believe that it was a miracle that Larry was able to guide the truck to a stop without running over someone else out there on the freeway in the Houston traffic. The traffic was still pretty heavy that time of day. The pick-up that hit him ended up upside down behind Larry's truck. Larry's Wal*Mart trailer had ran over it. It was pretty well flat. (The man in the pick-up was a deputy sheriff on his way to court to testify and was running an hour late we later found out. He had some stitches in the back of his head and was treated in the emergency room and released.)

We always hear stories of someone having trouble or an accident in Houston and people pass by and no one will stop to help. Thank God that a lot of people stopped that day. A Roadway Driver was south bound. He stopped and jumped over the fence, took his belt off and helped Larry put a tourniquet on his leg to stop the bleeding. A Registered Nurse stopped and took his vital signs and treated him for shock and watched him until the ambulance arrived.

Well, the driver, Gene begin to tell me...Larry is still in surgery. He went into surgery before 11:00 am and it was after 9:00 pm now. His left leg and foot was crushed. There wasn't a pulse in his foot or leg when he arrived at the hospital. The Doctor's don't expect him to have his leg and foot when he comes out of surgery; they think they will have to amputate it. He had a big open fracture and part of the bone was gone. He had lost a lot of blood from that. He had 17 breaks in his left leg, all the bones and joints in his left foot were crushed, and all the toes on that foot broken. The big toe on his right foot was broken too, but miraculously he didn't have any internal injuries.

As the driver was telling me all of this, it was such a strange feeling, like it wasn't really happening, that I was dreaming or like I was in a daze or something. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. I called my parents and Larry's family in Oklahoma, and then we all set down to wait on word that he was out of surgery. As I sat there waiting, I prayed silently. I never really believed that he would loose his leg in spite of what they were telling us. Finally about midnight they called down that he was out of surgery and that I could come up and see him.

Kay went with me for moral support. When we finally found him in ICU he had 3 bags of blood hanging, IV's and all kinds of tubes, but he also had his leg and foot up in traction! His leg and foot had all kinds of pins and metal bars and things on it. His toes all had pins sticking out the end of each toe. I'd never seen anything like it. He was awake and talked to us a couple of minutes then we had to leave.

We found one of his Doctor's. He told me that Larry was really in serious condition, he had lost a lot of blood. They were trying to save his leg but didn't know if they would be able to or not because it was crushed so badly and had so much

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damage. They had done a lot of microsurgery to repair it and try to restore the blood supply. He said they could have to rush him back to surgery at any time and amputate his leg and foot. He told me about the complications he could have, infection as he had a lot of asphalt and things in the open wound. Many other things could go wrong too.

The Doctor said they might have to take him back into surgery. I told them to call me if there was any change or if they took him back to surgery. I gave them the phone number where I would be in Conroe. I didn't get a call so I thought everything was the same. The next morning my Dad and I arrived at the ICU unit. We walked in, washed our hands as we had to do in the ICU unit and walked over to Larry's bed. It was empty! I ask the Nurse about him. I was relieved to know that he was in another unit across the hall. Daddy & I washed our hands, walked across the hall into the other unit. We went in, washed our hands again. When we finally found Larry he was in a room with a TV monitor and other machines on him. We didn't know what to think. We learned that they had taken him back to surgery during the night. He had developed a blood clot in his leg, he had quit breathing during surgery, and his lungs had filled up with fluid. He was in surgery for 12 more hours that time. For a few days they kept taking him back to surgery to clean the wound out as it was so full of debris.

The fourth day he went back to surgery again. They moved the bone back into place and put a screw into it, and put a rod in his thigh, there was 3 breaks there.

During this time, I had been driving back and forth to Conroe and staying nights with my Aunt Mary. My parents didn't wait to see how the surgery was going to go. They packed the first night when I called them and came down before I even knew they were coming, or before I could even ask them to. They took the boy's back to Palestine since school was starting for Meredith. They stayed with them the whole time Larry was in the hospital. I think God gave me the best parents in the entire world. They had a big garden and things at home that they just left to come help us out.

Larry was worried about me driving back and forth to Conroe in the Houston traffic. On the fourth day the safety man from Wal *Mart came to visit Larry. Larry told him that I was driving to Conroe every night. He said well, there is no need for that. He took me and got me a Hotel Room near the hospital. It was a real blessing, not to have to drive back and forth every day and fight the Houston traffic.

He had another surgery on the 3rd of September, then on the 8th of September another. That time they took bone from his right hip and did a bone graft in his left leg where the open fracture was. They also took muscle from his back and did a muscle flap there, then took skin from his right thigh and did a skin graft. He had tubes, IV's, stitches, staples, rods, screws, stainless steel pins and bars. I had to learn to take care of his leg. The Doctor's showed me what to watch for since I was with him more than anyone else and was to tell them if I saw any signs of infection or anything. They left a window in

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the dressing to watch the flap and skin graft. I had always been very weak stomached and never had any desire to be a Nurse. I had to learn to do things that a lot of RN's had never done or even seen at the time. Instead of a cast, he had a fixation device on his leg. Pins went into his leg to hold the bones in place, then all kinds' rods and bars on his leg to hold it all in place. The Doctor's told us that maybe some of the skin graft would take, but no telling how many times they would have to redo it. He was in surgery 7 hours that day.

Before they did the surgery to close the open fracture on his leg every day I would look over as they come in to change the dressing. I finally got brave enough to walk over and look at the open fracture up close. I could see the broken bones and see where the bones were missing. The Doctor said I was turning pale and I had better go sit down. I felt a little woozy but at least I didn't pass out!

Larry had the fixation device on his leg for five months. Then a cast with a hinge at the knee for three months then went to a brace for six weeks. He used a walker, crutches then a cane. He was quite a sight with the fixation device on his leg. I designed a cover for it and my Mom made it. It had button holes for the pins to stick through then went around his leg, the bars and pins and closed with Velcro. Some people were very freaked out by the sight of his leg so the cover helped. Some people wanted to see but some really didn't want to see his leg at all. When he was able to go out for therapy, I took him every morning for months.

The Doctor's told us that Larry would be off work for at least 18 months ... Well, he was back to work in 11 months! They said he would get an infection ... he didn't! They said they would have to redo the skin graft several times... It took 100% the first time! They said he would probably loose his leg and foot ... he didn't which we give the thanks to God for.

They brought in lots of medical students to see him. They brought in other Doctor's and Nurses to see and even brought in cameras to take pictures of the skin graft. In fact to this day when we see the Plastic Surgeon he brings his camera in and takes a picture! He was very impressed with himself because the skin graft took 100% the first time. The Doctor's said they just couldn't understand. We told them it was because a lot of people were praying for him and that God was doing a work in him.

I stayed in Houston with Larry for the four weeks that he was in the hospital. During that time I had a few trials of my own to face. At that time I had heel spurs that were very painful. Every step was misery. I had been getting shots in them that were very painful. They used to help for a while, but the shots wasn't even helping any more. The Doctor kept telling me that I would have to have surgery and have them cut out but even then they might grow back.

As if my feet hurting wasn't enough, I developed an eye infection. My eyes stayed very red and swollen all of the time.

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They hurt so bad that I just wanted to keep them shut all of the time. I went upstairs at the hospital to the Eye Clinic on the 9th floor. The Doctor said I had a very deep infection in my eyes. There wasn't really anything to do to help them heal; just time, probably months to heal completely. The only thing for the pain was steroid drops which the Doctor didn't want to give me if I could possibly get by without them, so I still didn't get any relief from that. When I would wake up in the mornings, my eyes would be so matted together that I couldn't even open them. I had to pull my eye lids open with my fingers. People thought that I was so upset about Larry that I cried all of the time because my eyes were always so red and swollen. I looked so bad that I hated to see anyone.

The morphine they gave Larry for pain would make him extremely depressed. I would spend the days trying to reassure him that I loved him and that his family and others did too. I would try to cheer him up, read the bible to him and pray with him. He would try to make me pull the needles and tubes out and take him home and would get very upset with me because I wouldn't. I found that it isn't easy to reason with or cheer someone up that is on drugs, even if they are prescription drugs for pain. Thank the Lord; he did get off the morphine and other pain killers sooner than the Doctor's ever thought he would. Even though I knew that it was the drugs that was making Larry like that it was still hard for me. I got to the point that I felt like I was drained physically, emotionally and in every way. We missed the kids a lot. My parents brought them to Houston after two weeks. I was waiting in the lobby for them. Landon ran to me, threw his arms around my neck. I started to cry. He said Mom, aren't you glad to see me? I had to explain that they were tears of joy. I would go back to the Hotel late at night and fix a hot bubble bath sit there and cry and pray. I would get so tired and weary but God was always there, he never failed us. He gave me strength to go on when I felt like I couldn't put one foot before the other one. I had to find a Laundry to wash my clothes and would go to the laundry late at night when I would leave the hospital.

Once Larry was able to get up for a few minutes in a wheel chair, he'd want me to take him down the halls, which was fine ...until he got the bright idea that he wanted to go downstairs to the Lobby from the 6th floor that his room was on. His leg had to stay elevated so I would have to put the leg rest up on the wheel chair, and then tie his leg to it as he couldn't keep it from falling off.

The elevators were always crowded so when we finally got in, I put the wheel chair to the back to the elevator with his leg out in front of him. Well, Larry is 6' 4" tall and the doors of the elevator wouldn't shut because of his foot. So here I am, holding his foot up so the door will shut. We were quite a sight! I think we stopped at every floor on the way down. We finally got to the ground floor, got off and got to the lobby.

Larry said... I'm sick, I think I'm going to throw up or pass out. I thought Lord, what in the world am I going to do if he does pass out or throw up down here in the lobby? I was

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praying that I could get him back to his room on the sixth floor before he did anything drastic. It seemed like it took the elevator forever to come. Then we made the usual stops at each floor on the way up with me still holding his leg up so the elevator door will shut, but finally we got to his room and got him to bed.

Besides the excitement at the hospital, if you could call it that, there was some at the Hotel too. The elevator in the Hotel was round with glass on the outside so you could see the city of Houston and the Astro Dome as you went up. Kids liked to play on it and it broke down regularly, then I'd have to climb the four flights of stairs to my room. At about 5:00 o'clock one morning I woke up and heard what I thought was someone stuck in the elevator, beating on the door and yelling trying to get out. The beating noise and yelling kept getting louder. I thought Boy; whoever is stuck in there is really panicked. I picked up the phone to call the desk but before they answered someone was beating on my door yelling ...The Hotel is on fire, get out!!!

I jumped out of bed and opened 3 of the locks on my door but left the chain on and opened it and peeked out. Other people was looking out their doors and some was in the hall looking around. I didn't see any fire or smell any smoke at that time so I grabbed some clothes on. I think that I probably set a record for getting dressed. By then there was firemen in the hallway and coming up the stairs. As I was going down the stairs I could smell the smoke and when I got to the parking lot I could see smoke pouring out from the second floor.

The TV news cameras were there so about 6:00 am I went to a pay phone and called Larry. I was afraid he might turn on the TV and see the hotel fire and be worried about me. Thankfully everyone got out and no one was hurt. The entire second floor had to be closed as the fire was started in one of the second floor rooms and there was a lot of smoke and water damage. One of the Hotel drivers told me the following story one day when we were talking about the fire while he was driving me to the hospital. The man that intentionally set the fire had been in prison for arson and had been released early. He had set fires in two other Hotels' before this one. When he left the Hotel that I was in, he had gone to the home of two Doctors (a husband and wife) that had worked at the prison. He tied the man up and set the house on fire, and left him in it to burn up. (The Doctor managed to get loose and get out). He took the woman to a Motel and sexually assaulted her. When he left there he had a hit and run accident on the freeway and the Police caught him. He had been in the same Hotel that I was in for four days. Now when I see big hotel or apartment fires on the news with people having to jump out windows, I think except for the grace of God that could have been me.

Larry was finally released to come home on Friday, the 25th of September. An ambulance took him home. Palestine is about 150 miles from Houston. The Doctor ordered a wheel chair and electric bed. I had to take him his meals in bed, give him

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sponge baths in bed, help him with his exercises, and move his leg for him. I'd get on my sterile gloves and take care of his skin graft and clean the pins in his leg on the fixation device. The Doctor kept stressing how important this was so that he wouldn't get an infection. He still wasn't out of the woods yet. He could still get an infection and lose his leg.

For a while we had a Nurse that came in the morning and one in the afternoon to take care of his leg, check his vital signs, and watch for signs of infection. In the hospital they had told me what to watch for too. A Physical Therapist came in the mornings to work with him. I had to teach the two RN's how to care for his leg. It had to be done six times a day so I still had to do it four times a day even with them coming. Now that we was home I had all of this to do besides the cooking, cleaning, taking care of the boy's and the usual things.

In two weeks we had to go back to Houston to see two of the Doctor's. I had to rent a van because Larry had to travel lying down with his leg elevated. I didn't know how I'd get him in the van but we finally got him out there with a walker and got him loaded. At the Hotel there was a big step to get up. We didn't know how we was going to get him up the step. The Lord sent a man by and he came over and helped us get him up the step.

In two more weeks, we had to go back to the Doctors. We decided that we would have to buy a van for him to travel in. The Lord made it possible for us to buy a new Dodge Ram Van. On the 6th of November Larry kept passing out in the Doctor's office while they were X-raying his leg. The Doctor didn't know what was wrong, so had an ambulance come and take him back to the hospital. He was turned over to another Doctor to find out what was causing him to pass out. While in the hospital this time they never did come in to care for his leg. Finally I went out and ask the Nurse about it. She said well, we can't do anything for his leg because we don't have any Doctor's orders for it. She ask what I needed and I give her a list of supplies. She ordered the supplies and brought them to me so I took care of his leg while he was in the hospital that time. I felt a little strange there with my sterile gloves on working on his leg with three Doctors standing around the bed talking and Nurses coming and going. Well, by now my weak stomach has come a long way! The Lord had really helped me and I was doing things that I would have never thought I could do. It turned out that he had an inner ear infection that was causing him to pass out.

He got out of the hospital Sunday, the 8th of November and we went back home again. We were glad to be back home again and thought maybe things will settle down a little bit now. After all, what else could happen???

The next Sunday, the 15th of November we went to church. Some of the men came out and carried Larry up the steps in his wheel chair. After lunch I was washing dishes, Larry was sitting in his recliner watching TV. It was so still and hot and an eerie feeling in the air like there used to be in Corpus Christi where I grew up when a hurricane was coming in. I ask Larry if he had

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heard any weather reports. I said something is going to happen with the weather...

Meredith ask if he could walk over to his friends a few blocks away. I lay down with Landon for his nap and Larry was still watching TV, a Dallas Cowboy football game. It started to hail so I ran out and moved the van in the garage and shut the garage door. When I got back to the bedroom I heard the wind start blowing really hard. I looked out the window and it was kind of green outside with leaves and things blowing around in a circle. I thought boy, its really windy. I think my brain was still kind of in slow motion after every thing that had been happening. It didn't dawn on me what was fixing to happen.

Larry called me to bring him the radio so he could get a weather report. About the time I got to him with the radio, the TV went off and Larry saw a black cloud out the patio doors.

Larry said to get Landon and get in the hallway and lay down. Landon was asleep so by the time I got him in the hall Larry had managed to get up and was already there. He told me to go get the radio that I had set by his recliner. About the time I got halfway across the den the windows started breaking, glass and shingles blowing in. The wooden fence at the back of our yard left. The neighbors behind us and beside us storage buildings went, but ours stayed. All kinds of things was flying. Then it finally dawned on me ... Oh, we must be having a tornado!!!

Well, I never did get the radio. Larry was yelling at me now to get into the hallway. It was dark and I couldn't see in the hall so I was afraid I would step on his leg. Finally he told me to just sit down where I was. By now I was in hysterics. I could just see Meredith flying through the air in the funnel cloud. When it was over we came out of the hall. There was glass and shingles all inside the house, there was even shingles under the cushions on the furniture. We opened the front door which is a steel door. A 2 x 4 had hit it and put a big dent in it. The glass storm door was shattered. When we opened the other door all the glass fell inside on the carpet. The phones and electricity was out and Larry wouldn't let me leave to go check on Meredith as power lines was down all over the place and all kinds of debris and things in the streets and yards.

After while I saw Meredith and his friend Jimmy walking up the street. I was thankful to see them. They had been sitting in a car in Jimmy's driveway listening to the radio. Meredith saw the black clouds and told Jimmy that he thought it was a tornado and they went inside. They all got into the hallway and began to pray and they were all fine.

God spared all of us from being hurt and we didn't have any major damage. We lost some shingles and windows. Once again my parents came down and my Dad repaired all the damage for us which saved us a lot of money by not having to hire some one to do it. The corner of our roof had raised up three inches and set back down. The nails was left pulled up three inches. Thank God he didn't let the roof go.

In March of 1990 Larry had some more reconstructive surgery on his left foot, had the rod removed from his thigh, the screw removed from his leg, and an inch of bone shaved off where they

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had put the bone graft and some of the bulk taken out from the muscle flap and the skin graft smoothed out so there isn't such a big lump there. We was in Houston another week then. My parents came down to keep the boy's again. Larry was on crutches again for several weeks and off work for 4 more months. Once again, things went better than the Doctor's even expected, because of all the prayers going up for him.

God blessed me with good in-laws too. During these three years my Mother-in-law came down from Oklahoma three different times to help out and she stayed with the boys when we had to return for Houston for a few days to see the four Doctor's.

In January of 1989 Larry had surgery on his eye muscles. He had a trauma to the head during the accident that had caused his eyes not to work together. The surgery corrected that.

During this time we never lost our faith in God. We had some difficult times in our family and marriage. Larry would get frustrated because he felt he was no good to his family or anyone else. He wanted to get back to work, to get back on the road. Through it all, God was faithful and he never put more on us than we could bear, although there was times that I thought that I just couldn't take any more but somehow his grace was always sufficient. My family, Larry's family, our Pastor, his wife and our church family at Westside A/G Church was a great help and blessing to us. We couldn't have made it without their prayers as well as the prayers of many others too.

Now, in September 1990 Larry is back on the road again. God healed me of the heel spurs which I am so thankful for and give all the glory to God for my healing. Meredith is in the Navy in Basic Training in Orlando, Florida. Landon is in the second grade and I am taking care of things at home. But most of all, God is still Number one in our lives and he just keeps blessing us. We are in a great church, Abundant Life Center where God is pouring out his spirit in a mighty way. We go to every service excited and anxious to see what God is going to do this time. We serve a great big God and he is bigger than any problem or trial that we could ever have, and he is always ready and willing to hear and answer our prayers.

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Update

It is now August 6, 2003 (my birthday). My goodness, how times flies. Larry transferred and in June 1991 we moved to Searcy, Arkansas. In May this year Larry had his 18th anniversary driving a truck for Wal*Mart. His left foot and leg bother him more the older he gets and it stays swelled all of the time. The last several years Larry has gone on the mission trip with the mission team from church. They went to Mexico three years then the last few years have been going to different Indian Reservations in Arizona to help build churches for the Indians. He has really enjoyed having the opportunity to go with the mission team.

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Meredith is 32 years old now. He spent five years in the Navy. He was on the USS LaSalle and also on the USS America. He was stationed in Orlando, Florida then in Virginia Beach, Virginia. After basic training he married Terre Dennis. They have two beautiful girls, Brooke 9 years old and Ashley 8 years old.

Landon has grown up to be a wonderful young man. He is 6'6" tall and 20 years old now. He took a year off after graduating high school and worked then last year started college full time at ASU Beebe. He finished his first year of college with a 4.0 GPA. Landon is very involved with the Youth Group at church and plays bass guitar with the band. He also helps runs the sound system at church. He really enjoys doing the sound and also playing guitar with the band. He works part time at the Wal*Mart Distribution Center and has worked there a year now.

I have been a stay at home mom and have been very blessed to be able to do that. Now I enjoy spending time with the grandkids. They usually come over Friday afternoon and spend the night and go home Saturday evening. Last year we took Brooke and Ashley to Hot Springs a few days then to Branson a few days during the Christmas holidays. This spring we took them to Branson a few days and Landon was able to go with us that time. We all had a really good time and the girls had a blast. They get along really good with their Uncle Landon. They say he is a good Uncle.

We lost Larry's dad in August 1986. My mom passed away in November 1999 and my dad passed away in May 2001. We miss all of them very much but know that they are in a much better place and we will all join them some day. God continues to bless us and our family and we are very thankful for all His blessings.

Note...

Some of the things I learned later from information that our attorney got from eye witnesses and from pictures that our attorney was able to obtain. Several people that stopped had taken pictures which we were able to obtain copies of.