



TRAUMA

A Will to Live

Nicole Bartolotti spoke to her husband, Gerald (Jerry) Bartolotti, just before 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 11, 2010.

Shown from left, Nicole, Cole and Jerry Bartolotti are a tight-knit family since Jerry's traumatic injury and life-changing experience nearly two years ago.

He was working on a construction site, as usual, and assured her he would be home as soon as he was done.

Moments later Jerry called back. But this time it wasn't his voice on the other end. Instead, a police officer gave Nicole the worst news a wife can receive—Jerry was in an accident.

Shortly after speaking to Mrs. Bartolotti, Jerry noticed that his 1994 Peterbilt 18 wheel truck and trailer was rolling down a hill, unoccupied. In an attempt to stop his truck from hitting anything (or anyone), he rushed to the passenger's door and reached for the emergency air brake. But his effort was futile and the unthinkable happened.

Andrew Fitch, an EMT for the Long Hill First Aid Squad was first to arrive on the scene. "The truck rolled over into a ditch and pinned him against a tree. I thought he was dead," he recalled. "Then I heard him say, 'I'm alive' ...but there was so much weight on him I really didn't think he was going to make it."

Jerry was trapped for two hours in the bitter cold before emergency workers were able to free him from the wreckage. Eventually, he was heliported by North Star Medevac unit to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) in New Brunswick. He had severe chest and arm injuries—there was little hope he would survive.

At the hospital, Jerry was placed in a medically induced coma. "All we knew was

that if Jerry could make it through the next three hours we would learn more," Nicole said.

When the doctors finally emerged, the diagnosis was grim. According to Timothy Leddy, MD, an attending orthopedic surgeon at RWJ and a Clinical Associate Professor of Orthopedics at UMDNJ Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Jerry was suffering from a reperfusion injury—an extremely dangerous condition caused when the blood supply returns to the tissue after extensive lack of oxygen. In order to save his life, they would have to amputate.

Carlos Sagebien, MD, attending orthopedic surgeon at RWJ and a Clinical Associate Professor of Orthopedics at UMDNJ Robert Wood Johnson Medical School said, "We had a long conversation with the family to let them know we would do everything we could to save his arm, but there was no way we were going to let him pass away."

And that wasn't all. Jerry also had seven broken ribs, a collapsed lung and several of the fingers on his right hand had been severed. Later, they would find out he had severe nerve damage in his right arm and hand.

"They told us he was the sickest man in the entire hospital," his wife said. "We had no idea if he would live."

"When all was said and done, we took him to the operating room 10 times,"

Dr. Sagebien explained. Ultimately, to save Jerry's life, doctors had to amputate his entire left arm, shoulder blade and collarbone, otherwise known as shoulder disarticulation. "When he came back to visit it was incredible to see him," said Mariann Boylston the Nurse Practitioner who cared for Jerry in the trauma unit. "You just feel so much admiration for someone who's been through all that. And his wife Nicole was his biggest advocate. She's tiny but she's very strong."

"She was an absolute champion. I don't think she left the hospital once," Dr. Sagebien said.

"You couldn't ask for a better team of people who work so well together," Nicole gushed. "If not for the amazing doctors and nurses of Surgical Intensive Care Unit West, Jerry would not be here today!"

But Dr. Leddy insists that this story isn't about the people who saved Jerry. Instead, it's about his incredible will to survive. "We were just innocent bystanders watching a guy fight for his life...and succeed. He's an amazing person."

It's been more than a year since Jerry's accident. He's adjusting to his new life and getting stronger every day. His wife Nicole continues to thank the RWJ team for saving her best friend's life.

Visit www.rwjtrauma.org
or call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.



Shown: Marianne Boyleston, RN, APN, was just one of the many team members who were instrumental in Jerry's long recovery at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.