L470S12.T17 Text 17

Interviewer: Cory Barnes

**The 18-wheeler**

1 Um, Delaney and I had gone to Memphis for his annual check-up, and, at St. Jude’s,

2 and we were on our way home that evening,

3 and I hate that drive to Memphis,

4 it’s like a five-and-a-half, six-hour, boring drive,

5 and I hate it,

6 and I especially hate the part of the drive

that goes over Monteagle

because it’s this big mountain,

7 and it’s, you go up,

8 and it’s, it’s a really difficult pass,

9 and I hate that trip;

10 that’s

why I don’t like going to Nashville and over to the west like that.

11 So anyway, it was nighttime,

12 it was dark,

13 and we had just come down Monteagle, on the Chattanooga side,

14 and I was thinking, ‘Okay, we’re in the home stretch,

15 we’re almost there,’

16 and I was happy,

17 and so I’m driving along

Complicating action

18 and I happen to look in my rearview mirror,

because I always check my mirrors

when I’m driving.

19 I looked in my rearview mirror,

20 and there was an 18-wheeler behind me,

21 and his lights were right in my back:

22 he was already practically on top of my bumper –

23 I don’t know

how he got there so quickly,

because he never blew his horn or anything, so,

but when I looked up,

24 there he was, right on top of us,

25 I had absolutely no time to react, to swerve, to get into the other lane, or anything like that,

26 and within seconds of me seeing him, there was the impact,

27 and he hit the back of us.

28 And he hit the back of our car in such a way

that he clipped the, um, I guess it was the passenger-side rear bumper,

because my car swung around so that the, I mean not the passenger side, the driver side,

29 the car swung around

so that my side of the car was impaled on the grille of the 18-wheeler:

30 I could look out my window and see all the lights on his grille.

31 And it was just right there:

32 I could have rolled down my window and touched the grille.

33 And I was so horrified

34 and I thought, ‘Okay, this is it.

35 We’re going to die’

because the 18-wheeler was pushing us along,

36 we were stuck on his grille,

37 and he had already left the road

38 and we were in the grassy median,

39 but he was still going probably fifty-five, sixty miles an hour,

40 and I thought, ‘Either he’s going to roll over us,

41 or he’s going to push us into a concrete embankment

42 and we are gonna be killed.’

43 And Delaney was in the back seat,

44 he was in the middle seat,

45 and he was saying, ‘Mom, what’s happening, what’s happening?’

46 and I just kept saying, ‘Delaney, it’s gonna be okay, it’s gonna be okay.’

47 And I was very calm

because I wanted to remain calm to keep Delaney calm, to keep him from being any more fearful

than he was,

48 and it was really strange

because it was eerily quiet inside the car, I guess something about the impact

or when the 18-wheeler hit the front of the car, uh,

49 maybe the engine died,

50 but it was just so quiet,

51 and I could smell the rubber,

52 and I could smell his hot brakes,

because apparently what made him hit us

was

that he had lost his brakes coming down the mountain.

53 And um, and he was in the wrong lane;

54 he was supposed to be in a different lane.

55 But anyway, so finally, uh, I have no idea why,

56 but our car came away from the 18-wheeler;

Ev 57 maybe he yanked his wheel to the side or something,

58 but my car came away from the 18-wheeler,

59 and went to the right,

60 and went back across two or three lanes of traffic;

CA 61 another oncoming vehicle clipped the back end of us,

62 and spun us around,

63 and we ended up sitting on the shoulder of the road,

64 and and at that point I had no control over the car,

because the engine had died,

65 the steering wheel wasn’t working

because the, the undercarriage had been, uh, bent

66 and the wheels were all mashed up and everything,

67 but we came to a stop on the shoulder of the road,

68 and the back end of the vehicle – it was an SUV, so it was a fairly large vehicle,

69 but the back end of the vehicle was all smashed up,

70 the front end was smashed up,

71 there was glass everywhere,

72 but neither Delaney nor myself had a scratch on us:

73 we were perfectly, perfectly fine,

74 and we didn’t have whiplash,

75 we didn’t have back aches,

76 we didn’t have anything wrong with us.

But, as we were sitting there,

77 I remember thinking, ‘Okay, we survived that,

78 but oh my god, just about ten miles back, I filled the tank up with gas.

79 We need to get out of this car

because it’s gonna explode.’

80 I don’t know

why that came into my mind,

81 but my, my next instinct was, ‘Delaney, let’s get out of the car.’

82 So we got out of the car,

83 and I think we both had our shoes off,

because it was a long trip,

84 and we had our shoes off,

85 we were being comfortable,

86 so we got out of the car, in the dark, in the ditch, barefooted,

87 and got away from the car, to try-y’know, in case it exploded,

88 and um, that night, we finally got home,

89 and it was a big ordeal to get home,

because we were out in the middle of nowhere,

90 a policeman came along,

because some motorist had reported the accident,

91 a policeman came along and helped us,

92 and he called a wrecker,

93 and the wrecker had to take us back up the mount to Monteagle, to this little-bitty garage

that was closed,

94 and then Delaney and I went to this little restaurant to sit there and wait for Corey and Delaney’s dad to come pick us up.

95 But so, we finally got home that night,

96 and I slept that night,

97 but for several nights after that,

98 I remember thinking

that I hadn’t really survived the crash,

that I had actually died,

but that my mind was not conscious,

my mind had not registered

that I had really died,

and, after talking to people about that feeling,

because it was such a weird, pervasive feeling,

99 some people told me

that that is a type of post-traumatic stress disorder.