

## **Episode 89: Alex was trapped under an ATV**

Do you have a best friend?

I have a best friend. His name is Tim. He and I grew up together in Ohio. We went to the same school, same church, we would sleep over at each other's house all the time. And we each have younger brothers, and they were also good friends, and our parents were really close as well.

Of course I'm in Florida now, and Tim still lives in Ohio. We haven't seen each other in years, but we still communicate by phone and on Facebook pretty regularly. Tim's the kind of guy that if I told him I had some kind of emergency and needed him here, he'd be on the next plane. And I'd do the same for him. That's just what best friends are supposed to do.

My guest on the podcast today is Alex, and his story kind of illustrates that.

He was outdoors working one day. This was in the summer, and Alex and some other men were working on a mountain that in the winter functioned as a ski slope. They were using chainsaws and getting the long mountain slope cleared of trees and other debris, in preparation for the winter season.

Alex ends up getting seriously injured. But it wasn't his chainsaw that caused his injury. And he didn't get hit by a falling tree. Alex was run over from behind by an unmanned 1800 pound ATV, and he found himself trapped underneath it. He couldn't get out; he couldn't even move. And since he didn't know if anyone else had even seen this happen, he suddenly felt very alone.

Then, his best friend Greg showed up.

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### **Scott**

Who was with you on the day this happened?

### **Alex**

Oh boy, I've already got a chill up my back. Greg was my teammate during the rescue itself. There were probably about 8 or 9 of us in total clearing the ski run from deadfall and debris. Preparing it for the next ski season, as it were.

### **Scott**

Ok. So Greg was the primary person you were working with; the closest that day anyway?

### **Alex**

Yeah, Greg and I and the whole team had broken for lunch. We refueled our saws and our weed whackers and all of our equipment. Got some liquids inside of us, ate our lunch, and we were getting ready to attack the afternoon ski run that we were gonna clear. We had a plan. The plan was to send Greg down in the Polaris Ranger to the bottom of the hill with fuel, resupplies, extra chainsaws and whatnot. Then we were going to work our way down. I looked over at Greg and it looked like he was going to go in the buggy by himself and I said, "Hey Greg, what's up? Are you going alone?" He said, "Yeah." I didn't think that was such a great idea. Plus, anytime I'll pass up the opportunity to work really hard if I can ride around in an oversized golf cart (laughter). So I hopped in with him and we went to the bottom of the hill. That's how the setup

all happened. We had guys at the top working their way down, and Greg and I were gonna work from the bottom to the midpoint.

**Scott**

You mentioned this was a ski run, so obviously it's a long hill. This is in the summertime of course, so there's no snow, but this is the time to clear out the trees and all the debris that collects overtime so it can be ok to use during the winter. So your job today- you mentioned you had chainsaws -you were primarily clearing trees.

**Alex**

Yeah, there's deadfall that falls into these old ski runs. Plus I don't know what species they are, I'm not an herbalist, but the bushes and stuff grow up through. So you can have 2 feet of snow and have good coverage and not hit big obstacles and what not. In big snow years that all gets covered, but in light snow years you want that cleared so you don't ski across a stump or fallen tree. That was the gist of the operation.

**Scott**

You've used the word buggy. I've seen a picture of this thing, this is no buggy. What you're talking about is an ATV and the model is a Polaris Ranger. You can call it an ATV but when I picture an ATV I'm thinking of a one person vehicle, running through the trails, jumping over rocks and stuff like that. This thing is huge. Can you describe it? We'll have a picture of it on the website so people can see what it looks like.

**Alex**

Yeah you know I hasten to call it an ATV, it's really a small car or small pickup. I've done a little bit of research and I think with the tools and the chainsaws and the fuel and the water in the back of the buggy- it's a 4 seater with a roll cage and a wench -it probably weighed in at about 1800 pounds.

**Scott**

That's a big buggy for sure.

**Alex**

Yeah it is.

**Scott**

I looked at the specs on it and it has an 11.5 inch ground clearance, which is 29 centimeters, so it runs fairly low to the ground. So you guys started and the two of you took the ATV to the bottom of the hill; and then you rode part way up. What was the plan here?

**Alex**

Well (laughter) Greg's quite a bit fitter than I am physically. We got to the bottom and we had been cutting all morning. I was already feeling the fatigue of being a recreational logger as it were. Greg and I debated taking it up on the road cut to take it up onto the hill. Greg was perfectly comfortable leaving it parked and I encouraged him and said, "Let's drive it up as far as we can so that I don't have to waste any energy." We ended up driving it up the hill. The ski hill started to pitch up quite a bit so we decided to just pull it sideways, perpendicular to the fall line if you will. We cut the wheels uphill in case it slipped out of gear, something that would never happen in a million years. Yeah, the story starts from there.

**Scott**

So Greg was driving. He parked it and you got out and started walking down while he was still parking it? Did I lay out the chain of events correctly?

**Alex**

Yeah, yeah. Not to throw anybody under the bus, but Polaris when they made that particular model and year of ATV they did not put a parking brake on the darn thing. So Greg and I debated how to park it. I'm from the construction industry and I'm a little bit brash at times and I was pretty much just like, "Fuck it Greg. This thing's not going anywhere." I grabbed my saw, I had my kevlar chaps on, my safety helmet with my hearing protections, my 2 liter Camelbak on my back. I headed downhill to hit some 4 inch Aspen trees that would be on the skiers left. I headed downhill and he headed uphill; that's how it started.

**Scott**

When you said, "This thing's not going anywhere." If there was ever an example of famous last words, that's gotta be the epitome of that.

**Alex**

(laughter)

**Scott**

I'm sure you have probably thought about that many times since then.

**Alex**

Yeah I relive that day quite a bit.

**Scott**

The Ranger was parked directly above you, but you said that while you were working it was kind of invisible to you. What do you mean by that?

**Alex**

Well, when you're on a job site out in the woods with your buddies cutting trees down, you gotta keep your head on a swivel. You've got to always have situational awareness I guess I would call it. I took a glance back to see that Greg was far enough away that, if he was falling a bigger tree, it wouldn't fall on me etcetera. So, yeah that's a great word Scott, invisible. That Polaris Ranger was invisible to me, I never thought about it in a million years. I never thought that thing would slip out of gear.

**Scott**

I've read what you wrote about this and you mention that there were a few mistakes made. You should've hiked up the hill with the chainsaws rather than driving up. You should've confirmed the Polaris was in park. You should've chocked the tires, and you should've had a contingency plan. Obviously looking back those things would've all been great, but none of those things were in place. So take it from there, you're downhill from it, you put on your hearing protection, how much can you hear when you have your hearing protection on?

**Alex**

Oh it knocks down quite a bit. I'm no ear-ologist (laughter) . I don't know if that's what it's called, but it knocks down that piercing sound that causes deafness over time. It knocks quite a bit out for sure.

I started my saw, it was a great saw and I miss it. The saw started in one pull. I was basically looking downhill, hunched over, because you want to cut trees off as low as you can. That way when snow coverage isn't super deep you don't catch it with a ski tip or something like that. So I started cutting and next thing you know I felt this huge- well actually I thought Greg had shoved me. For a nano second I thought, "Why is Greg shoving me?! I'm running a live chain saw here wide open, what is going on?" Just for a nano second. The next thing I know I see a knobby tire going by my face, inches from my face. Then I realized, "Oh, I just got run over by this small car, and I'm getting dragged underneath it." It happened so fast, but what I think happened was that I got flung back against the plexiglass windshield, if you will, and it just ran me over. It just flat out ran me over and was grinding me up every which way, it had its way with me. I had no control over what was happening.

### **Scott**

Did you lose consciousness at all?

### **Alex**

At that point no, I didn't. I put it all together very quickly, and I really thought that thing would just go over me and I would get spit out the back end and I would just be like, "Holy cow, look what just happened." I knew I was in deep trouble because I was getting beat up pretty good. I knew I wasn't going to go back to work after that. I knew I was going to be able to sit up, look around, and tell Greg what happened, and then limp out of there and go home for the day. That's really how I thought it was going to pan out. It didn't happen that way.

There's very few rocks on this particular slope, and the ATV hit about a 3 inch in diameter rock that was buried. it wasn't just sticking up out of the thing, it ran over the rock and it stopped the ATV square on top of me. It crushed my ankle. It trapped my left ankle between what was probably the left steering linkage on the ATV and this rock. It's like musical chairs, all this chaos is happening, totally out of my control, and then boom! The music stopped. This is where it gets hard to tell the story. It was terrifying. I didn't know if Greg had started his saw already, and if that had been the case, he may not have heard me. For that nano second, the world stood still. I was alone and really not sure what was going to happen next.

On these low clearance machines, there's typically a steel skid plate. That skid plate had just squashed me. My right arm was probably wrapped up over my head. My left arm, I didn't know where that was. I couldn't feel anything- well I could move my eyelashes and my vocal chords and I was really struggling to breathe. The breathing part was really critical. Later on- it was about a 45 minute period I was trapped underneath there -the breathing became really difficult and labored and I had to really calm my mind. Hyperventilating or panicking under there was not an option because every breath I took in was really critical. I was pancaked, I couldn't move any part of my body.

Ultimately I think my first plan of having that thing just keep going down the hill and crash into a clump of trees, would've been the best thing. Potentially or not. We don't know if the back differential would've hit me in the head, then I would've had a massive head injury. So we don't know. Once time stood still, I was really alone. I never felt that alone in my life. I immediately started screaming out for Greg, because like I said I didn't know if he'd started his saw or not

yet. Greg luckily hadn't started his saw. He came running down to assess the situation. This was new information to him, he didn't see what happened so he was like, "What's going on?" Immediately he started trying to lift the machine. Well this is an 1800 pound car trapped on top of me. I'm writhing in pain and I'm not necessarily calm at this point. I'm saying, "Get it off me! Get it off me!" So he tries to lift it. Well, you hear stories about mothers lifting cars off of trapped children with the adrenaline rush and stuff like that, in our case it wasn't like that. It's still an 1800 pound hunk of iron and plastic.

**Scott**

Unfortunately the laws of physics still applied.

**Alex**

They sure do. Gravity wins in those situations. I've been doing construction my whole life pretty much. I've taken some college level physics. So immediately I started yelling, "Fulcrum! Fulcrum! Fulcrum! Grab a rock or a stump and start a fulcrum!" and Greg did. Greg grabbed some fallen trees, deadfall from seasons before. He grabbed- I'm estimating -a 6 inch in diameter tree and tried to start a fulcrum.

**Scott**

The idea of this, obviously, was to put this long log wedged under the ATV but on top of a nearby rock, and leverage it up so it releases the pressure from you.

**Alex**

Yeah that was the theory. I was getting so squashed and it was so incredibly painful; I just needed some relief. We need to buy time. We need to have time on our side because I was in a pretty bad situation. Greg couldn't see me, and I couldn't see Greg. I could see the weeds and maybe part of his legs and feet, I don't know what I could see. My eyes were closed most of the time because it was so painful, but we just need to buy some time. To hit pause and find out what the heck was going on, what my injuries were. So Greg got this makeshift fulcrum started and I did feel some pressure relief. As he started the fulcrum and started to stand on the other end of the log, it was rotten inside. We didn't know this. So I'm starting to get pressure off and the BOOM, it releases back on to me with the full pressure. I immediately said, "Greg, grab your saw, cut down another tree if you have to, but start another fulcrum." I wasn't in the position to tell anybody what to do, but I needed that fulcrum pressure off. Greg was like, "No no I've got it. There's another log here." So he grabbed another one and got another one started. I will interject this about Greg. Greg did a magnificent job this whole entire rescue. For the longest time after this happened, I thought Greg was standing on the log on the fulcrum and steadying himself with one hand while he's making the 911 call off of another tree. No that wasn't the case. It was raining, we had lightning, we had all sorts of crazy stuff that no one would ever believe going on. He was standing there balancing with no hands, there was no tree that he could balance off of. So, shout out to Greg and Archimedes, who came up with the fulcrum.

**Scott**

That's one thing we haven't even talked about; the weather conditions right now. You've got an electrical storm, a thunderstorm happening while this is going on.

**Alex**

You can't make this up. When we started down the hill in the buggy, an afternoon thunderstorm- which in Colorado is very common -was rolling in and it was starting to rain a little bit. I was a little uneasy about the lightning to be honest with you, I'm not a big fan of- I can handle the rain,

we can all handle that but getting hit with a lightning bolt is unfavorable. So by the time I got trapped, it was pouring down. By the time Greg was on the fulcrum it was an utter downpour. On cue, a lightning bolt hit so close, it rocked my fillings. It was an incredibly close lightning strike. Greg and I were both under the opinion that, "Well, we're kind of having a shitty day already. If we get zapped by lightning, oh well. That's the way the cookie crumbles and it's our time." We had a little bit of lightheartedness around that. I asked him if he was living clean, because I don't know if I was living clean at the time.

**Scott**

So he was able to use the new log, or new tree, and actually get the pressure off of you while he was standing on it.

**Alex**

Yeah. This is where this gets pretty crazy. Cell reception in the mountains is intermittent and spotty at best. For whatever reason, he had enough bars to call 911. He got a hold of the local 911 dispatch and explained our location. In the meantime, our teammates were up above us with fresh fuel in their saws and what not and were working their way down. So we could hear the chainsaws working above us, but they couldn't hear us. So- this is amazing, you gotta have this guy on the show, but this is amazing. He's talking to dispatch, doing what he did. I'm screaming and barking orders at him because I was really trying to convey to him the desperate situation and sense of urgency. Meanwhile, in between talking to dispatch, he's screaming uphill to try to get some of our teammates' attention that we were in trouble.

**911 Dispatch**

911 where is your emergency?

**Greg**

(censored)

**911 Dispatch**

Ok and what's going on there?

**Greg**

We've got a gentleman trapped under a Polaris Ranger and he's in bad shape.

**911 Dispatch**

How old is he? Do you know?

**Greg**

He's 50 years old.

**911 Dispatch**

Is he conscious right now?

**Greg**

He is.

**911 Dispatch**

Is he breathing ok?

**Greg**  
He is.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok. Does he have any obvious injuries, like is he bleeding, anything broken?

**Greg**

His ankle is definitely broken. He's trapped underneath the Ranger.

**911 Dispatch**

Is it basically a 4 wheeler?

**Greg**

Yeah it's a 4 wheeler. A 4 person 4 wheeler.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok. I'm gonna put you on hold while I send out an ambulance. Stay on the line for me ok?

**Greg**

Yep.

(to Alex) They're sending an ambulance.

**911 Dispatch**

Where in the ski area are you?

**Greg**

We're about half way down the mountain from the cabin, there's 2 ski runs that come off the very top of the mountain, we are on the one that is on the left hand side. Approximately half way down.

**911 Dispatch**

So you're on the actual mountain, you're not like on a road or anything?

**Greg**

Yes we're on the actual mountain.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok, I'm going to put you back on hold. I'll be right back.

**Greg**

Ok.

(to Alex) It's someone in the area. They're going to send the fire department. Yeah, that's what she's getting, the sheriff is on route now.

(yelling up the mountain) HEY!!! STEVE!!! STEVE!!!

**911 Dispatch**

Are you with the patient right now or did you have to come down?

**Greg**

No, I'm with the patient.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok. Do you see any road or anything that responders are going to be able to get there in trucks?

**Greg**

I'm gonna have to talk to them because it's kind of convoluted to get in here. So as soon as someone gets to the base, please have them call me and I can guide them up as far as what road they need to come in.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok. Ok. I'm going to put you back on hold. I'll be right back.

**Greg**

Ok.

(yells up mountain) STEVE!! STEVE!! JERRY! JERRY! STEVE!! STEVE!! STEVE!

(talking to Alex) Good, so hopefully they'll stop and they'll be walking down. No I don't but now they've-

(yelling) JERRY!! JERRY!!

**911 Dispatch**

Are you still there?

**Greg**

Yeah

**911 Dispatch**

Do you think it's going to be accessible by vehicles or are they going to need OHV's?

**Greg**

No, they can drive in a regular car.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok. They can drive in a regular car. Alright we're getting them headed your way. How's he doing? Is he still conscious?

**Greg**

Yes he is.

**911 Dispatch**

Is he still breathing normally?

**Greg**

Yes.

**911 Dispatch**

How long ago did this happen?

**Greg**



20 minutes ago. Once he's got help he's got-

### **911 Dispatch Radio**

132. Ambulance 132 en route.

### **Greg**

(yelling) JERRY!!

### **911 Dispatch**

Ok they are on their way to you. He's gonna call you, so look for a blocked or restricted number. If his conscious level or breathing changes give me a call back on 911 ok?

### **Scott**

You know, in listening to that, Greg sounded remarkably calm. What were you thinking when you heard him talking with 911? He's totally professional. This was a very serious situation. What were you thinking about that?

### **Alex**

Well, this is where I- I swore I wouldn't get emotional on your show -but Greg and I had been friends since Little League baseball back in the 70s in North Boulder. There's certain people you'd want to go through that situation with, and the only person on the planet I'd want to go through that with would be Greg. His calm demeanor and his wherewithal to keep me calm- he didn't know if I was bleeding out, if I had a spinal cord injury, if I was paralyzed, if I had a collapsed lung, thankfully that wasn't the case but he couldn't see me -it was a really desperate situation. To have those nerves of steel, to command that situation, it just speaks volumes about the character of this man. I am forever indebted to him. He had his hands full. Task management wise, he had me barking at him, he had 911 talking, communications between everybody was very difficult, the fire rescue squad didn't have comms, and it was hectic. Greg managed the whole thing. It was crazy.

### **Scott**

I'm trying to put myself in your position. You knew how serious the situation was, and Greg probably did too, but when you're hearing him and he's so calm, did it worry you that he didn't know how bad it was? That he really should be panicking a little bit more?

### **Alex**

(laughter) Oh 100% Scott, you nailed it man. I'm underneath there literally dying, just getting crushed to death. I'm no hero, but I can tolerate some pain. I've been around this world long enough, but I was in a lot of pain. Greg was just like, "Ok, here's where we're at. Here's what's happening. Your dispatch is doing their due diligence" and I'm just like, "Holy fuck! I am fucking dying here. Can someone please step up the sense of urgency?" But that would've been the worst thing possible, for Greg to freak out and start screaming into his cell phone. That would've been the worst thing that could happen all day. Thank God Greg just kept it together. We've been through a lot of shit in our life, so in hindsight it was just spectacular.

### **Scott**

I've heard those 911 calls where people are just panicking, and they're useless. You know? Sometimes the 911 dispatch operator has to say, "Can you put somebody else on the phone? Somebody that I can actually do something with?"

Ok so by this time the other workers had gotten down, and they were trying to strategize how to get this thing off of you. One of the ideas they came up with was to use the winch on the front of the ATV and you said, "No don't do that." Why was that a bad idea?

**Alex**

Well you know, I'm facing downhill. My left foot and ankle are crushed on the steering linkage. Then they said, "Let's hook up the winch." That's all I heard. I could hear them talking and strategizing and they were like, "Hook up the winch." I said, "No!! Don't hook up the winch, because if you pull the winch forward, you're going to shear my foot off." It literally would've popped my ankle and foot off and it would've been lights out. Then somebody reached in and- please if you're listening to this and you were one of my buddies up there -put their hand on the passenger side seat to open the glove compartment to get something for the winch. That little 5 pounds of pressure added, I said, "No don't touch the ATV!" because Greg had it balanced just right. Ultimately, what they were doing was they were securing the ATV. They wrapped the cable back up around and secured it to a tree behind us. That was so that, if and when they started to lift it, the ATV wouldn't roll forward and crush me further. They knew exactly what they were doing. At the time though, all I heard was "winch" and "let's hook it up" so I said, "No! Please don't do that!"

**Scott**

So it took a while for the rescue personnel to get there. You had enough people there, Greg couldn't lift this by himself, but they all tried lifting it together right? Did that do any good?

**Alex**

Like I said, they didn't know if I was bleeding out, had a spinal cord injury etcetera etcetera. So at one point, if they moved that the wrong way they could've killed me. If they move the wrong way and they get injured in the process and drop it back on my head, I'm dead anyways. They were in a no win situation. Finally I got really quiet because I had run out of adrenaline or whatever, and I basically barked out at someone to come lean down so I could talk to them. I said, "Everybody needs to come to my side of the ATV and lift. I need to get out of here right now." It wasn't that long of a sentence, but I said, "Everyone needs to come to this side and start lifting." That's what happened. I had to give them permission to go for it. They got themselves in a position to do that. One of the guys Scott hurt his back on the lift, he was in physical therapy for several months afterwards. So shout out to Scott, thank you for sacrificing your body to get me out of there. At that point they all started lifting. The blood started rushing back to my legs. All of the sudden my knees lit up with pain. Then I don't have any memory, from the time they started lifting to the time I was out on the rocks next to it. They lifted it off of me and then 2 people maybe just hoisted me out. They couldn't leave that thing lifted up in the air forever. I don't know how that took place, someone will have to tell me.

**Scott**

When you come-to again, you're looking up and seeing sky rather than skid plate. Even if you were in pain, that had to be a relief.

**Alex**

Yeah. Like I said, the blood started circulating to the rest of my body and it was a glorious moment. I look up at the Aspen canopy, the thunderstorm had blown by at this time, and I'm

looking at the blue sky and vibrant green Aspen canopy. That was a glorious moment you know? That's when you're like, "Hey I might live." I'll never forget that.

Being bossy in nature, I told the guys once they got me flopped onto the grass or rocks or whatever it was, I said, "Nobody touch me. Just nobody touch me." because I didn't know which leg was going in which direction or about my arms. I was a real mess. One by one I said, "Somebody needs to cradle my head and put my head upright. Get it in line with my spine. So-and-so moves my right leg, but not too fast." So one by one I started getting people to get hands on me to get me into a quasi comfortable position. A lot of people were kind of assessing my injuries, this was before the medical staff had shown up, but somebody said, "His right arm is definitely broken." My left ankle definitely looked broken and it was bad. What I had in hindsight is called a brachial plexus injury, it's kind of a dead arm. I had nerve damage coming down from my spine to my right arm. I did not feel my arm at all, nothing. I thought, "If this is what a broken arm feels like, I'm in good shape." The thing that really stood out to me- my ankle of course -but my left side, I had my Camelbak on-

### **Scott**

Can you describe a Camelbak for people that don't know what a Camelbak is?

### **Alex**

Yeah. Camelbak I guess is a brand name. It's a water hydration system in a backpack with a bladder in it. Mine was a 2 liter, which is a fairly good size water hydration system. Yeah, so I had my Camelbak on, which probably saved me when I was getting tumbled. My left ribs felt like sticks were sticking into them. I kept asking my teammates, "Hey man, get the sticks out. Something is jabbing me on my left side." They kept saying, "There's nothing there. There's nothing there." I was like, "Please move the sticks." In hindsight, what it was was all my broken ribs poking me from the inside; simulating sticks poking me in the side. So that was fun (laughter) not really.

Just a little something about the helicopter, because of Greg's wherewithal and what he was telling 911 dispatch, the incident commander was able to call the helicopter in advance. He assessed the situation and went with a gut feel, because Greg was so calm and not freaking out, they had enough information to call the helicopter in advance. At one point, the sheriff, or whoever was there before the medics, said something about a helicopter. That was music to my ears. This is probably where I would get emotional again. When you're in that much pain and you know that driving down to a local hospital or clinic is going to be a long hard journey, somebody saying there would be a helicopter was a godsend. So I heard "helicopter" and I swear it wasn't 20 seconds later, we heard the rotor noises of a helicopter. Now there happened to be a Classic Air stationed at an airport nearby, so because the incident command and Greg had communicated in a crude fashion, that helicopter was on its way long before I ever knew it.

It was too steep for the helicopter to land, so it circled a few times and assessed the situation. They had radio communications with the incident commander on the ground who was next to us. The helicopter ended up coming in and putting its front skids into the dirt at an angle, and then let the air medics and their bags and equipment out. So they basically hovered while the medics got out and got to me. Then the helicopter took off and went to the top of the hill to a flat spot. They hooked me up with ketamine, which is ironic because ketamine has been part of my solution for my PTSD; we'll get to that in a minute. There are a couple times that I have no memory. One was getting dragged underneath the machine. Second was when the machine was lifted off of me. The third was when they were getting me on the backboard. Even though I

had pain meds on board, that was pretty painful and traumatic. The helicopter was 1500 yards or so up above us, up a fairly steep vertical face, and we had to get my fat ass up this steep hill on a backboard to the helicopter. That was the next challenge.

**Scott**

It doesn't sound like a very comfortable ride to be carried on a backboard. These guys must have, while they were carrying you and you're moaning in pain, they must have felt guilty every time they hit a bump or something right?

**Alex**

No, I tried to make it as light in spirit as possible. Once that ketamine got on board I was trying to crack jokes and make everybody comfortable. I have since tried to replicate hiking up that hill, not carrying anybody, and it's really steep and really long. It's probably not 1500 yards, but I'm sure to the team- there were about 15 people there, men and women first responders, and my teammates also pitched in to do a rotation and take brakes as we went; stabilizing me and all that. It was a heck of a deal, it was about a 3.5 hour rescue. It happened around 2 in the afternoon and by the time they got me loaded on the helicopter it was about 5:30.

**Scott**

Do you remember anything about the helicopter ride?

**Alex**

I do. That was a heck of a helicopter ride. I've been blessed to have the opportunity to do some helicopter skiing in Alaska and Canada. I'm not unfamiliar with the process of getting on a helicopter and getting off a helicopter, and the rotor noise. So they got me shoved on the bird, and I had a minor cut on my right ear. I had been lying on that side so a bunch of blood had dripped into my ear hole on my right side. The cut was pretty minor, but ears can bleed a lot. They got me strapped in and duct taped to the backboard and we took off flying to Denver.

Two things happened. One thing was my pain; I was in a lot of pain. I asked the air medic, and it's noisy so they've got a headset on me for hearing protection and liability, but it was hurting that cut on my ear. First thing I needed to do was try to get that headset off, but I couldn't move. I was strapped down. I screamed out to the medic, "Hey can you take these off?" He had to take his off to hear me with all the rotor noise. So I said, "Hey take these off and leave them off." He said, "No, we need to protect your ears." I said, "I won't sue you. Please take them off. I'm construction, I'm deaf already. Please take these off because it's hurting the cut on my ear." So he took them off. Immediately, once I established communication with him, I said, "Hey, we need to turn up whatever pain meds you have." He said, "No we can't do that." I said, "Go all the way full blast." He said, "You have to be awake when we get to Denver to talk to the doctors and the trauma doctors in Denver." I said, "I promise you I will wake up when I get to Denver, but turn up the volume on whatever you're giving me." So that was an interesting conversation. He took me right to the limit, I was in and out. I could remember out of the corner of my eye seeing puffy clouds and the thunderstorm that had passed over us. That was how my ride went to Denver.

**Scott**

When you got to the hospital, and you got assessed, what were your actual injuries?

**Alex**

Well, believe it or not, my ankle was not broken. It had some deep deep puncture wounds, and it was swollen to a large size. I had broken ribs, brachial plexus injury, nerve damage to my right hand and arm, and nerve damage to my left foot. During the rescue I was trapped for about 45 minutes, so what the medics were really concerned about was something called compartment syndrome. It's where the blood pools into your tissue and it can't come out and recirculate new oxygenated blood. I've been told by medical professionals that if I had been under there for another 15 or 20 minutes, I could have potentially started losing limbs. Particularly my lower legs, because the blood was so restricted to those areas.

Really quickly they assessed me for spinal cord injuries. Then that night I was pretty loopy because then they got me on the real meds. I was in and out of MRI machines and scans, this and that and the other thing. I did not get a lot of sleep that night, it was pretty rough.

**Scott**

How long were you in the hospital?

**Alex**

I was there for 4 days. I kept thinking I was going to get out. I just kept thinking, my folks came down from Boulder to help me out and I just kept thinking I was getting out. They kept drawing blood, and apparently there are some blood markers that indicate things aren't stable yet. I had no surgeries though, no spinal cord injuries. I definitely won the lucky to be alive lottery.

**Scott**

It definitely could have been a whole lot worse, and you survived obviously, but following that you experienced PTSD. What was the first sign that that was going on?

**Alex**

(laughter) Well, people that know me know that I'm a little off my rocker at times. The first year though, I really bragged to people and said, "Oh I'm doing so great. I don't have PTSD." I made it a point to tell people the first year, "I'm a miracle. I've got my act together and I don't have PTSD." I would make a point to that at cocktail parties or whatever, "I don't have PTSD isn't this great." Well year 2 I started a podcast in January of 2019, this had all happened in 2018, and part of it was to be able to tell my story and help people with suicide prevention and PTSD and all this other stuff. At the first year anniversary, I was going to do a podcast about my accident. I sat down with a friend and we tried to record a podcast. Well guess what, I was a puddle of tears for 2 or 3 hours. Finally my friend said, "You're not ready to tell your story, you're kind of a mess." I said, "You're right. I'm a mess." Nobody thinks they have- I didn't think I had PTSD - but I did, and it escalated. All the symptoms you can read off the internet, and it escalated and I became suicidal. I was very high on the suicidal ideation scale, let me put it that way. It resulted from other stuff in my life as well, but this accident propelled all that forward and brought it to the forefront.

**Scott**

How did you combat that? What was your strategy against that PTSD and the suicidal tendencies?

**Alex**

Well I think the modern healthcare system is really good at doing the trauma stuff we just talked about. You know, flying somebody to Denver and assessing them for spinal cord injuries and keeping them alive. I think there's room for improvement in the mental health space. I don't

have papers to prove it but I think there are a lot of people walking around with trauma that's been unaddressed. Some people can say, "Well you have an addiction problem. You have 'this, that and the other thing' problem." It really comes down to correctly identifying what was going on with me, in this case. I had seen counselors over my lifetime. I'm 10 years sober from alcohol so I'm familiar with the concept of recovery. PTSD was never really totally identified with me.

I'll just fast forward, it became pretty critical in January of 2021. Six months ago my symptoms increased to the point where I was calling the National Suicide Prevention lifeline number, which I'll give that number out here in a little bit. I was talking to peer counselors at the same number, the Colorado Crisis number, in my case. I started telling my story a little bit, my childhood story, things that have happened along the way, and then my accident. It became clear that I had PTSD, and I didn't think I ever did, so I'm not ashamed to say it. Thankfully through this podcast and meeting great folks like you, I've come to believe that PTSD is curable.

**Scott**

Curable, or at the very least, treatable anyway.

**Alex**

Absolutely. Absolutely, for sure.

**Scott**

You went back on the 2 year anniversary of the accident. You actually went back to the scene of where it happened. What went through your head as you were there again?

**Alex**

Well that was kind of an interesting process. At the 2 year mark I was going to publish another episode with my story again. Just something about the 2 year anniversary. Well, I had written my story out, and I wasn't ready to tell the story. So I worked that day. The days are a little bit longer in July in Colorado. Straight from work I jumped in my truck and went to the site. It was a lovely evening and- man do you make everybody cry on your show Scott? (laughter) You got a knack for that.

**Scott**

(laughter) We tell the stories and what happens is what happens.

**Alex**

Yeah, yeah. Well, basically I went up there and I started hiking up the hill. I drove my 4-wheel drive truck down to the bottom of the hill just like Greg and I had done. I had a Camelbak on, I like to stay hydrated. I hiked up the hill, all dirty and grungy from work. I found the locations where it had happened. I thought I had found it before, but I hiked up further and it got a little steeper and I started finding- and this is kind of emotional for me -parts to my chainsaw that had been pretty much decimated. Plastic parts off the chainsaw. I loved that chainsaw so I knew those were my parts. I made a little video and picked up the parts and had a little time reflecting on the mountain by myself with nature. I gave thanks to my friends and the first responders that made this possible, it was a pretty heavy spiritual time. A time of gratitude and reflection really. It was pretty profound. I went home that night and called a friend down in Denver, told her what had happened and what I'd been up to. We exchanged pleasantries, and I think I slept a little bit better that night. It was pretty heavy though.

**Scott**

It almost seems like a sense of closure. Going back after you've mostly recovered from this thing. Finding those parts to your chainsaw almost feels like a souvenir.

**Alex**

Yeah. Yeah they're still sitting on my desk in my office. The chainsaw is still there, the kevlar chaps that I was wearing that day to protect your legs in the event of a cut. I still use the same helmet that I had on when I'm chainsawing or cutting timbers. I still use that stuff. Well I don't use the same chainsaw. I have a different one, a backup. But yeah, souvenirs is an interesting way to look at it, and it's a daily reminder for me to have an attitude of gratitude, and that there's no guarantee of tomorrow. That was a one in a million accident, and the outcome of it was one in a million. I've been doing this stuff for a long time, and that was a one in a million opportunity to take a look at my life.

**Scott**

You mentioned your podcast. What's the name of that and what's it about?

**Alex**

It's called "The Builder's Journey." I didn't start the podcast to be rich or famous. I'm not super big on social media, maybe someday that will change. I always give out the National Suicide Prevention lifeline number once or twice on the show, no matter who the guest is. We don't focus strictly on suicide prevention, but I always give that number out. We've had some local influencers on the show, a county commissioner or two on the show, the town mayor. My buddies have been on the show. We do fart joke episodes, kind of low brow humor. I like to just keep it real. I'm supportive of the armed services and first responders, and we try to focus our stuff on that a little bit when we can. Given the opportunity I think everyone should check it out. It's "The Builder's Journey" . It's a look at the veiled valley through the eyes of a builder. That's what I am, I'm a builder, and hopefully we can start some new relationships and I appreciate you giving me the platform to shout that out. That being said I'm going to go ahead and give out that National Suicide Prevention lifeline number, it's 1-800-273-8255. Give those good folks a call if you happen to be in a position where you think that could benefit you.

**Scott**

That may just save someone's life.

**Alex**

Yeah, so thank you Scott for that platform.

**Scott**

Alex, congratulations on making it through, and congratulations on 10 years sober. That's no small feat either. Thanks for sharing your story.

**Alex**

Yeah Scott thanks. Be well.

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You can check out Alex's podcast at [TheBuildersJourney.com](http://TheBuildersJourney.com). And if you subscribe to that podcast, you'll probably hear me on there at some time in the not too distant future, as he and I are working on setting up a time for him to interview me for his show.

And I wanted to just mention something here. If you subscribe to my podcast, then you've seen, a couple of times this past month, you've seen trailers for other podcasts show up in your feed. The first one was for a podcast called 9/12, and more recently there was a trailer for Badlands, Season 2. And I just wanted to let you know, each time one of these is published in the podcast feed, it's because I chose it. I vet each one of these to make sure the podcast that's being promoted is one that you, my listener, would very likely be interested in. If a podcaster approaches me with a show about the upcoming football season, or professional wrestling, or stamp collecting, those promos would be declined. Not that they're bad topics, they're just not stuff that most of my listeners would be interested in. I only want to promote podcasts that I think you will really love. Just wanted to make sure you know where I'm at on that.

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## Voicemails

### Angela

Hi Scott, my name is Angela. I currently live in British Columbia, Canada. Like many people, I have begun working from home this year. I have found that podcasts have been an excellent way to help pass the day. After experimenting and listening around to see what appeals to me, I have landed on your show. I just wanted to give you props for the compassion that you show for your guests. It's something that I have found lacking in a lot of other podcasts, and it is just so appreciated to be able to hear such an unfiltered story from your guests. I think that your kind demeanor and the compassion that you show really facilitates that. Particularly with the last podcast I listened to with the father, Travis, who lost his son Brandon. I just found it so touching and honestly, I've been quite grateful. I've not had anything traumatic happen in my life, but I know that if that was to happen, it would be my wish to have someone like you that could show such empathy while also letting me get my story across. So I'm excited to hear what comes next and I thank you for helping me pass my work days.

### Brook

Hi Scott, my name is Brook. I'm calling because I am just having this weird compulsion to let you know how weird my experience just listening to Robert was, and his gunfight with pirates. I had been trying to listen to the woman, Cherie, who was almost run over by her own car, I believe. I kept clicking that one and it kept zapping me right back to the gunfight with pirates one. I thought, "Well that one is not going to be interesting to me, I want to listen to the other one." After a couple tries on Apple podcasts, just clicking on the one I wanted to listen to kept zapping me over to Robert's gunfight with pirates. I thought, "Well, fate will have it that I'll listen to this I suppose." So I did. The second I heard Robert talking, I just- I know this sounds strange -everything sounded so familiar to me. His voice, the words he used, his demeanor. I don't think I know him, but I just was like, "Wow this is really strange that I just feel so strangely familiar with this person that I've never met." Listening to the whole episode, I was totally wrong, it was extremely interesting and exciting. I should've just listened to it anyway, because you don't really put on things that aren't interesting. But the whole time I was thinking it was really weird that this man felt so familiar, and I don't know him. The final straw was when you asked him what he had been listening to on his iPod, and I kid you not, I'm getting chills and goosebumps just thinking about it right now. I always have music on in the background, regardless of if I'm listening to a podcast or whatever, it's just like a heart beating it's there and just exists. I kid you not, at that very moment I was listening to Def Tones, Adrenaline album. When he said he had been listening to that album, I said, "I'm gonna call." I don't know why, I don't know what I expect to accomplish, but this is a sign from somebody somewhere that there's just too much synergy to overlook I suppose. Synchronicities are overabundant.

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If you have any kind of comment about the podcast, or like Brook, maybe some kind of unusual experience listening to a particular episode, or a question, or anything – just call the Podcast Voicemail line at 727-386-9468. You can call that number anytime night or day, and it's never answered by a human being – it's always voicemail. You just might hear yourself on a future episode of this podcast.

And finally, I want to say thanks to everyone who supports the show through my Patreon. Yeah, patrons get ad free new episodes, and the bonus exclusive episodes, but what it really means when you become a supporter is that you're saying you like what I'm doing, you like the podcast, and you want me to keep doing it. That's what really puts gas in my tank. You can become a supporter at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.patreon.com/WhatWasThatLike).

And now, this week's Listener Story, which needs a trigger warning because it talks about Childhood Trauma. Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

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### **Caller**

My whole life growing up my mom had debilitating ocular migraines that would leave her crying afterwards. During one of these migraines, my drunken stepdad, at the time, was screaming at her to shut her fucking mouth and a bunch of other nonsense. He ended up freaking out and running outside, getting a shovel, and he came back in and threw it toward me. Then he went into the spare bedroom and got a shotgun. He aimed it at my mom's face and said, "If she doesn't shut the fuck up, I'm gonna shoot her" and that I was supposed to go dig her a grave. So I went outside at 10 to 12 years old probably, and started digging a hole in the woods. Sometime later I heard a gun go off coming from my house, I wasn't that far away. So I ran off into the woods.

That night, I came back and got my dog who was always chained up out back and went further into the state game lands that were way past our property line. I stayed there for 3 days and 2 nights. Some time later I heard a 4-wheeler, on the third day, and heard my mom yelling for me. I guess she was stopping every once in a while and calling out my name. So I ran up to her. I never really talked to her about it, ever, from that point forward. It was just something that I dealt with. I blocked it out for a really long time. Years later in therapy it triggered back into my memory.

Just want to let everybody know that shit might be rough sometimes, especially as a kid. I promise it will get better. I'm 24 years old now, so this was probably 12 to 14 years ago. I have an amazing family, a beautiful fiancée and 2 amazing kids. One of those kids is my step daughter. I can promise on everything, that she will never ever be treated the same way I was. So keep your heads up and enjoy life as it is now.