

Episode 92: Andrew head-on crashed his snowmobile

I've lived in places where the winter is really cold. Personally, I can say I prefer to live here in Florida, where it's usually relatively warm. I don't miss shoveling snow, or driving on roads that are icy, and it's been a long time since my fingers and toes felt numb from the cold temperatures. I know some people prefer a colder climate, and I'm fine with that. The world is more interesting because we are all different.

But when you live in an area where there's cold weather and lots of snow, one of the things that makes it more bearable, and even fun, is to ride on a snowmobile. These things are a blast. For an avid snowmobiler, there is nothing better than a sunny day and a wide open field of fresh snow.

And my guest today, Andrew, definitely falls into that category – he is a huge fan of snowmobiles. He goes out riding every time he gets a chance. And he's one of those guys that sees a hill, and he knows that with enough speed, he can get his machine to go airborne. That's his thrill, and he's been doing it for years.

But there was this one day, he went flying up a hill and caught air, without realizing that there was someone on the other side of that hill. Someone on a snowmobile, coming TOWARD Andrew, who also was about to fly through the air, at the exact same time.

And in that split second, while they were both in the air, Andrew realized that the other driver was someone he knew very well.

Scott

What is meant by backcountry snowmobiling? What exactly is that?

Andrew

That's a great question. When I tell this story most people don't really understand what that is. When most people think of snowmobiling they think of these kinds of lumbering machines loaded up with people driving down an icy road, sightseeing. That's not at all what we were doing that day. Backcountry snowmobiling, first of all, the machine is very different. These machines are meant for deep snow, they are extremely powerful, and they weigh about 500 pounds. They are meant for a single rider. They have about 165 horsepower, so their power to weight ratio is just insane. They are as fast as any sports car out there off the line. They're not even comfortable on roads, they're really just meant for deep backcountry snow; 2 or 3 feet of snow is where they really excel.

Scott

I have a little bit of familiarity with snowmobiling. We lived in Maine for several years and my wife and I had a couple of Polaris snowmobiles. These were, like when you were describing touring down the road looking at nature, that's more what these were. Big machines, two passengers, not designed for performance, more designed for comfort. It sounds like yours were kind of the opposite of this.

Andrew

Yeah like I said they're meant for going up super steep hills really fast, shoeing through deep snow. Out in the backcountry, with that much snow involved, you're always getting stuck, so

these had really long tracks, it's called a lug on the track but it's the little paddle that's attached to the track of the snowmobile. They're about 3 inches long so they have a lot of dig and a lot of bite. I mean they're fast they'll go 80 miles an hour no problem up to 100 plus if you want to.

Scott

Well let's talk about a little bit of setup. Where were you when this happened? How far away from civilization?

Andrew

I've kind of grown up, really in the mountains. My dad was just avid into nature and exploring; he loves motorsports. We've grown up in the Utah backcountry. The range is known as the Uinta range. It's northeastern Utah. A lot of people are familiar with Park City, a famous ski area, so we are maybe 20 miles east of Park City in an area known as Wolf Creek Pass about 30 miles beyond the closest town. So basically, we load the machines up into a trailer, we drive up as far as we can get before the snow is too deep, and unload the machines. Then we just ride these little logging trails back into the mountains until we find a little play area, and we go off trail and just get lost and when we're done we try to find the trail again, get back home.

Scott

Where you were that day, do you know who actually owns that piece of land?

Andrew

It's forest land.

Scott

Oh so it's all public?

Andrew

It's all public land yeah. It's actually a pretty popular camping area in the summer. There are some trails back in there. We actually go back there a lot to camp. It's all dirt roads you know. This particular area is really nice because there's not really steep mountains, it's more hilly. A lot of big ridgelines and a lot of nice field areas. A lot of trees, lots of fields, it's a perfect riding area in the winter time.

Scott

So who was with you that day?

Andrew

Like I said, I kind of grew up snowmobiling, it's really a passion of mine. My father kind of raised my brother and I on snowmobiles. My dad was there that day but my brother couldn't come for some reason. We had about 4 other good friends with us, all very experienced riders. It was just an awesome day as far as snowmobiling goes. We were pretty selective on who we wanted to bring, we didn't want any beginners with us on that day.

Scott

When you got to this place where you unloaded the snow machines, can you describe what it looked like? I'm picturing a few football fields in size. Was it that big or what was the terrain like?

Andrew

Basically there's a parking lot, and the forest service actually maintains a CAT track. So we park right in this parking lot where they've plowed. Then the road is snowed over. There's a mountain pass that goes up and over and that's what we use to ride back deep into the mountains. So we unload the snowmobiles, we get on this CAT track and we ride for maybe 20 minutes at 60 miles an hour down this road. Then you get into some of this deeper, more thick terrain, and that's where the logging roads start. We were a solid 45 minutes- where this actually happened -we were probably an hour and a half away from our trailers. Probably 45 minutes riding from this CAT track graded road.

Scott

What was the temperature like that day? What was the weather like?

Andrew

As far as snowmobiling goes, a snowmobiler's dream day is a big huge storm the night before and then you wake up to blue skies. Cold, you want cold temperatures so the snow stays really nice and powdery. That's basically what this day was. We had a huge storm the night before, it dumped 2 or 3 feet, so we knew it was going to be awesome. Woke up early, loaded up the machines, and yeah we got to the trailhead and it was just a beautiful blue sky. It was probably- ideal temperature is like 10 degrees (F)- If it gets much warmer than that the sun really starts to heat up the snow and you lose some of the powdery feeling in the snow. We usually get to the trail head quite early so we can get the first tracks out into the virgin snow.

Scott

Take us through that day, what happened? You guys got to this area and what happened?

Andrew

As you can imagine, it was just epic conditions, we were all so excited, a mile high. We were just playing away up this ridgeline. We'd taken a logging road pretty deep in there to this play area that we knew was kind of hard to get to, we knew there wouldn't be any people there. We probably wouldn't see anyone all day. So we rode up this ridgeline and there's a shelf under this ridge, then it drops off again into this big valley. We knew that on this shelf would probably be our best snow of the day, it's really protected from the wind so we knew there would be a lot of deep snow. So we were up on this ridge and we had to drop down- with that much snow on the ridge there were a lot of avalanche concerns. We were really careful, we came really prepared. So when you drop down these hills you have to go one at a time just in case there were to be some kind of an avalanche, then everyone else can obviously come dig you up once you're down. It's a lot safer if you go one at a time. My dad dropped in first and I followed him. We got to the bottom and, I never actually asked what happened, but I think someone must have gotten stuck up above the rest of our group cause they just weren't coming down the hill. My dad got greedy I think, he saw this virgin snow and he just took off right into this field. I just sat there for a couple of minutes waiting for the group, didn't see them, so I thought, "Screw it. I'm gonna go play this field out and they can deal with it." No friends on powder days, right? That's the saying.

This field, it's about 50 yards wide, and it runs for a couple hundred yards and it's totally wide open. Just an absolute play area and there's some little terrain features in there, but the main thing is just this little hill, maybe 10 feet tall and 50 feet around, right in the middle of the field. On snowmobiles in deep snow it's really fun to hit these terrain features with some speed because, you'll either get air, or it will push your skis up into the air and you can hold a wheelie for as long as you want, you feel like you're flying. So that was my idea, I thought, "I'm going to

go hit this hill and see if I can launch it." I headed straight for it, no sign of my dad, no idea where he went. Crested this hill, and from that point I have really 3 memories. First, I just remember seeing my dad right in front of me at the top of this hill, and he was already kind of in a wheelie position. So I saw his skis right above my face. The next thing I remember I was just flipping through the air, just spinning and spinning. It seemed to last forever. The third memory I have is just laying in the snow on my back staring at the sky wondering, "What happened, where's my dad, am I ok?" Pretty crazy situation.

Scott

So you and your dad had the same idea of hitting this hill and going airborne, but the hill was high enough that you couldn't see each other and you were both coming toward each other.

Andrew

Yeah, crazy. We've been back to this hill many times and I still have no idea how we didn't see each other. Just a perfect angle, one in a million shot, and we both had the exact same idea to crest the hill at the exact same place. We just happened to do it at the exact same time and in opposite directions.

Scott

Here's Andrew's dad Drew.

Drew

At the time of the impact, there was just this quick flash. Then all of the sudden there was this crunch, and then I just remember myself flying through the air and wondering, "What in the world just happened?" My first thought went to my son, and I thought, "I think I just killed my son." Then I landed in the snow about 30 feet in front of the accident and quickly got up. The first thing I heard was just moaning. I was so relieved to know that my son was alive. I quickly ran back and I felt this adrenaline surge go into my body. I went over and I was so happy to see Andrew lying on his back in the snow, conscious and able to communicate with me. I was so relieved. As I looked around, there were just parts and pieces of snowmobiles everywhere. It was almost like a bomb had gone off. I looked over and the 2 snowmobiles were right on the crest of the hill, and they had locked horns and they were just this big crumbled mass that were totally locked together. I quickly realized that if it would have been a split second either direction, one of us could have gone right over the other or into the other at an impact speed of probably close to 70 miles an hour. It would have meant instant death to one, or even both of us. I just felt this immediate sense of gratitude that our lives had been spared and that my son was still conscious and able to communicate with me.

Scott

Back to Andrew

Andrew

There's a couple miracles involved in this- I call them miracles -in this story. The crash itself honestly was a miracle the way it happened, one of us, no doubt, should be dead. If we were going maybe 1 or 2 mile an hour speed difference, faster or slower, either one of us; I think one of the machines would have-- well his machine would have taken me right in the chest or right in the head. It would be a very different story. Basically his snowmobile kind of came down on top of mine and incredibly his front ski hooked on my handlebars and it stopped the machines on a dime. Completely stopped them dead. I was going at least 35 miles an hour and he was probably doing the same or faster. They try to keep these machines really lightweight, it's just

aluminum, so it's just incredible that they locked horns the way they did and didn't blast over each other. It kind of launched him off sideways, he really didn't get hurt at all he just flew off the side. I think I remember kind of turning my body a little bit to the right, and that makes sense with the injuries I received. My left hip hit his front bumper, and the whole bumper was actually completely crushed in, so I think that was my leg or hip hitting him. I just flipped through the air several times and then landed there totally confused. I laid there for a second. It did enter my mind, "Is my dad dead? Is he ok? What happened to him?" I was completely winded, I sounded like a dying animal I'm sure. I was trying to get my air back. My dad came running over, it was great to see his face, he was super concerned obviously. Right about then the whole group showed up, I heard the machines and they pulled up. I looked around and there's just pieces of snowmobile all over the ground. It looked like a bomb had gone up. Just stuff everywhere. They kind of just left me there, obviously they were taking care of and talking to me, but I just laid there for a few minutes and got my breath back. I was hurting but it seemed like I was ok. So they said, "Alright, well should we try to get you up and we'll figure out what to do?" One of them tried to grab my arm and tried to help me stand up and then that's when it hit me. I felt like my whole body was on fire, I thought my leg had fallen off. It was so painful right then when I tried to move. The shock of the accident was wearing off. That's when we thought, "This is a lot more serious than we initially thought, we need to figure something out here quickly."

Scott

I would assume that you were wearing a lot of layers and they couldn't necessarily see-- it wasn't clearly obvious that you had any broken bones or anything.

Andrew

Exactly, kind of no idea what's going on. These cold days when you're riding you get windshield way below zero, so we're fully suited up, lots of layers, helmets, protection, the whole 9 yards. So yeah, I got my coat off-- I knew my upper body was relatively ok, I think I had a broken rib but I was moving my back and neck alright. My lower half was messed up, and I could feel my leg and it felt big. I knew there was immediate swelling that we were concerned about. They tried to pull my boot off and I was in just absolute agony. So they just left everything in, they were a little worried about my back so they didn't want to move me too much. Yeah I had a lot of pain in my lower back- well more my pelvis region -but my very lower back, so they were concerned about that and wanted to be careful.

Scott

Now you were so far away from everything, did you even have cell service to make a phone call?

Andrew

No nothing like that. We were 30 miles plus from the closest town, and that town doesn't have much cell service. That was definitely the first thing we thought about, how do we deal with this. I mentioned some miracles involved in this story and this is where the next one comes into play. We take this pretty seriously, we've been riding long enough to see accidents and be involved in avalanches and crazy weather, so there's some gear we all bring. The most important piece being an avalanche beacon. It's basically a small passive radio that sits in your chest pocket and when you start riding you turn those on, which is always transmitting a beacon signal, and the rest of the group has these transmitters. The idea is that if somebody gets trapped in an avalanche, the rest of the group can turn their transmitter on to search mode, which will allow them to pinpoint the body buried under the snow. They're really accurate, you can find a body within a foot radius of where it tells you to go. Then you pull out what's called a probe, which is

just a long stick, it's like a tent pole that folds up into a little pouch. So you unfold that and you can poke down into the snow and find the person. Then we all have shovels as well, for digging. We also make sure that somebody in the group carries a GPS with them and then we all have radios as well so we can communicate and talk to each other. That way when there is a problem we have a means of locating-- what's interesting about these avalanche beacons, it's the most important thing to carry back there, but cell service actually interferes with the beacon. When you're wearing those you have to turn your phones off or you may not be found if you get stuck in an avalanche. So we always turn our phones off when we get out of the trailer and load up our sleds. Miraculously, for some reason, my dad had not turned his phone off that day. He remembers cresting a few hills before the accident and he heard a text go through his phone, he heard it ding in his chest pocket. Honestly that may have saved my life because he knew exactly where he needed to go to get cell service. There was just barely enough to get a call out to 911. Luckily we had a group member with a GPS, he had our exact coordinates, so really within about 20 or 30 minutes of the crash we had a call out to 911 and they had search and rescue on their way.

Scott

How long did it take for emergency responders to get to you?

Andrew

It was about an hour and a half from the actual accident, which, considering how deep we were back there and how remote and the snow conditions that day, it was really a miracle. Utah had a pretty robust search and rescue system, a lot of the guys on search and rescue are avid snowmobilers and so at any given point on snow days there's almost always search and rescue in the backcountry. Obviously it takes them some time to get on their radios and get the call. Search and rescue snowmobilers actually found us almost the exact same time as the helicopter found us. Luckily we had this big field where the helicopter could land. As soon as they showed up I had a crew of about 10 people on me trying to assess my condition and help me get comfortable.

Scott

You were laying in the snow for 90 minutes.

Andrew

Yeah.

Scott

Aside from your injuries, that's got to be just miserable.

Andrew

Yeah exactly. About 30 minutes into the accident, that's when I started getting uncomfortable. I knew I was hurting pretty bad. I knew my leg, hip, butt and possibly my back were hurt. Then yeah, just laying in the snow for that long you start to tense up and shiver and I could tell I was losing blood somehow, which was internal luckily. Yeah I was getting really cold. Search and rescue got to me and they couldn't find a vein, I was all constricted, so I couldn't get any kind of pain medicine.

Scott

Being in the snow, they had to get you on a backboard. Did you lose consciousness at all from the pain?

Andrew

No, I was conscious the whole time. The pain was mostly manageable, except when they tried to move me obviously, that was extremely painful. They did get me onto the backboard. What's so interesting is the helicopter had landed about a hundred feet away from the crash sight. As you can imagine 3 feet of fresh snow is almost impossible to move in, so they actually draped the backboard over a snowmobile, and then very slowly drove the snowmobile through the snow with everyone keeping up behind postholing. I wish we had a video of that, it would have been comical to watch (laughter).

Scott

Your last ride for that day.

Andrew

Yeah exactly. I always joke, I've never been heli-skiing. I've always wanted to go heli-skiing, so this was my first heli-skiing experience.

Scott

What is that? I'm not familiar with that term?

Andrew

Heli-skiing is where they basically pick you up in a helicopter and then drop you off at the top of the mountain and let you ski down. It's always been a dream of mine. I think this was my first helicopter ride; not quite the conditions I hoped it to be but I was sure grateful for the helicopter that day. Helicopter ride took about 30 minutes, they unloaded me at the hospital, got a bunch of painkillers into me and then I was right into surgery a couple hours after that. I ended up breaking my femur pretty severely, broke my hip, my pelvis, and the surgeon estimated I lost about 30 percent of my body's blood internally into my leg. They didn't find it on the x-ray but I'm pretty sure I broke a rib too because it hurt pretty bad.

Scott

I've heard that a femur break is the most painful break you can have. It's the long bone in your thigh. Would you agree with that? How would you rate that pain?

Andrew

Yeah (laughter). It sucked. I've broken a lot of bones actually, I've broken about 10 bones in my life, so I'm no stranger to the bone pain and healing process. It was definitely the most painful. It's the strongest and biggest bone in the body. It takes a lot of force to break that bone, so it was painful. What's crazy about your leg, the muscles and tendons in your leg are so strong that when the femur breaks, a lot of the pain actually comes from the muscles and tendons pulling the bones into each other. Your tendons have so much tension on them in your thigh that it will literally crush the two bones into each other and that's where a lot of the pain comes from.

Scott

In the meantime, your dad had called your wife to meet you at the hospital. Again, Andrew's dad.

Drew

So I knew I needed to call Andrew's wife Elizabeth, and again, this was something that I was not excited about, to tell her the news. They had not been married too long so I knew that this would

be a really traumatic thing for her. The minute I made it to the parking lot where we had left from the accident, I got on the phone and explained what had happened and she was amazingly calm. Elizabeth, his wife, is just a rockstar. She took the news very well and headed straight to the hospital to be there. In fact she was the first member of the family to arrive at the hospital.

Scott

I also asked Elizabeth about getting that phone call.

Elizabeth

I felt like I was pretty calm through most of it but I do think I was in a little more shock than I realized at the time. When I got the phone call I was actually with my mom, we were at my brother's soccer game. So I was like, "I gotta go to the hospital." She was like, "No no, I can tell that you're in shock. I will drive you." So we drove down there and I remember feeling like it was kind of all a dream or like I was in a movie. When I walked into the hospital, we went in through the ER and I said, "My husband was just Life Flighted in," and I explained the situation. They were like, "Ok," then they went on the intercom and said, "Trauma 2's wife is on her way. Trauma 2's wife." I was like, "Trauma 2!? This is real. This is really happening." When I got there I was not completely at ease, but put at ease because the first thing he talked about was his snow pants and how concerned he was about his snow pants. I was like, "You're gonna be fine, I'm just glad you're alive. We'll get you new snow pants. It will all be ok," (laughter).

Andrew

My wife showed up to the hospital. I was in a trauma bay, they had just loaded me full of Dilaudid so I was a pretty happy kid at that point. She comes walking in stressed out of course and I think the first thing I said to her was, "They cut off my snow pants!" I was pretty distraught about my snow pants (laughter).

Scott

What's the deal with those snow pants? Why was that so important?

Andrew

I had spent a month trying to find an awesome pair of snow pants, I'd been through- I actually ripped a couple -pairs of new snow pants while skiing. I had just found an awesome pair that fit me perfectly. Search and rescue actually wanted to cut my snow pants off when they found me in that field and I insisted that they would not cut my snow pants off. I didn't let them. Then first thing when I get to the hospital they cut them off and for some reason that was a big hang up in my drugged brain (laughter).

Scott

Priorities become different when you're high on painkillers.

Andrew

Exactly. My wife was very concerned but very grateful I was there and alive and hopefully stable.

Scott

So you went into surgery, and everything I've heard is that femur surgery is pretty violent. What exactly happens during that surgery?

Andrew

My profession, I'm in real estate and construction, so I'm used to drills and hammers. We build custom homes. During my recovery I had a lot of boredom just sitting around, so I thought I should pull up some of these surgeries and see what they actually did to me. Basically it just looked like another day on the job site. They literally pull out a big screw and ream out the inside of your femur. Then they stuff a rod- well a small nail -through your femur, that acts as a sleeve. Then with a hammer they sleeve this rod down the middle of your femur, and they actually hammer it into your femur. So I have a foot and a half long titanium rod in my leg right now. Yeah they use screws, drills, saws, hammers, it's pretty involved surgery.

Scott

Not something you want to be awake for that's for sure.

Andrew

No, no way.

Scott

Part of the motivation you had for recovery was an upcoming trip. What was that, what was the plan there?

Andrew

A little background during my phase of life during that time. This was March of 2015. I had just gotten married that year, so I'd been married less than a year. I was finishing up my senior year at the University of Utah. So it was right before I was supposed to graduate, I was trying to wrap up all my classes. Then as a graduation present to ourselves, my wife and I, we had booked a 2 month trip to southeast Asia. We wanted to backpack through a bunch of these countries in southeast Asia. I think that was my first question to my surgeon, I still really wanted to go on this trip. I said, "Can I go?" He said, "No way. Absolutely not," but we went (laughter). We really wanted to go. We had this trip booked for 2 months after my accident, so I had a lot of recovering to do to be in a position where I could backpack through southeast Asia.

Scott

That just seems unbelievable. The accident happened in March and you're supposed to go hiking in May. To have 2 months after breaking your leg and your pelvis and your hip, that just seems almost impossible to recover that quickly.

Andrew

Yeah you know it's the marvels of modern medicine. The hospital had me up on crutches just 2 days after the surgery. They want you to move. They want you to recover your blood and recover your muscle mass, so they really encourage movement immediately after the surgery. Which was pretty painful trying to move, and with that much blood loss it was very hard to even want to get out of bed. I think this trip really helped motivate me to do that, I really tried to move as much as possible. It was a challenge, I was laid up in bed for the first few weeks. Really no movement, or very minimal movement, I was as helpless as it gets. It would take about 30 minutes to get me out of bed, into the bathroom, and back in bed. I needed 2 people to help me do that, at least for the first couple of weeks. So pretty challenging.

Scott

Was that in the hospital? How long were you in the hospital?

Andrew

They actually had me out of the hospital pretty quick. Obviously they checked me out and wanted to watch me and make sure I was recovering correctly and make sure there weren't going to be complications with the surgery. I was out of there within a few days after the surgery. Obviously I couldn't do stairs, I had trouble doing much of anything, so my parents were nice enough to put us up in their home. They have single-story living and they let me sleep in their bed actually. We kind of just moved into my parents home, and my wife was in school so she couldn't be there all day. She and my mom just took turns taking care of me.

Scott

That's nice to have that support system in place right out of the gate.

Andrew

Yeah I was really blessed in that way. It was nice to have a lot of help when I needed it.

Scott

What were some of the difficulties you found in just day to day stuff?

Andrew

Emotionally it was pretty hard. I'm not much of a movie person, I never watch TV, so just sitting there all day was really depressing for me. I read a lot of books but other than that it was pretty boring and that was hard. Using the bathroom was a challenge. Like I said it took about 3 people to help me do my business. I remember the first time I had to sit. I got in there and my mom was on one arm, my wife was on the other, and they got me sitting on the toilet and I did my business and then I had this horrible realization that there was no way I was going to be able to wipe my butt. I had to choose either my brand new wife of less than a year, or my mother. That was a hard choice (laughter).

Scott

Can you describe what was the physical part of it? Your arms weren't broken or immobile, what was difficult about doing that? What made it impossible?

Andrew

Just the stiffness in my body and just the pain in trying to flex any muscle, or move anything down there. My pelvis was all messed up, my hip was all messed up, so trying to twist your back enough to be able to physically wipe the butt was just impossible. So I chose my wife, and we're still married so things worked out I guess (laughter).

Scott

Now you know I had to ask Andrew's wife Elizabeth what she thought of that decision making process.

Elizabeth

(Laughter) I was the one that said that, because I was like, "Here let me come help you." He was like, "Absolutely not." I was like, "Well it's either me or your mother, so which is the better choice" (laughter).

Scott

I wondered how do you prepare yourself mentally to do a job like that?

Elizabeth

I would like to say I'm a mentally tough person. I feel like, I mean, we had just barely been married not even a year. So I understood why he obviously didn't want me doing that. At the time I was like, "I'm supposed to be your caretaker though, like obviously I should be the one to help you with that." Now looking back I think if it was the opposite situation and I needed that help, I would have absolutely refused as well. I mean I grew up babysitting a lot so I'd changed a lot of bums. I was a special ed teacher, so I'd even changed some older people, so I was ready for it. I was ready for the challenge (laughter).

Andrew

Oh bless her heart. I swore to myself no matter how painful it was, that was the first and last time that would ever happen.

Scott

Well good for her, man. Did you have any withdrawal issues once the pain meds were stopped?

Andrew

Yeah I was taking pain meds, heavy narcotic doses, every 3 hours. I'd wake up every 3 hours at night. I hated that man, that was hard. I'd wake up every night with the bed completely soaking wet, and I don't know if that was part of the recovery or something to do with the pain medicine. I had sleep apnea, my wife said she'd wake up and I'd be not breathing or doing weird things. She said one night she woke up and I had my arms straight up in the air totally asleep. Just weird stuff with that much pain medicine. Then yeah, getting off of it was hard. I wanted off of it as fast as I could because I was actually like mega constipated from the heavy doses and nothing seemed to help so I wanted off of it pretty quick. I went through the full withdrawals and had about a week of just crazy withdrawal symptoms.

Scott

On top of all the other recovery issues, it feels like a recovery addict to some degree.

Andrew

(Laughter) Yeah.

Scott

A lot of people that's there concern because so many people get addicted to that and you really don't know until you're on it if you're one of those people or not.

Andrew

Yeah I love the feeling of pain medicine, it feels so good when you're in pain, but the side effects are a major deterrent for me. I can't handle the side effects of them.

Scott

So you went on the backpacking trip. Did you have any trouble during that time?

Andrew

You know I honestly think it was the best thing for me. My family was very nervous about it, she had no desire to see us go on this trip. She had been taking care of me and knew my condition. We went, at that point I was on a cane, I didn't have much of a gait to my walk. I was struggling

to walk, but I had a cane, I packed up a backpack and we took off. Basically we hiked every single day for 2 months through these little towns and cities. Within about a month I was able to ditch my cane. I had my normal gait back and even though it was highly unrecommended I think it was great for us. We had one scary incident there, we actually got into a motorcycle crash in the highlands of Vietnam.

Scott

Don't tell me you were trying to jump a hill or anything right?

Andrew

(Laughter) We were playing chicken with another motor biker. (Laughter) No we were coming around a blind corner and met a semi head on and had to dump the bike and rode the road on my arms a little bit. Really bless my poor mom for putting up with it, she didn't like those pictures very much. She said, "Come home."

Scott

Speaking of your mom, I wanted to mention this, you had talked about a little prank that you pulled on her. What was that?

Andrew

Yeah, so I had just basically hours at home. My mom was so great the whole time, about as good of a caretaker as I could've asked for. She brought me food and helped me with anything I needed when my wife was at school or at work. But you get kind of bored and your mind wanders so I thought I should probably pull some kind of a prank on her. Her biggest fear was that I'd be walking around on my crutches and something would happen, like I'd slip and she wouldn't be able to get me up or help me back into bed. So I thought I should play that to my advantage, my wife was in on this. I walked into the bathroom one day and, at this point I had enough mobility to shut the door and actually sit down on the floor with my back against the door. I sat there and threw my crutches across the bathroom and it hit the wall and it made this big noise and I started screaming. I think my mom had a heart attack, she started screaming and freaking out, and had her phone out ready to call. She kept trying to open the door but since I was leaning against it, she couldn't get in there, it was just her absolute worst nightmare (laughter). We had a pretty good laugh about that one.

Scott

I would imagine that since she's known you her whole life, that little prank was probably not a huge surprise.

Andrew

(Laughter) No it wasn't out of the ordinary but definitely kind of a cruel prank to play on her.

Scott

Well it breaks the boredom anyway. You mentioned that your dad felt guilty or somehow responsible for the crash. Why do you think he felt that way? Maybe because you got injured and he wasn't injured, or what do you think the thought process was there?

Andrew

The emotions of the crash are a pretty interesting aspect. When you're in some kind of traumatic experience like that your brain wants to find fault somewhere, "Who's at fault? Who's the guilty party? Could this have been avoided?" This particular accident, it was kind of hard,

you know my dad kind of escaped unscathed. I had a couple nights where I just felt like, "Oh it's so unfair. Why was he where he was? Why did he think he should hit that hill when he did?" I struggled with that a little bit. At the end of the day we were both doing something totally ordinary. We weren't really taking any risks beyond what we normally take. It was a very controlled situation and it just was a one in a million accident the way it happened. I went through the whole spectrum of emotions, anger and frustration. I'm sure he felt an immense amount of guilt because he basically was uninjured, then seeing his son laying there in the snow I'm sure was just heartbreaking for him. Since the accident I've had 2 kids and I can't even imagine the emotions I would feel if I was in this situation as my father was. I was dealing with all this frustration and anger and depression a little bit, trying to get through this, but at the same time I had immense gratitude that the accident happened the way it did and that we were both alive. I didn't kill my father or vice versa. It was a pretty emotional roller coaster.

Scott

I'm thinking about it as you have all these hours and days on end to think about what happened. If you had it to do over again, you probably would have chosen the same way, you wouldn't want him to be the one that was injured. You'd probably rather be the one that got injured anyway.

Andrew

Oh 100 percent. My dad, I'd hate to see him in my position. I can't imagine the feelings I would have had if I was in his shoes.

Scott

I asked Andrew's dad his feelings about being, in any way, responsible for the accident.

Drew

From my end, the responsibility was confusing. I was on the other end of this large meadow, probably almost a football field away from Andrew when I last saw him. He was just sitting still on his snowmobile and others in our party were gathering up with him, and he was actually pointed in the other direction. So I thought, I better just go join up with this group. I had no idea that he could have gone from the place I saw him last to the blind crest of this hill so quickly. It was one of those things, when we collided, one of my biggest emotions was just shock and confusion as to how he could've gone from one place to another so quickly without me realizing it. We're always so careful in everything that we do in the backcountry and try to be prepared and use good judgment. Like Andrew had indicated, this was just a one in a million chance that we could've crested the hill at the same time, same place exactly. There were no snowmobile tracks to follow, this was just wide open fresh snow. As far as the responsibility, when I review this I do not know what I could've done differently to avoid the accident. At the same time, any parent knows, any time anything happens to one of their children, they take it very very hard no matter what control they have over the situation or not.

Scott

Overall, Andrew is still happy with the way things turned out.

Andrew

If I were to do this over again, 100 percent I'd take the blow. I'm here today, I'm alive and it all worked out. I'm really grateful it worked out the way it did.

Scott

And you kept a souvenir of the crash?

Andrew

This is pretty crazy, somehow, in the crazy forces of the accident, it blew the whole computer off of my snowmobile. The computer that controls the speed and the RPMs. I actually have the dashboard intact and I have it hanging on my office wall, I look at it everyday. The needle is frozen at the speed that we were going when the accident happened, I'm looking at it right now. I was going 35 miles per hour and the RPMs were pinned at 6000. It's a good reminder that life changes fast and you never really know what's going to happen.

And if you want to see a picture of Andrew's speedometer that he talked about, we'll have that on the website page for this episode, at WhatWasThatLike.com/92.

Last episode was a special one with all the childbirth stories. If you haven't heard that one, go check it out, there are lots of great stories in there. Anyway, Ramona heard that episode and was reminded that she and her mom have something in common.

Ramona

Hi Scott. Love your show. Just thought I would share something kind of fun after your stories about moms and giving birth. My mother had me on her birthday, same hour, same minute. We were off by an ounce or an inch, I don't know that detail. She used to always tell the story, because it ended up in the paper and in the paper it said something about the baptism. She said the article said, "History repeats itself." It didn't say that but that was cute she thought that. I was named after her, first name and middle name. My first name is Ramona and my mom was named after the song "Ramona" in 1928. I just thought it was kind of a cool story and everybody that hears it thinks it's pretty amazing.

And now here's something pretty cool about a previous episode. Episode 83 was called Shareen was rammed by her own car and it went live a few months ago - on July 16, 2021. The guest was Shareen, and she was pregnant and stuck in this relationship with her abusive boyfriend, and a co-worker helped her get away. Well, it ended up that the two of them were trying to get away and it turned into this car chase where he was chasing them and crashing into them. Really scary.

Anyway, I had tried to get the 911 audio from that day, and it didn't get to me in time to include it in the episode, but I did just get it recently. So I'm going to play you a couple of calls. The first one is just someone who saw what was going on, and he wanted to get the police there to stop this attack. The second call is after Shareen and her friend had finally gotten away from him, and they went straight to the police substation and needed to have an officer come and take their statements. So here are those two calls:

First Call**911 Operator**

San Antonio 911 this is Denise. Do you need police, fire or--

Bystander

Ma'am, ma'am, ma'am, ma'am. 5 minutes ago two dudes were trying to run this girl off the road, into- I'm on Cinnamon Creek- into the Riverstone apartments. I've been trying to hit here and contact you for the last 5 minutes to let you know. The woman turned around, alright, she's in a like goldish color little small car. One of the dudes, the bad guy, he's in a black small car and the other one's in a white truck, and they're chasing these people. It's a woman, I don't know if it's a little girl with her or if it's another woman in the passenger seat. They turned around on Cinnamon Creek, the girls are trying to get away from these 2 dudes and they are trying to run this car off the street. I don't know where they went. They were heading down Cinnamon Creek toward the Shell station. She spun around and came back up toward whatever that is across Cinnamon Creek.

911 Operator

Fredericksburg Road?

Bystander

No, Fredericksburg Road runs parallel to Cinnamon Creek. She spun around and went toward Hamilton Wharf and they chased her that way.

911 Operator

Ok

Bystander

It's a white truck and a small black car, or like midnight blue, really dark. They're chasing these 2 females in a small goldish colored car. Yeah I mean people had to stop to keep from getting in a head on collision with these 2 dudes. One in the white truck and one in a dark small car. Have you seen those old Nissan's?

911 Operator

Yes sir.

Bystander

It might be something like that. Or maybe an old Corolla, some small car like that. Then the other guy is in a white truck and they tried to run these 2 females off the road right there in front of the Riverstone apartments.

911 Operator

Alright, I will get someone out there, ok?

Bystander

Alright, I don't know where they went because I was towards the back when it happened. They spun around and shot out toward Hamilton Wharf because she was trying to get away from them. You might want to check it out, I don't know. The 2 dudes almost caused a wreck on Cinnamon Creek because everybody had to stop.

911 Operator

Ok, I will get someone out there. I greatly appreciate it.

Bystander

Ok thank you.

911 Operator

Ok bye.

Second Call

Shareen's Friend

Hello?

911 Operator

San Antonio Police, ma'am are you ok?

Shareen's Friend

We're at the substation on Pru. We're at the substation on Pru.

911 Operator

Ok, ok. At Pru substation ok.

Shareen's Friend

If you could send somebody, I don't know if there are officers here.

911 Operator

Yeah, they are on the way. They're on the way.

Shareen's Friend

Ok.

911 Operator

Thank you ma'am. Are you ok? You don't need an ambulance or anything?

Shareen's Friend

We don't need an ambulance, but my car is pretty much totaled.

911 Operator

Ok well you are at the substation so you're safe. Alright thank you so much ma'am you take care of yourself.

Shareen's Friend

Ok.

911 Operator

Ok bye-bye.

Again, that episode is Shareen was rammed by her own car, and it's episode #83.

And just before this week's listener story, I want to invite you to join a bunch of other listeners and be a supporter of the podcast. Your support is what keeps this thing going! And for just \$5 a

month, you get all the new episodes ad-free, and you get the bonus exclusive 911 episodes, and you know, I've never actually mentioned this, but you also get a personal audio message from me, thanking you for being a patron of the show. You can get all the details and sign up at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And now, this week's Listener Story, about the sad cruelty that happens in high school. Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

Caller

I'm choosing to keep myself anonymous, but this is a story for kids or teenagers who struggle in high school; who struggle just as much as me. When I started in high school my father had just passed away on my first day of high school. I was really beat up, I was obviously sad and really mad. It was at 3:50 in the morning so I still had school that day. I decided I was gonna go to school and maybe get my mind off of it, talk to some friends and hopefully not think about it. I headed into my Biology class and I went to talk to my friends, so I asked them, "Hey let's hang out." The room goes completely quiet and everyone is looking at me and I didn't think anything of it. Obviously, I was already struggling so I didn't really like the attention on me, so I thought, "That's weird." Then I asked them one more time, "Hey do you guys wanna maybe hang out this weekend? Just do something fun?" One of them said, "I'm not gonna hang out with no little bitch who's complaining about his dead dad." My heart instantly sunk, to be honest, I was broken. I thought those were my friends. Everybody looked at me and the room went dead silent. I sat there in silence with my anxiety and stress and I was really broken. I left the classroom and I instantly started bawling. I started crying and bawling and then I heard the class get loud and everybody started talking and stuff. I decided I wasn't going to show up for that period. I was going to head to the nurses office and pretend I was sick. I went to the nurses office, pretending I was sick. Then I headed off for the rest of my day hoping to forget about it. Obviously they weren't friends. I sat at a table and I was all alone just sitting there with my hoodie on. I thought, "You know what, maybe I just don't want to be bothered today." I didn't want to miss class so I sat there and then heard all the freshmen talking about me. Talking about my dead dad. Talking about how I was a pussy for being sad over my dead dad, and how their life was much harder. I was broken. I already had severe bipolar at the time and it didn't make anything better. I struggled everyday, waking up, having to go to the same school, see the same people and hear the same things. It hurt me, it really did. I'm 18 now. I just graduated and I've never been any better or happier in my life, now that I'm done with high school.