

Episode 27: Luke survived a fatal crash

Probably most people have been in some type of car accident at some point in their life. I've been in more than one myself. None of them were serious, or even involved injuries. These things are common - human drivers make mistakes, and cars just run into each other sometimes.

But the crash we're talking about today wasn't a simple fender bender.

Luke and five of his friends were just having a fun, 4th of July vacation. In fact, this episode is being released on July 5, 2019 - the 5-year anniversary of the day of the accident. Everyone in the car that day was seriously injured. Two of them did not survive.

My hope with this episode is that as you hear Luke tell the story of what happened that day, it will serve as a reminder to drive safely and use good judgment. Your passengers are depending on you to do that. What happened to these six young men could easily happen to any of us - all it takes is a brief lapse in judgment or focus.

As a note, going forward I'm probably not going to do any more stories about auto accidents. I do get submissions pretty regularly from people with a car crash story, but if you're a regular listener to this podcast, you know I have a pretty high standard on what I consider to be an unusual story. Most car crashes aren't unusual or extreme enough to get on the show. Today's story is the exception.

And if you'd like to join some other listeners who are supporting this show, you can do that through my Patreon at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.patreon.com/WhatWasThatLike.com/support). Hang around after Luke's story today, and I'll have some information about different Patreon reward levels that are now in place, and the podcast has its own subreddit, and the private Facebook group, all kinds of stuff and I'll tell you all about that at the end of today's show. My goal is to continue to put out episodes that are WORTH supporting, and for your support, I thank you.

And now, here's my conversation with Luke.

Scott

Do you know if anyone was wearing a seatbelt that day?

Luke

Well, I know I was wearing mine - that's part of the reason why I'm here to tell you this. There were six of us in a car that was designed for five people. So automatically, one guy is not wearing his seatbelt.

Scott

Yep, that's unfortunate. Obviously, it's important not because it may or may not have saved lives, but it certainly is usually a good idea. Well, let's talk about you. What happened that day? You and five of your friends were traveling to a lake house. Can you, kind of, tell us what was the plan for that day or for that weekend?

Luke

So we go back about a week before this 4th of July weekend, 2014. My friend, Marcus and I were just huge fireworks fanatics - we love anything that goes boom. Ever since I was little, I love shooting off fireworks. The same goes for Marcus - he just takes it another level higher than me. He figured out that if you buy wholesale instead of going to the tents - you buy from the people that sell to the tents - you can stretch your money and buy all sorts of crazy fireworks. So, somehow, he hooked up with this distributor. Me and 4-5 people threw in a couple of hundreds of bucks, packed the Ford Explorer full of fireworks, and drove it back. He started researching every piece we've got and made, like, this schematic - he was putting together some sort of circuit or something and he got everything figured out with different lengths of fuses at different burn rates. So, we're gonna go and have this spectacular fireworks display at this lakehouse at Truman lake. So, we've got all this worked out. At that point, I kinda have a rough idea of who was going - I knew it was going to be me, Marcus, Daniel, and Eddie who was my buddy, who I've known for about 20 years.

Well, the day of the 3rd of July comes. I ended up having to work late that night. I got off work at about 10 o'clock and headed over to Marcus's house, which is only about a half-mile from where I worked. I had all my bags packed and was ready to go - it was going to be a fun weekend. I've been down to this lake house of theirs, probably, 4-5 times in the last 3-4 years. Actually, the first road trip I took after I got my driver's license was down to that lake house. There was another one of my friends who I hadn't seen in quite a while - my buddy Neil from high school. He had left high school, joined the army, and had, kind of, been away for a while. It turned out that he's also, kind of, a bit of a pyro and a fireworks fanatic. So, we've got the team together and we're going to have a good time. Another one of my friends, Mary, was coming with us just for-- we were supposed to be down there for 3-4 days, but she was just going to be down there for about a 1.5 - 2 days. She has a family up in Minnesota that she was going to be visiting. So, we took these 2 cars down, left Kansas City - we probably left close to midnight - and headed down to Truman Lake in Missouri. Obviously, in the middle of Missouri in July, there would be fireworks stands about every 20 miles, so we kept stopping, buying more stuff, and piling it in both cars.

Scott

How far away was the lake house? What was the distance of this trip?

Luke

We live just south of Kansas City, so Truman Lake is about an hour and a half from us - probably closer to an hour. With all the stops that we took, it took us closer to, maybe, 2.5 - 3 hours to get down there. So, when we got arrived at the lakehouse, it was, at least, 3 o'clock in the morning. We were all just super jazzed to be down there. I got a week off work. Everyone else is gonna be celebrating the holiday. We're all stoked. Most of Marcus's family was down at the lakehouse too. It's a fairly small house - I mean, it is only two floors. I think there were, maybe, 2 bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms. So, we had made a decision ahead of time that we were going to pitch tents on the front lawn and camp - we didn't mind sleeping on the ground. The next day, on the 4th of July, we obviously played around with some of the smaller fireworks and started setting up this big old display. I mean, it probably took Marcus, maybe, 2-3 hours to get everything wired together - that would have been later in the afternoon at 3 or 4 PM. One of Marcus's friends - who's good friends with his little brother - named Will showed up. So, Will showed up with Marcus's little brother, and they were going to spend some time there for the weekend too. We finished getting everything set up. I met Will - a really great guy - got along well with him, and we ended up having some cigars that night after the fireworks display. So, we

set off this display. He had it all timed out and wired together perfectly - it probably lasted a good 15-20 minutes. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever seen.

Scott

That's pretty amazing for an amateur setup.

Luke

Yeah, for someone who's never done anything like that. When Marcus gets something into his head, he whole-ass it - it's all him.

Scott

Marcus is your best friend.

Luke

Yeah. I've known him since I met him in seventh grade in Industrial Tech class. We both had an interest in model rocketry - that's, kind of, how our friendship blossomed over the years. His house was always the 'hangout house'.

Scott

And it's his family that owned the lake house?

Luke

Yeah. It belonged to his grandparents. They never really used it that much. We would go down there, periodically, for weekends and spring breaks just because it's a nice place to get away from the city and it's next to Truman Lake which is absolutely beautiful. It's rimmed by these 100-150 ft tall bluffs that we would hike up and down - it's just gorgeous. So, we got our display done and had the time of our life. We saw Mary off. She drove back to Kansas City so that she can head on up to Minnesota the next day. The next day, we woke up and we were, like, "Well, we've got a couple more days here. Let's do it again." So, we tried to figure out what we want to do for the rest of the day. Marcus and Daniel were both boy scouts. We were near a boy scout camp that a lot of the Midwesterners go to - I think it's called Bartle. Near this boy scout camp is this tiny little Missouri town called Iconium. In Iconium, there's a convenience store, so to speak, that all the scouts, kind of, frequent. There's none of the home amenities of home, air-conditioning, cold pop, or anything like that, so all the scouts kind of flock here - it's a good memory for a lot of these people at this store.

In Iconium, they sold this soda that's, kind of, hard to find - it's peach-flavored Nehi. I've actually got one of the cans here with me today from way back then. There's really nothing special about this peach-flavored soda other than it's pretty tasty. If you go down to the store there at Iconium, there's a little restaurant attached where we got floats made with this Nehi peach soda and soft-serve ice cream, which sounds kind of weird, but it's quite the combo, especially on an 85-degree day. So, he talked us into going down to Iconium, which was maybe a 30-minute drive from where we're at. Of course, none of us had the foresight to use our GPS and we were destined to get lost. So, we all piled back into his Explorer.

Let's backtrack a little bit. Will is a couple of years younger than us and a good friend of Marcus's younger brother. Marcus, his younger brother, didn't want to come with us and Marcus said, "Sure." So, 6 of us hopped into his Ford and drove down the road. There's really not a whole lot in this part of Missouri. Obviously, there are Truman Lake and Lake of the Ozarks with your recreational areas, but once you get about 20 miles from them, it's pretty bare.

Scott

When you guys took off on this trip, can you tell us who was in the car and where were you all sitting?

Luke

So Marcus was driving there with his car 2001 Ford Explorer - we called it the 'Exploder' because the engine was, kind of, misfiring and grouting instead of, like, how a normal engine would. Will was sitting in the front seat. He was the tallest and had the longest leg, so we gave him the most legroom. I mean, I was 6'1" and he was about a head taller than me, so that was a pretty obvious decision. I was sitting in the backseat behind the driver. Daniel was to my right, so he was in the middle of the back seat. He was, kind of, the smallest guy in our group. So he got, kind of, squeezed between me and Neil, who was sitting in the back passenger seat. Then, in our infinite wisdom, we decided that he could ride in the trunk of the Ford - there's a lot of room back there - because, "What's the worst that could happen?" We were going for 30 minutes down the road. One of the little things that, kind of, sticks with me is I remember going into the tent, grabbing my wallet and my phone and stuff out of my backpack, looking down, seeing my pocket knife sitting on top, and thinking, "I'm not going to need that. We're only going to be gone for about an hour."

So, we all piled into his Ford and headed on out towards Iconium. Of course, we got lost along the way, so the 20-30 minutes drive ended up taking, like, an hour - it's probably 11 AM by the time we got there. Marcus and Daniel were, kind of, reminiscing about their scouting days down there and talking to the owner who they have known from their time at the Scout camp. We were all just, kind of, milling around the store. We headed outside to a little restaurant attached. We had a real nice lunch of burgers, fries, and wonderful peach Nehi floats that I still adore to this day. Then, we decided to head back. Obviously, we knew the right directions this time, so it's gonna be a much shorter trip. I remember that we were going down the highway and I saw, like, a flatbed tow truck that had a car that had, obviously, been in an accident on the back. You could see that the windshield was blown out from the inside - like something had hit it from the inside and pushed it out. I just remember saying "You see guys, that's why you need to wear seatbelts. That's what happens at high speed" or something along that lines. At that time, I was taking classes in college in the criminal justice field. I had a class about, like, accident reconstruction and that sort of thing. So, it's a practical application of what I'm learning in college.

On the way back, we stopped in Clinton, Missouri, which is another one of the larger towns down there. It was the 5th of July, so there were fireworks stands everywhere. We topped off the gas tank in the Explorer, then we started hitting up these fireworks dance. It was the day after, so everything's 40% - 60% off. My buddy Neil was military, so he had, like, a military discount. So, we started getting everything even cheaper and cheaper. We started loading this truck full of fireworks again, so we're all packed in there. I should also mention that I fell in love with this peach Nehi soda, so I bought 3-4 packs - everyone else had bought 2-3. So, we had, like, 10-12 packs of soda crammed into this car along with all of our fireworks and 6 full-sized grown men. So, we pulled out of Clinton - it was probably 1.45 - 1.50 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a beautiful day with an overcast sky - maybe 80 degrees. We were planning for the 2nd round of the firework show.

We were all psyched up and amped up as we were heading back. We pulled off of this little two-lane highway onto the dirt road that we took back to the little neighborhood where the lake

house is in. The speed limit was probably 30 miles an hour. It's a fairly skinny, unpaved gravel road and there are some short but steep hills. This little road is, maybe, 1.5 - 2 miles long before it gets to the neighborhood with woods on pretty much either side. So Marcus was a bit of an adrenaline junkie. We all, sort of, are at heart, but he's more so than any of us. As we took off down this road - the speed limit is probably 20-25 miles an hour - we were just flying down this thing. He was having a good time up front. Everyone else was whooping and hollering, but I was, kind of, a bit uneasy about it. So, we were tearing down the road. He was getting the air from some of these hills. I remember hearing Daniel saying, "It's a beautiful day to die, gentlemen."

We're just screaming down the road. The report said that we hit 79 miles an hour - that was the recorded speed. So, we just flew right over this hill. In my mind, I was thinking, "Please, God, Don't let there be a car on the other side of that hill. I don't want to slam into someone else." So, I kind of get that feeling in the pit of my stomach like when you're on a roller coaster and, kind of, feel everything go up - I don't know why. I just, kind of, shut my eyes and felt like a turtle, kind of, pulling into my shell and holding myself tight. You could feel the car leave the ground. I heard the engine just rev incredibly fast. The wheels weren't on the ground, so they were just freely spinning around. Everything's happening over the course of maybe 5-6 seconds, but it feels like it was a lot longer - It felt like an eternity between the sound of that engine revving and the loudest bang I've ever heard in my entire life.

We left the road off to the left and somehow flew right into the woods. We caught a tree that was, maybe, 12-18 inches in diameter - a fairly good-sized tree. We snapped it in 2 - that was the bang that I heard. I've got my eyes shut tight. It was just a massive thing. The world exploded around me. I slammed forward against my seatbelt, pulled myself tight, make a little ball, and tried to protect myself, I guess. Then, another 3 or 4 more bangs. I felt like I'm on a roller coaster - I was just getting flung around but I've got myself, kind of, pulled pretty tight, so I wasn't moving. I can just feel myself being pulled around by the force of this car moving around. Then, it just stopped and there was silence. I can hear the engine knocking its last few death strokes, I guess. I heard some hissing. I felt something spraying on my face. I could hear - I'm not sure who it was - I think, Neil, kind of, moaning softly like he'd been knocked out. When I opened my eyes, I saw broken glass and peach Nehi cans - that's what was spraying me in the face. I saw my hand braced against the roof of the car and my hand was bloody. I was thinking, "Shit, we're gonna get in so much trouble for this. We're going to be dead meat when we get back to that lake house. They are going to be so pissed off at us." I was thinking, "Crap, I've got to go to the hospital. My parents are gonna be pissed off at me. Like, I'm really screwed." Then, I kind of looked around and I realized, "Wait, we're upside down. The roof is caved in. My head's at a really weird angle from being crushed in. I can't see anybody else." I kind of got a little fuzzy here. I didn't get my head knocked around. I didn't get a head injury or anything like that. I didn't even really think I was hurt besides a cut on my hands.

I started, kind of, frantically looking around. I looked in the front seat and saw Marcus - I think that he must have been knocked out. I saw Daniel on the roof of the car. I mean, it would be the roof, but now it's the floor because we're upside down - kind of, laying on his back in the debris. Everything that was in this Ford just got thrown around - there were fireworks and soda everywhere. I couldn't see Neil to my right - it was all just wreckage. I couldn't see Will on the front seat either - there's even more wreckage up there. All I could see were Marcus and Daniel. Then, I turned to the back to look for Eddie - since he was riding in the trunk. All I saw was wreckage. The first thing I remember saying was, "Guys, I think Eddie is dead." I mean, I guess I was, kind of, thinking out loud. There's really no internal monologue at that point, so to speak -

it just becomes an external monologue. So, anything that was going through my mind just came right out of my mouth at that point. That's when the realization hits me that - this is a lot worse than I initially thought - we're in it pretty deep. I looked to my left and all I saw was the ground and trees. I didn't know how far we are off the road. To be honest, I didn't know where we were on the road itself - it just, kind of, happened so fast.

I started, kind of, taking stock of what was going on. I heard Daniel - he was in quite a bit of pain but I didn't really know why at that time. Mark was in the front seat - I saw him coughing so much. Well, I mean, at least he's okay. So I was trying to figure out what to do next. To be honest, I had no idea what to do. I started asking people if they were okay. I can't remember what they said. I called out to Eddie and Neil but got no response. I just got more and more worried. People would say stuff like, "Well, there was no time to be afraid." Well, there was plenty of time for me to be afraid. I'll be the first to admit that I was trying to figure out what to do and thought, "Well, I need to get out, first and foremost." I can start to smell gasoline. If I can get out, I can get help, and I can get other people out since I was reasonably sure that I was the least injured person at that time. I didn't know the extent of everyone else's injuries, but I honestly thought I was just fine. I got a little cut on my hand. I'll be okay.

I reached down to my right for my seatbelts for the release and couldn't find it. The seat had buckled when it got thrown forward and I couldn't get down there, so I tried to get my pocket knife and cut it out. I reached into my pocket - there's no pocket knife - and started having that little flashback or eureka moment, "It's still in my backpack in a tent a mile away." My knees are pretty much in my chest. My legs were squeezed between my seat and Marcus's seat. My head's, kind of, crammed at a weird angle because all my weight is now on my neck since I'm hanging upside down. I'm like, "Okay, I really need to get out of this seat now." About that time, I could hear Neil, kind of, to my right - I still couldn't see him, but I could hear him. Not even an hour prior, in Iconium, I knew that Neil had just bought a pocket knife that had one of those seat belt cutters on it. So I was like, "Neil, I need your knife. Where's your knife?" The response I got from him sounded like talking to someone while they were half asleep - he was groggy and slow. He said, "I don't know where it is." Well, I knew Marcus usually has a pocket knife on him as well, so I turned to see him. From the way the car, kind of, bent his seat, he was almost facing me. I asked him for his knife because I knew there's usually one in his pocket and probably two or three somewhere in his car, but he didn't know where his pocket knife was. I don't necessarily remember what he said.

That was, kind of, the time when I started to realize the extent of his injuries. I looked around and started to see a lot more blood everywhere. That was, kind of, when I realize that I might be the only one left that can do something. It was getting worse by the minute. The last idea I had was to go to my cell phone and, maybe, get a 911 call. Obviously, I wasn't quite sure where we were, but I figured that I could give them a good enough idea of where we were for someone to come find us eventually. I didn't know the name of the road. I knew we were off Route 7 just East to Tightwad, and that was really about it. I went into my right pocket and tried to get my phone, but I couldn't get my fingers more than about a half-inch into my pocket. The seatbelt had cinched so tight over my legs. There's no way I could get my hand into there to get a handle on that phone. That was, kind of, my screwed moment. I didn't know what to do. There was nothing I could do. I was upside-down in a truck filled with gasoline and fireworks that I thought could blow up at any minute with 5 people, and there I was thinking that I'm the only one who can do anything and that I had let them all down because I couldn't do anything.

This would probably be the first time that I actually thought about the possibility of death. I didn't think anything of it until now. It came up in a really weird way. I just had an aunt who had passed away, maybe, half a year prior in a freak accident at home. I thought about how that, kind of, screwed my family up and devastated everyone from her death. I thought, "Great. Now, they're going to be devastated over another death, and it's the second one in a year. What am I doing?" I kind of just stopped all the struggle. I closed my eyes, took a couple of breaths, relaxed, and thought, "Okay. We'll just, kind of, slip off here. I guess if I'm gonna die, I'm gonna do it peacefully." So, I closed my eyes, took a couple of breaths, and felt the wave of calm come over me. Then, a little voice in the back of my head screamed. I snapped back into reality, opened my eyes, started going back to work, and tried everything I could possibly think of. I remember thinking, maybe, I can grab one of these little itty bitty pebbles of safety glass off the ground in front of me and try to, like, knock through my seatbelt with that - anything to get me out.

Marcus was in pretty bad shape, and so was Daniel. Daniel was talking about how his legs hurt, saying his legs were broken. So, I was, like, trying to keep them calm while, at the same time, trying to keep myself calm, which I was failing at. Anyway, I was getting more and more antsy by the moment. Every minute I was hanging there in that seat, it was hurting more and more. The seat belt around my lap was like a boa constrictor just squeezing the life out of me. My neck was just hurting more and more. I was losing faith in rescue by the minute. So, everything's exhausted. I just started yelling until I was hoarse. I don't know how long I yelled for. Daniel joined and started yelling. I kind of got my neck craned out the window. I was screaming as loud as I could.

Then, I heard someone running up. I don't remember what was said to me and what I said to them, but I know one of them started yelling to call 911. He asked me if I was hurt and I said, "No, I'm fine. I just need a knife to get me out of here. Do you have a knife?" He said he thinks he has one, so he ran back up. At that point, I was saying something like, "We're good, guys. They're calling 911. We're all going to be good. Don't worry." I was trying to maintain the calm, which I, sort of, destroyed with my hollering, I guess. Again, it felt like the time slowed down in between the time he left to get the knife to the time he came back - it was, like, another 10 minutes. It must have been the dullest pocket knife because it took him a few good tries to cut the belt on my shoulder and across my lap. I kind of slumped down to the little space that was right in front of me and realize, "Well, how do I get out?" The gap in the window to my left is probably less than a foot. I'm a pretty big guy, so there's no way that I'm gonna fit through that. I guess they started pulling away all the boxes of fireworks, the cans of soda, and the boxes of soda. There was one of the trunk windows open, so they grabbed my arms and shoulders and pulled me. I got about halfway out and he asked me, "Are you good?" I said, "Yeah, I've got it from here." I got my hands on the car and was ready to push myself out with my legs, but I realized my right leg doesn't work, which was weird because it didn't hurt - it was just not working. So, he asked me if I was good and I said, "Well, maybe not." They grabbed me, pulled me about 20-30 feet away, and left me up against a tree.

I looked over to my right and saw Eddie. He was leaning up against another tree and he's just got this massive deer-in-the-head look going on, almost like a zombie-like expression on his face, just kind of a blank face with big old eyes. The goofiest voice in me thought, "Holy shit, it's Eddie!" Like, when you walk into a restaurant or something and see a friend who you weren't expecting there or a buddy that you haven't seen in a while. To be honest, I thought he was dead because when I looked back into that trunk, all I could see was wreckage. He didn't acknowledge us and do anything - he just keep staring straight on. Obviously, those were some

red flags there. In my mind, I was just glad to see that he was out. He looked like he was in one piece and he was breathing well. The worst will be behind us in a few weeks when we all get patched up. We'll be sitting around the campfire having cigars and cooking burgers again like we always do. There were, probably, 5 to 6 people around the car. Everyone got their phone out. Cell phone service was, kind of, hard to come by in that area. Someone eventually did get through to 911. Then, I thought that I better call my dad and have him let everyone know that I'll be okay because I know my family's gonna be worried if they just get a call from a hospital. After I pulled my phone out of my pocket, as soon as I unlocked the screen, it powered down - it was out of batteries. So I was like, "Well, that's another stroke of bad luck today, I guess."

Then, it seemed like a state trooper arrived pretty quickly. He came down the embankment that we were - I realized we were probably about 50-ish feet into the woods - and, kind of, took in how badly mangled the car was. I wasn't registering how bad it was at that time. The trooper looked around the car. He did his 360's peeking into the windows, came up, and asked me if I'm okay. I said, "Yeah. I think I just have a broken leg." "Is it bad?" I don't know how to describe the voice - it was a very soft yet serious voice. He just replied, "It's bad." He went back to work and talked to people on the radio. That was another one of those times where time just, kind of, melts together. Everything became a bit of a blur. Adrenaline was, kind of, wearing off. I felt myself relaxing a little bit which was a difficult thing to do after a situation like that.

Eventually, 3-4 more deputies and troopers showed up - all the uniforms were there. That was about the time we started seeing the paramedics and the fire department. The firefighters and paramedics had to leave what they were doing, go to their station after they get the call, get their equipment, and then come to us. So, it probably took a good 20-30 minutes before the first firefighters and paramedics arrived. I saw a group of them coming down the hill. They only went to the car. Someone started working. Then, someone went over to Eddie and started working on him. I was just, kind of, sitting back observing. I'm not really thinking much of anything other than, "It is not going to be fun to explain to my parents why my leg is all screwed up because we're driving around and being stupid." Then, every few minutes, there would be a new group that would arrive and come down. One of two of them would come to me and I would just brush them off, "Now, don't worry about me. It's just my leg. Go help the others. They are hurt a lot worse than I am." Because I knew, at least, Marcus was in pretty bad shape. I didn't really know about Will or anybody else. I mean, I knew Daniel had a couple of broken legs. He was next to me on the ground after he had been pulled out. His feet were pointing in directions that they shouldn't be pointing, so to speak. This went on 3-4 times, maybe - a group of paramedics came up to me and I would tell them, "Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. They needed a lot more than I do."

In the back of my mind, I began to notice, "Well, the three of us are the only ones that are out. Where's everybody else? Why are they still in the cars for, like, an hour?" I guess they were working on extracting them. Obviously, they first have to, kind of, stabilize them and treat their injuries in the car. Again, the group of paramedics showed up and I told them, "Well, don't worry about me. They are hurt a lot worse than I am." The medic looked at me and said, "Oh, you're the last one. Well, let's go then." They asked me what was wrong and all that stuff - I was sitting up. They immediately got my collar and stuff and got me to a backboard. I thought that was a lot of overkill. "I feel fine, I just have a twit leg, that's all. I thought I must have pulled something. I'll be fine." But, they put a splint on my leg and got me and Daniel ready for transport. I could hear him back in the ambulance up the hill where they were going to load us up. They took Daniel first - he's a pretty little guy. Then, they got to me - I'm 6'1", so I'm not the biggest but I'm not the littlest - carried me while I was being strapped to the backboard with all their medical equipment

up a fairly short but steep hill to get to the ambulance. There were, like, 3 people on either side of me trying to hold me up this hill and trying to lighten the mood with the jokes. I'm like, "Oh, yes. This means I should lay off the barbecue, right, guys?" That didn't get any laughs, but I tried anyway.

We got into the ambulance. Daniel was in so much pain and started yelling in German - he's bilingual. I didn't really realize that he could do that. I wasn't really feeling anything. "We were going to be in so much trouble. We're screwed." - that's the only thing I could think of because not only his car was destroyed, but we're also hurt and I'm going to have to pay for an ambulance bill now - I know those aren't cheap. In the ambulance, another paramedic was talking to me because, again, I was in the right state of mind, I didn't get my head banged around, and they hadn't pushed any medication to me yet. So, I was talking to him just like how I'm talking to you now. He mentioned something about a helicopter. "What do you mean?" He's like, "Well, we're gonna have to fly you guys out." I was thinking, "Oh, that's gonna be expensive." Then, he said, "Well, you really don't have a choice now." "Well, I guess you're right." After a few minutes, they started an IV on me and Daniel. They pushed the pain meds into Daniel. I told him that I didn't need anything, that I just couldn't feel my leg, and that was the only thing that I thought was wrong with me. So, I said, "I'm fine."

They started driving us down the road back to the highway Route 7 and took us to this little town of Tightwad, Missouri. The only things there were a fire station, a bank, and a convenience store. On the previous trips to the lake, we always love stopping in Tightwad. Who names a town Tightwad? It's funny. I mean, I've got a Tightwad bank hat somewhere. I've saved my receipts from a Tightwad convenience store. We've got pictures in front of the Tightwad sign. We drove on out and pulled into this field by the bank. They opened up the back doors of the ambulance and I could see, feel, and hear the helicopters - I think there were 2-3 of them that were on the ground with their rotor still running.

Then, I heard a familiar voice - it was Marcus's mom. Somehow, she was at the back of the ambulance asking, "What happened?" I kind of briefly explained that we were in a car wreck. I'm not sure how everyone else is. She was asking about the other boys. She was, like, the mother of our group. A lot of us had hung out at that house for years. She's just our biggest sweetheart and cares deeply about all of us. She's just a wonderful person. I kind of briefly explained what was going on. She had no idea. They were shopping in Clinton that day and getting groceries at Walmart. When they came back, the road was blocked off and she had somehow figured out that it was, sort of, her son's car that was in the accident. I asked her, "Hey, can you call my dad and let them know I'm okay?" "What's his phone number?" I started shouting off the number and messing it up. I probably gave her, like, 3 different numbers - none of which, I'm sure, were the right ones. The paramedics and the police, kind of, ushered her to the side, and I got moved into a helicopter.

That was my first time in a helicopter - not a bad ride. The medic that rode with me was a fella named Derek. Derek was a pretty cool guy. We talked a little bit about barbecuing and baseball - we were both from Kansas City and that's a pretty big thing in Kansas City. I asked him where we were going and he was like, "Well, we're taking you to Overland Park Regional." I got all excited because I live in Overland Park. So, I got a helicopter ride home. About that time was when my legs started to not necessarily hurt but it was, like, a dull ache - like I pulled a muscle or something. It was starting to really bug me, so they started to push the pain meds in. It was a quick flight - maybe 30-40 minutes - to the hospital. They took me down into Emergency and started asking all the medical questions, doing vitals, and looking over every inch of me. I was

still thinking that I need to call my family - I can just borrow someone's cell phone. I need to call my mom and dad and let them know that I'm okay because they're gonna hear about a car accident and automatically assume the worst - especially my mother who is a natural worrywart. If I don't answer my phone in 5 minutes, she would think that I'd been kidnapped or something. They got a little bit of pain meds in me, so I was just sitting there all hunky-dory - not really hurting and not feeling really great either. I was, kind of, bummed that I was strapped to a backboard with a gown and all sorts of stuff hooked up to me while my family started showing up.

My mom and dad show up eventually. My mom pretty much broke down when she saw me - I knew that one was coming. Then, another one of my aunts arrived. It was her sister that had passed away earlier in the year. I remember I looked and said to her, "I'm sorry, I scared you and Kathy." Then, she kind of broke down. That was probably the first time I actually cried because I was happy to see everybody and they were happy that I was okay. My brother showed up and asked me how I felt. He was like, "How do you feel?" I said, like, "I've been in a car accident. I mean, how does it look like I feel?" Again, this was kind of when it started to blur. They started giving me more and more medication as the pain got worse. I was so thirsty and they didn't know what was wrong with me. They couldn't give me anything to drink or eat because I might have to have surgery. I hadn't had anything to drink since noon when I had the peach Nehi float - it was probably close to midnight now. So, I started to get pretty miserable.

I want to know how everyone's doing - my father was keeping up on this. "Daniel is at this hospital. Okay, good." A few minutes later, he found that Eddie's at this hospital, and Neil is at that hospital. "What about Marcus?" "Well, we haven't heard about him yet." He kind of pushed it back to the side and went on with what's right in front of me, I guess. Somehow, I managed to get a hold of my friend, Mary who had turned around from driving to Minnesota - they were almost there. They heard about the accident and turned right around. Hearing her voice was one of the greatest things because everyone here was freaking out around me, but there was this, like, angelic calm voice on the phone of a friend who I had for many years. She wanted to know what happened, so I briefly explained it. It was a pretty short conversation. I don't remember a lot of what was said, but it was meaningful.

Eventually, we found out that my leg is broken - that's why it didn't work. It broke right at the top of the femur where it meets my hip. There was a piece of metal - I'm not sure what it was or where it came off. I wish they would have kept it - it would have made for a good souvenir, I guess. There was a piece of metal lodged in the back of my right heel. Some of the X-ray showed a pneumothorax in my chest, I guess - the air gets pushed out of your lungs into your chest cavity - so I had to go for emergency surgery. I never went for surgery, so I'm a little scared. From what I've been through earlier that day, I guess I probably shouldn't have been all that scared because that's probably the safest thing I've done all day. I asked him to make sure I get put under. I've heard too many stories about people being awake during surgery and that was my concern at that time, I guess. They pushed the stuff into my IV, someone drew the curtain on, there was blackness, and then I woke up. I didn't know what time it was. It was still dark and everything hurt from my head to the toe. My leg hurt very bad, even with the crazy amount of pain meds they were giving me. I was still filthy and, probably, look like hell coming in and out of the anesthesia.

I asked, "Where's everyone? How is everyone? How's Marcus? Where's everybody at?" My mom and my dad were in the room. My father is a police officer. He's been a police officer for 30 years. He had to do stuff like this before. He told me where everyone was and then he said, "I'm

sorry, but Marcus didn't make it." My dad was there giving a death notification to his own son, which was something that I'm sure he never thought he had to do - which is something I never thought I would ever hear. That was when I'm broke. I snapped like a twig. There was nothing I could do or say. There was nothing anyone can say to me to make me feel any less horrible than I felt at that point in time. Then, he told me that Will also didn't make it, and that was just another just punch to the gut. I didn't know him too well - I've only known him less than a day. But still, 2 lives were taken just like that.

That was one of the worst nights. It was just a constant haze of coming in and out of the medication. Every time I woke back up, I would remember what happened, finding out all over again, and just breaking down again and again and again. Somehow, I've calmed down. I don't know if they gave me something or if I've just gotten it out of my system. My mom and my dad were still there. Obviously, it was still a tough morning. Then, friends started to show up. The next thing you know this hospital room was packed with, like, 15 people. Tragedy aside, it was great to see everybody there to support me. It makes you realize how many people just cared deeply about you.

So, I was in there for about a week and a half. I was getting around okay on my leg - kind of hobbling with a walker. My foot kept bothering me. I felt like I was constantly stepping on glass - it was just a little itty bitty incision, probably no more than 2-inches long on the back of my heel. It kept getting more and more painful. I'm not sure what the doctor's deal was. I don't know if he didn't want to check his work or he thought I was trying to, maybe, scam pain medications or something, but he wasn't necessarily believing that I was having all this pain in my foot. On the day I was supposed to be discharged to go to my physical therapy, I had a 101° fever. I was having crazy fever dreams in the middle of the afternoon and hallucinating. They were like, "Well, we'll keep him for another day until the fever goes down. Then, we'll send him on his way." When I, kind of, came out of the fever haze, one of my favorite nurses, Sarah, was in the room and was going to change my dressing. So, she changed the one on my right hip and then got down to the one on my foot. She kind of pulled her head back a little bit. I looked down, saw that there was black blood on the bed, and said, "Oh, shit. Is that from me?" She looked up and said, "Yep, I'll be right back." So, she got a doctor. Next thing you know, there were 2-3 other doctors. There was an infectious disease doc in the room. They were taking cultures of my foot and going back in for emergency surgery at 6 o'clock in the afternoon when I was supposed to be getting discharged. I'm not too worried about this surgery. My foot was in an incredible amount of pain, so they've got me just pumped to the gills with all sorts of Dilaudid and who knows what else. They pushed the anesthesia, put the mask on, and the world went dark again.

This time, though, it felt different waking up. It was the most intense and incredible pain that I can ever imagine - I can't even fathom anything worse. It was like stepping on hot nails with the back of my foot over and over again and just driving it in. I had no idea what was going on. It was so painful to the point where I was screaming like I'm being murdered - it was bad. My favorite nurse, Sarah, was back in the room with me. This poor girl-- I mean, she went through so much that night with me - she was right there with me trying to do everything she could. I guess what happened was, somehow, there was a mixup - I didn't have orders for any sort of pain management or recovery after the surgery. So, I went straight from the OR back into my room and woke up with all those nerves firing. I was not sure how long I was in there. I was just out of my mind and screaming. I don't know if I was going into shock or what but I got cold and I was shivering. Then, Sarah held my hand trying to calm me down. They're giving me all the medication they can give because there was no doctor that can prescribe me. For some reason,

it's just the nurses there. Somehow, I managed to go to sleep after a few hours after they got enough of some sort of medication. That was the big medical foul-up that happened to me.

After that, it was pretty much smooth sailing. The next day, the CFO of the hospital was in my room with a bouquet of flowers and the "Please don't sue us" speech. But he was fairly nice. I ended up leaving about a week after that. I had to spend about another week or week and a half in that hospital. Then, moving on, I did another 10 days of inpatient rehab and physical therapy at a different hospital in my area where they specialized in stuff like that.

Scott

The final outcome for the six people who were in the car-- Marcus and Will, as you mentioned, didn't make it

Luke

Right. I was right behind Marcus. My right femur was broken right at the femoral neck - I believe that's what it's called - right at the top where it joins your hip bone. The laceration on my foot eventually became infected with, like, 4 different kinds of bacteria - one of which was flesh-eating. So, that was kind of interesting. Daniel, who was seated in the middle seat directly to my right, broke both of his legs and tore most of his tendons and ligaments down there - it was really bad. He actually ended up getting out of the hospital before I did, but his recovery was a lot longer. He was wheelchair-bound for 6-8 months. It probably took him 2 years before he was back to somewhere near 100%. Neil, who was sitting in the backseat behind the passenger on the far right side, broke his left leg and his right arm. He had ruptured his spleen. He had some pretty bad face injuries. He didn't break his jaw but he had a lot of teeth that were knocked out. His lip and cheek were cut up pretty badly. He ended up getting quite a few stitches. Eddie, who we found out was ejected from the car - not quite sure how - with all the flips we did when we went into the woods, when I saw him, it looked like there was not a scratch on him. When he got ejected, he must have landed on his head or hit his head because he had a very bad head injury and concussion. He didn't break his neck. He didn't fracture a skull or anything, miraculously. I don't even think he broke a bone in his face, but he was in a medically-induced coma, I believe, for about a week. Then, his recovery went fairly smoothly after that. There weren't any cognitive issues. He has some trouble with the balance every now and then, but he's pretty much his old self for the most part.

Scott

You're pretty much recovered now. It's been five years now, right?

Luke

Yeah, it'll be 5 years and 1 month. I get a little pain in my leg every now and then - there's nerve damage in my right heel from the infection and the surgeries they had to do - but I'm pretty much back to myself. Last month, I biked about 150 miles on the Katy Trail in Missouri, and it was awesome. I felt better than I've ever felt.

Scott

You ever talked about this with some of the other ones who survived?

Luke

We discuss it every now and then. Right after the immediate aftermath, we talked about it a lot. Because I was the only person that didn't blackout due to pain or receive a head injury, I kind of have the clearest picture of what went down. Obviously, people like Eddie, Neil and Daniel had

questions, so I answered them and relayed the story. Then, when I came back to work, everyone wanted to know what happened. I guess there is that morbid curiosity where you want to know the story, so I would relay the watered-down version to them. This would be the first time telling the whole story, so to speak.

Scott

You can just send them to this podcast now.

Luke

Yeah, I can.

Scott

I understand that the agency that handled your rescue was the Warsaw Fire Protection District.

Luke

That's right!

Scott

Shout out to those guys.

Luke

My hat's off to you, gentlemen.

Scott

Is there any part of it that I haven't asked you that you'd want to mention?

Luke

There is a little thing that comes to mind. As you can see now, I'm wearing a ball cap. I've always loved wearing ball caps - I don't know why. I was wearing one in the accident. Obviously, it got blown off my head when we were doing all of our flips and everything through the woods. When the trooper was looking around the car, he came out and said, "Who was wearing a hat?" Like, that's kind of a weird question. I said, "That'd be me." He went, "It's your lucky day." And he threw my hat back to me. So, that would be the hat that I was wearing at that time. It has seen better days. As you can see, there's a black engine oil from the car. It looked a lot worse that day since it had been washed.

Scott

Maybe you can send me a picture of that hat and we'll post that on the website.

Luke

I'll send you a picture of the hat and a can of Nehi from the accident.

Scott

I'm glad you made it through. I'm really sorry about your friends, but I appreciate you sharing the story with us today.

Luke

I appreciate you giving me an opportunity to tell my story. I mean, what I want people to take out of this is, 1) Wear your seatbelt. Obviously, I doubt that I would be here if it weren't for my seatbelt. 2) don't drive recklessly. What happened could have easily been avoided. The only

reason it happened is because of stupidity and recklessness. That shouldn't have happened, but it did. Unfortunately, we have to live with those consequences now.

Scott

Thank you for listening to this episode. As you might imagine, it was not easy for Luke to talk about the day his best friend died. Every time I release a new show, I want to introduce you to people and stories that you just won't find on other podcasts.

Lots of stuff going on here, and I wanted to let you know so that you're aware of what's happening.

First up, the Patreon rewards are now in place. I was kind of surprised the other day, because someone asked me about what it costs to be a supporter of the show. She said she thought it had to be a big dollar amount. But that is definitely not the case! You can be a supporter of this show for as little as ONE DOLLAR a month. The support levels are at \$1, \$3, \$5, \$10 and \$20, and you can get What Was That Like Stickers, you can get your name listed on the website as a supporter, and you can even get a shout out right here on the show. All of that information is on my patreon, which is at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.patreon.com/WhatWasThatLike).

AND, for those of you who use Reddit, and I love love love Reddit by the way, the What Was That Like podcast now has it's own subreddit! It's still kind of a work in progress and there's only a few people there right now because it's new, but I'll be adding features and posting stuff in there, and Reddit is a great place to hang out with other listeners, and myself of course. So I hope to see you in there. The group is at [reddit.com/r/whatwasthatlike](https://www.reddit.com/r/whatwasthatlike).

And, a reminder, we also have a private Facebook group. If you'd like to join in the discussion there, that's at [whatwasthatlike.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/whatwasthatlike).

I have to tell you, I'm pretty excited about this podcast. It's just now a year old, with 27 episodes out, and it's growing faster than I expected it to. I have some great interviews lined up – and wait til you hear the next one, episode 28, coming out on July 19. It's gonna blow you away.

I have no doubt that this show is going to be one of the most popular podcasts in the not-too-distant future, because every time someone hears it for the first time, they tell me how much they love it – then they go and download all the past episodes. And for that to keep happening, I'm counting on you – yes, I'm just talking to you right now – I'm counting on you to tell your friends and family and everyone else about it. Most people find out about new shows by word of mouth, so thanks for spreading the word, and I'll see you on the next episode, where we'll once again ask the question, "What was that like?"