

Dear Kathy,

On February 6, 1999, I was 43 years old and racing Midget, Sprint and Champ cars. Entering the '99 season, I was thinking that if it was no better than the '98 season, I would stop. In January, I had already raced in Orlando, Florida at the Disney World 1 mile track and at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis. Now, we were in Phoenix for the Copper World Classic on the 1 mile track which was my favorite.

I was very familiar with the chassis of the car I was driving, but the engine wasn't quite up to par so I didn't qualify as fast as I should have. This forced me to race in the last chance event that night if I wanted to race in the main event the next day. A car behind me broke a brake line, hitting the car directly in front of him which then hit me in the rear tire. The back of my car jumped up and turned backwards slamming the car and my helmeted head into the wall at roughly 145 mph. This put me fast asleep and changed many lives instantly!

I had asked Christ into my life years before and even though I let go several times, God didn't let go of me! My head injury should have killed me, but I was alive when they pulled me from the car. My heart stopped so they had to jump start it. I jokingly tell everyone that the equipment they used must have had a die-hard battery in it. I was flown by helicopter to the hospital. On top of the head injury, my left elbow and right knee were severely damaged; and one of my eyes had a stretched muscle causing double vision.

My wife flew to Phoenix the next morning along with my mother and one of my brothers. My sons who were in high school at the time would come later in the week. I was in a coma for a couple of days and in the hospital for more than a week – I have no memory of my time in Phoenix. When I pulled through and was able to start rehab, my wife had to fly me home to Indianapolis all alone without any medical care because my insurance wouldn't pay for treatment in Phoenix.

When we arrived in Indy, we were greeted by several friends at the terminal along with the rehab team who would transport me to their facility. I spent quite a bit of time in-patient at the rehab hospital, but I don't remember much at all. Then, I did out-patient physical therapy. A dear friend, Kathy Tackitt was a physical therapist who had taken a leave from her profession in order to be with her daughters. She volunteered to work with me and did it all for free.

Being stuck in hospitals and wanting to get my life back, I decided that I was going out for a short run even though I had no sense of balance. I was driving my wife, Sandy nuts so she said, "Fine! If you can walk down the street with me, you can go for a run." I didn't make it far and her point was made for the time being.

I was mailed retirement papers from my work, and the doctors told my wife that she would have to put me in a nursing home if I didn't get any better. I was determined to

retire on my terms not when some doctor said I should, and there was no way that I was going in a nursing home which I saw as a place where people were sent to die!

Sandy took unpaid time off work to care for me; she, Kathy and so many others helped me get back on my feet again. I slowly started to get better. I had eye surgery 4 months after my accident to correct my double vision (and another surgery 6 months later); my balance was returning; my mind stopped playing tricks on me and my personality began to return which is rare after a head injury.

A month before the accident, I had realized that my 45th birthday on April 17, 2000 would be the same day as the Boston Marathon so I challenged my running partners to qualify with me. The Boston Marathon is the only marathon aside from the Olympics that still has time requirements that must be met in order to enter. My friends would have no problem meeting the standards, and before the accident, I would have been right there with them. Now, I wasn't sure what I could do.

The physical therapist from the rehab center wasn't happy about the fact that I was working with Kathy instead of with her. She asked to check me over and then told me that I would never run again. I went home and ran 2 or 3 miles to prove her wrong. My stubbornness would be a great ally!

I started running in shorter races and building up my miles. 8 months after my accident, I ran the Chicago Marathon in 3 hours and 22 minutes meeting the Boston Marathon qualifying time of 3 hours and 25 minutes or better. I feel like life is a book, and I told my wife that the Chicago Marathon was the end of another chapter in my book.

I kept hoping and praying that things would work out and they have. Surviving this, I always figured that God wasn't done with me yet. I had told myself that 1999 would be the end of my racing, but maybe God knew that I needed something drastic to make me stop? Throughout my recovery, many times I couldn't understand why this happened to me. I can see now that God was in control all along; and even though I still have challenges with double vision, I know God is always with me. We must never give up hope no matter what we are facing and we must remember that only God is perfect. Sandy and I just celebrated our 29th wedding anniversary and life just gets better.

May God Bless You,
Kenny Nichols
Indianapolis, Indiana