

45 MINUTES



*By: Kevin Brown
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The story you are about to read is true. It is based almost solely on my memory and my opinions of the events that took place on the night of January 2, 2006 and the days and weeks that followed. I haven't interviewed anyone, nor have I asked anyone's opinion about any of the following. The only part that is not based totally on memory is the 911 call. I did take excerpts from the actual call for accuracy purposes, aside from that the rest is based on the way that I saw it. You might say it has taken me a year and a half to write this story. Why? I'm not sure. I first wrote just the basic events of that night soon after it happened, but there was still another side that kept burning at me. Another side that I felt I should write. I would say that I hope you enjoy what I have written, but I haven't written it for enjoyment as much as I have written it to keep it from being held up inside of me. It is something that I have had a hard time telling anyone about face to face, so I have put it down into words. I have also written this for anyone to read who may have Sleep Apnea, as a warning to them, that they need to get it treated while they still can.

Thank you

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The night of January 2, 2006 was just like any other night. What time I wasn't dozing off to sleep, I excitedly watched as Alabama beat Texas Tech in the Cotton Bowl with a last second field goal. After the game, somewhere around 11pm, I went to bed and ready for work the next day after a nice three day holiday weekend. The next day I thought the only new world I was going to awaken to was the changes at work. My boss and friend of nearly 10 years had just retired the week before. Also a co-worker of 9 years and a friend for many more than that had left as well. Little did I know when I went to bed that night that these changes were minor compared to what lay ahead of me and only starting just about an hour from that time.

EMERGENCY!

The time is 12:15AM; a frantic call comes into 911, the date is January 3, 2006. "I need an ambulance to the house as soon as possible. He's bleeding from the mouth. It sounds like he's snoring and he won't wake up!" says the caller. "Is he conscious?" the 911 operator asks. "No he's not and he's making this snoring sound" responds the caller. The conversation goes on as the 911 operator calmly but very helpfully assures the caller that an ambulance is on its way. In the hallway voices can be heard calling and saying "...tell him to hurry, he won't wake up! ...DAD! DAD!" Another person can be heard in a near panic, scared of what may be happening. A second 911 operator takes over the call and calmly but very methodically has the caller check various vital signs. "Yes he is breathing", "Yes he has a pulse" the caller tells the 911 operator. "No, he has no history of heart condition, just allergies" the conversation continues. Finally, after an eternal 5 minutes, the ambulance arrives. The patient is still unresponsive and making odd gurgling snoring like noises. By this time the parents of the patient, who live only a short distance away have arrived as well after being alerted by the patient's daughter. The paramedics enter the house quickly and find the patient has already turned to a blue looking color all over. They attempt to wake him before they carry him from the bedroom to a stretcher waiting in the hallway. Once on the stretcher he is loaded in the ambulance and rushed to the emergency room. The patient is still unaware of what is happening around him or to him. The family rushes behind the ambulance and arrives at the same time. They enter the Emergency room through the front main entrance expecting to see him immediately, but, there is a delay that seems like forever as the hospital staff tells them they will have to wait. "Why do we have to wait?" they wondered. "What

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has happened to him?” they questioned among themselves. Finally, just before 1:00AM, they were allowed to enter the same room as the patient who even now is still not aware of his surroundings, but was trying to fight off the paramedics for some odd reason in his extreme dazed and seemingly unconscious state. They finally subdued him by strapping him helplessly to the stretcher as he begins to realize something is different.

A Strange New World

I woke up looking at a strange clock on the wall across the room at the foot of the bed, the time was just after 1:00AM. My wrists and ankles strapped down and I unable to move, my Bama shirt ripped open and shadowy, unfamiliar figures above me making sure I didn't go anywhere. They were telling me something and saying something to each other, but I do not remember what it was. Most likely, after the fight I put up, something about me being a wild one or something. Anyway, as I woke up I could feel an oxygen tube strapped around my head, resting under my nose. I noticed them motion to someone that they could come over to see me now, it was my wife. Still very much dazed, but confused I asked “Where am I?” she told me I was in the hospital. I asked her why; she responded that I had a seizure. I thought to my self, “A seizure?? How could I have had a seizure? I had never had one before, that's something somebody else has, not me!” I soon realized the rest of my family was there as they came to my side to check on me. My son and daughter were there as well as my parents. I also saw my In-laws who came to see how I was doing. I later assured my father-in-law that I was going to be okay and that he should get some rest. I knew the next day he was to start a new job.

I learned that I had arrived there by ambulance. Well, I wish I could have at least remembered my ride to the hospital in the ambulance. How exciting! Right? As the night wore on they moved me out of emergency to an area known as emergency admitting at around 2:00am and then finally to a room at around 7:00am. Needless to say, there wasn't a lot of sleep to be had for that night. I did call into work that morning to tell them I wouldn't be there. I can't remember if I was asked if I was sick or if I just answered the question before asked. I tried to calmly tell the person answering the call that I would not be there because I was in the hospital. I'm not sure how it sounded to her, but at least they knew where I was for the next few of days.

During the night that I arrived at the hospital and the next day they performed a series of tests on my brain, including a CAT scan, EEG, and MRI. First I'm glad they did find one up there but I'm also glad they found no real cause for the

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Seizure. Well, I can't say the findings were completely negative, all they did find was a little bit of scar tissue from a car accident I had when I was less than a year old and I'm 42 now (at the time of this incident) and have never had a problem from it. A nationally known neurologist who checked on me at that time said that would never cause me a problem. Even though Hypoxemia (low blood oxygen level) is almost positively the cause of my seizure and Sleep Apnea being the prime suspect in its cause, I was given a very high dose of Dilantin to control seizures. Around 1:00Pm the afternoon of January 3rd, a nurse arrives in my room with a huge syringe full of Dilantin that she was to give me. It took her about 15 minutes to inject this into me. As you can imagine, it hit my blood stream very quickly. My brain was already quite baffled and confused from all the things from the night before, not to mention the lack of sleep, well the Dilantin made the room start to do funny things like move when most of the time it probably really wasn't.

The meals they brought to me were almost inedible, not really because of taste but due to the fact that I had seriously bitten both sides of my tongue. This made things like jello look really tasty! Can you imagine? I turned down things like beef and would request things like a big bowl of tasty jello!! Yummy!! Then again, maybe it was the Dilantin talking, making me think my tongue was sore. Well, I spent most of the day dozing in and out of sleep, but I'm not sure that I ever slept really good or for very long. I did have several visitors come to see me. I do know that I slept through some of their visits, but I know they understand and should they ever end up in the hospital, they can do the same to me. Though I do not feel as though I was very much company to them, I greatly appreciate each and everyone of them and their thoughtfulness for going out of their way and taking time from their day to stop by. I was still battling with a moving room, a big lack of sleep, and still wondering what had happened and what was going to happen not only the next day but next week and more.

The next night as I slept, they placed an oximeter on my finger to monitor the levels of oxygen in my blood. This was done to help confirm the question of Sleep Apnea. Although Hypoxemia doesn't mean you have it, it is a definite symptom. Soon I drifted off to sleep, but was suddenly awoken by an alarm. A machine in my room is alarming. What is it? What is wrong with me now? I feel fine, but this is an alarm in a hospital, this can't be good. It turns out that it was the Oximeter that was alarming. My oxygen level had dropped too low. It seemed like it took forever for a nurse to come and turn the alarm off, but they finally did. I'm sure it wasn't as long as it seemed. During that night my oxygen levels dropped as low as 77% and a normal level is around 99%. Sleep Apnea is now almost positively confirmed as the cause of my seizure. I guess that's comforting to know what caused it, but what now? What do I do? Do I ever get to sleep again? Well, after a good night of sleep that night and being awoken every hour

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so my vitals can be checked. I began to hope that just maybe I can go home. I couldn't half walk, because the room was still spinning, but I was feeling fine and I wanted to go home and watch my own room spin a while. Later the Doctor did come and give me the news that he will be sending me home today. Oh boy I thought! I'm going home! But he also had some other news. Some news that was some of the most terrible news that I had ever heard. The doctors both told me that I couldn't drive for 6 months!! This was horrible! This was worse news than the seizure! I was given a prescription of Dilantin to take for seizures. Well, the Dilantin never made it to the level in my blood that the doctors wanted it to be, so they have now switched me to Topamax. The Dilantin had a way of making the world spin in ways it didn't really spin anyway, so that didn't hurt my feelings too much except for the fact that I was finally learning how to keep it from spinning when it really wasn't. I personally still wonder about the need for either drug to control seizures, but if this is the only side effect of that episode on January 2nd (aside from CPAP), then I'm happy! He also told me that he will schedule me for a sleep test to confirm the Sleep Apnea.

After the doctor left the room, I slowly got dressed and waited for my so called complimentary ride to the car. We waited and waited, only to learn that they were short handed that day and it was going to be a while longer. I asked if I could walk out. Now remember, the room (hallways included) do not sit still yet. They told me that it was ok with them if I thought I could do it. That was enough for me. I spun out of bed and waddled down the hallway, slowly, but surely holding the handrail all the way. Eventually I made it to the elevator. Down the elevator and then another long hallway that eventually led to the door of the outside world. It was beautiful! I was outside and on my own two feet! I was going home!

The ride home was better than you can imagine. Being released from the confines of the hospital and seeing the world again was wonderful. Then when I finally arrived home, it was even better. Still very tired and my body still trying to adjust to this new medication, I tried to relax. I also tried to find things that I could eat. As I mentioned before I had bitten both sides of my tongue. Some advice that I can give you from my experience is, if you ever have a seizure, let me give you a bit of advice, do not bite your tongue! It is not worth it. The effect might be good, but the side affects from such a move are long lasting. It took me several days before I could eat solid food again and even longer than that before the soreness went away. Afraid that I might have another seizure or might stop breathing again during the night, for the next couple of weeks while waiting for my sleep study, I slept lightly. I adjusted my sleeping position to a slightly more upright position and prayed that I would wake up the next morning and hopefully in the same bed that I went to sleep in. Each morning that I awoke, I said a quiet

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prayer thanking God for a new day. This is something that I continue to do to this day.

Sleep Test

Finally came the day or night of my sleep test. The people at the sleep center were great and the room I was in reminded me of a mini-motel room. I stayed there all night connected to a countless number of wires and monitors. That night as I slept, they monitored my every breath and every move. I think they even watched a dream or two that I may have had, but I don't think they put them on VCR or DVD. The next morning I returned home feeling fine and awaited my results. My doctor was very shocked when he saw the extent of my Sleep Apnea. I had up to 107 events in 1 hour. That's a lot of no breathing! He didn't understand how I was even functioning from day to day. Now I go back to the sleep center and sleep with a CPAP and get all the pressures right. January 18, 2006 I went back to the sleep center and this time slept with a CPAP machine and was monitored and adjusted during the night. The next day on the 19th, I picked up my very own CPAP machine and we have been buddies ever since!

Just A Dream?

Ok, now to backup a little. So far I have only talked about what happened to me physically and some mentally that night. That is only half of the story. Most of what has been said before can for the most part be told by anyone that was around me during that time. But there is another side to this story. This is a side of the story that only I can tell. This part will tell you what happened in those 45 minutes. What 45 minutes am I referring to you might ask? The 45 minutes from the time that the call was placed to 911 until the time that I woke up in the hospital. The 45 minutes from the time that I went unconscious until I woke up again.

Why would I resist the help I so desperately needed from those around me? Where was I? I can't really answer those questions for sure, but I will tell you what I experienced while others were working so hard to help me. Have you ever had a dream that seemed so real that you thought you were really there? A dream that felt so lifelike that even when you awoke, you are still wowed by it? Well, that begins to explain my experience during those "lost" 45 minutes. I cannot tell you where I was at or exactly what I was doing. But I can tell you the following without a doubt.

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I remember being somewhere, I'm not exactly sure where it was at, but I remember being there in this place outside somewhere. I was there with people that I knew, but I cannot tell you who they are. We were all there playing and having fun. I wish I could remember what we were doing or remember some of the faces even, but unfortunately all of those are fuzzy and gray. I only remember the fun and laughter. If I had to guess, I would say that we were in a park with beautiful green grass and lots of trees.

Well, now when you are somewhere having a lot of fun and someone tries to take you away from it, the natural reaction is to resist, right? Well, this is exactly what I did. In my mind and perception, the paramedics were taking me away from this place. I was having fun where I was at and I did not want to leave. I didn't know who they were and didn't understand they were only there to help me. At the time I was still halfway in the fun world, this dream world, and they were pulling me back to the real world. I knew someone was pulling me or something, but I had no idea who, what or why.

So where was I? Where was this place, this park, which was so much fun and who were those people there I was enjoying it with? I do not have a real answer to this question because so much of that actual 45 minute span is very fuzzy to me now as it was to me then just after it happened. There is another piece to this puzzle that might help to answer that question though. On Friday night, January 6, I had a very similar dream to what I had on the Monday night that this journey had started, but this one had a different ending. With this one, I did not have paramedics pulling me and tugging me or holding me down and strapping me to a stretcher. As I mentioned, this dream was very much like the other that I had on Monday night, shortly before being rushed to the hospital. But, the end of this dream I actually rode home in the backseat of a car. Well, that doesn't so unusual does it? Well, not really, we all ride in cars and have been given a ride home by someone before. But there are a few twists to it as you might imagine. I will first tell you that upon arriving home, my Grandmother on my Mother's side "Grandma Phoebe", points out that my Mother and Daddy are there in the driveway, with the car doors open as though they had just arrived. The car is a white Lincoln LS. They are looking frantically around the driveway as though they had lost something. The car I'm in is stopped in front of the house, but they do not see us or the car as they look around the driveway. Grandma Phoebe tells me "Your Mom and Dad are looking for you; you need to get out and let them know that you are here". I start to get out of the car and this is where the dream ends. I know this doesn't sound too odd or unusual, but let me explain a few of the other pieces of this puzzle. Along with my Grandmother in the car was my Uncle Al (my Mother's brother) and PaPa (Paw-Paw) (my Dad's Dad). What is so unusual about that you might ask? We often times are with others we know in

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dreams, right? This is where it starts to get maybe a little strange. My grandmother passed away in 1989, PaPa in 2001, and Uncle Al in 2003. But there is even more. We were all sitting comfortably in a 1980 Toyota Celica, Blue in color (the last car my grandmother had). Well, I'm actually assuming the color was blue; this is only because the inside of the car was identical to hers. As I mentioned, the four of us were in this car stopping in front of my house. I know a Celica has 4 seats, so we should all sit very comfortably in there. Let me take this a step further and explain our seating arrangements. PaPa, Grandma Phoebe, and I were all three seated in the backseat of this Celica sports car. In the front passenger seat was my Uncle Al. That leaves one seat open, the driver's seat, so why were three of us in the backseat? I wish I had the answer as to who was driving this car and driving me back home to my family with my family. The light was so bright and blinding around this person who was driving, that I could not make out any form or features. Whom ever it was brought me back safely and none of us had any concerns about riding with him or her. I can't help but wonder if this is actually the ending of my experience on Monday night. But why see it on Friday night? Why would it replay during my sleep 4 days later? Maybe so that I could understand it better myself? Maybe to help me answer some of what did happen and why I wanted to resist the paramedics as they tried so desperately the help me. I personally feel like this dream helps to answer what happened in that 45 minutes. Not what happened to me physically, but what was happening mentally or maybe even spiritually. You will see in the next part what I mean by that.

Where was I?

I approach the answer to this question very carefully. I do not have an answer to where this place was or is and I will not know the answer to that question until I die, but I will now draw the only conclusion that I feel like I can. I am not going to say that I died, went to heaven and was revived back to life. To my knowledge, medically I was around the entire time. As far as I know I never totally quit breathing nor did my heart ever stop. I do know that I was very fortunate that none of this ever happened. So no, I cannot say that I died and went to heaven. Because of that dream on the night of January 6, I feel like I may have maybe had a peep into heaven or at least maybe visited some of those who have already gone before me. As the old song goes "Knockin on Heaven's door" or as the title of a play that I was in states "One Foot in Heaven". I do not have the answer to this. If this was a heavenly experience, then why are we riding in a car? Why didn't we just fly back? The car is something that I'm familiar with and can identify with. It is something that my mind can accept easier than us flying around and zipping back down at the last minute.

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Being in an unfamiliar place of having fun with family like people. Being brought home by three very close family members who have passed away, plus the mysterious driver. The bright light, could that have been God or Jesus or maybe an Angel? Was it just a coincidental dream? Again, I do not have the real answers to this, only speculations from a very real feeling experience. I know all this sounds crazy and there is no way to apply logic to the answer except for maybe it can be explained just because of the lack of oxygen.

But if it was caused by a simple lack of oxygen, then why did I see those that I saw? Why wasn't it more dramatic and even crazier than what I saw or dreamed? Wouldn't it have been more like that commercial on TV where you have Abraham Lincoln and a beaver playing cards with you and carrying on a conversation?

Another part of me tells me that I really didn't go there to visit them, but more likely they came to visit me in my time of trouble. They came to comfort me and to let me know that everything will be alright. They came so that I wouldn't be alone. Since I was completely unaware of my physical surroundings at the time, they offered that bridge that I needed, to let me know that my family is there and waiting for me, looking for me to come back to them. This is probably the more logical scenario of the two, if there is a way to logically explain this at all. The whole experience was so real, from the joyful time, to the ride home, to seeing my Mother and Daddy frantically searching for me.

Second Chance

Prior to all this happening, my wife thought that maybe I had Sleep Apnea. I snored and would doze off in the middle of a movie or something, but that was my only real symptom. I didn't have hypertension, diabetes, or any other problems that might point to Sleep Apnea. Also neither of us realized how severe Sleep Apnea can be if left untreated. If you or someone you know suspects they may have Sleep Apnea, don't wait like I did. Get it checked now! You may not get a 2nd chance! I recently read a story of a man with sleep apnea who went to sleep on the sofa only to never wake up again. So Sleep Apnea is not anything to play around with. It is a very dangerous medical condition and should be treated that way. Joining the hose heads of America and the world keeps me alive and I'm very thankful for that. If I can adjust to wearing a mask at night, you can too! So do it! Don't wait!

Today I look around the world and see the sun, stars, grass, flowers, rain, sleet, snow, etc. and am thankful for each and every one of them. I once again don't let the little things be big things. I keep the big things from being even bigger. I

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strive to enjoy life and what it has in store for me. I have a plaque in my office that I purchased since this happened that states "The miracle of God is seen in every sunrise". This is so very true! The next morning, for me to see the sun coming through my hospital window was a true miracle for me.

It is amazing how different an event like that can make you look at things and we really shouldn't wait for bad things to happen before we are thankful. I have always loved those things, but now more than ever.

My family deserves much more than I can ever write here. The love and support I received during that time is not measurable by anything. Words cannot begin to describe how thankful I am for each of them and what it is like to see each of them. If not for the alertness of my wife that night, I may not have had the opportunity for one more ride in that blue Celica back home again. I may have stayed in that park I was in. I may have never had the opportunity to write this story and tell you of my experience. I'm going to stop short saying that I visited Heaven, but I feel like I was well on my way. But also I try to wonder that if I wasn't in heaven yet, why would I see all those who had gone before me? I feel like the explanation to this is this; they were always there for me in life when I was sick or in trouble or needed someone, so why wouldn't they be there for me after they have passed on. Why wouldn't they come to my side like the rest of my family? Maybe they were coming to me in my time of trouble. It could have been that they were coming to offer their love and support like they always have. They also knew it wasn't my time yet. They knew that it was too soon for me to be there and that I have a wife and two wonderful children that I needed to be with. So why wouldn't it be them to guide me back home? Why wouldn't they show me where I needed to be in my time of distress and confusion also offering their love and comfort? Besides, I would much rather have them bring me back home to my family than some stranger that I do not even know. I'm glad they led me back home again so that I can continue to enjoy my family here on earth and to enjoy doing things with them and for them. If Heaven is only half as good as my experience, then I look forward to returning someday in the future. I'm not sure why I got a second chance at life here on earth, but I did and I'm very thankful for it.

I thank God for that chance each and every day. I could go on and on with the thank-you's; my Mother and Daddy, my son and daughter; my in-laws. I also owe a lot to the 911 operators who very calmly and professionally kept my wife from panicking any more than she already was. Their quick actions along with the paramedics are to be commended. The hospital staff is also to be recognized for their hard work in not only keeping myself comfortable under very unfamiliar circumstances, but also keeping my family calm and informed as they went through an even more stressful situation than what I was going through. My

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thank-you list can go on and on. My co-workers for their support; friends from the theatre; the many at church who prayed; thanks to all of you! The list goes on and on. I will not attempt to name everyone because there are so many that I will miss and there are so many that I do not even know. My biggest thanks of course is to God for all that He did for me and my family during that time. Without the strength, care, and love we received from God during that time and continue to receive; this story would never have happened.