

Laguna Niguel News

The Orange County Register

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Reclaiming his life

Brotherly love has helped Randy Hall through a coma, frustration and, maybe, learning to walk again

By AMANDA STRINDBERG

Randy Hall thought he had it all – a sleek silver-smoke SL500 convertible Mercedes, a lucrative clothing business, escapades to Europe, a collection of the finest French wines, parties to attend and women to schmooze.

But it wasn't until Hall ventured into a two-year venture into no-man's land between life and death that he realized his life was empty.

He was missing happiness.

Hall was left comatose on April 19, 2000. He was assaulted in his Laguna Niguel home. The case is still under investigation. *(Note: in 2005, Randy still had not regained memories of what happened. As of now, however, he says the assault did NOT take place in his home).*

He says his two-year slumber was a wake-up call for him to abandon his fast-paced lifestyle.

"I almost feel lucky that I went into the coma," Randy says. "It was almost necessary for me to realize how bad my life really was. I may have had thousands of women, but it was always boom, boom, see ya. I wasn't happy. I want a wife. I want kids. I love kids...If it would have been my time to go I probably would have gone down there," Randy said pointing downward. "I was a bad guy, but look, here I am now. I am so lucky," he says, shuddering as he thinks of his past life of sin and pleasure. "I am much happier now."

His brother Alan agreed.

"It was like God gave him another chance," he says.

But Randy says there is one thing holding him back from complete happiness.

He wishes he could walk again and get out of the prison he considers his wheelchair. Last week Randy had two surgeries that may give him the chance to walk. Surgeons removed excess bone growth on his hip and knee and sliced tendons to allow them to be stretched.

For the next two to six months hall will go through physical therapy to regain the ability to walk – something doctors said would never happen. But doctors said he would never wake up from his two-year slumber.

Randy is determined to prove them wrong again.

"I am not going to live like this," Randy said, sitting in his wheelchair. "The doctors, of course, are going to tell you the worst, but I have a goal and I am going to achieve it. I can't be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life."

Randy made his decision shortly after waking up from his coma. His brother wanted to take him out of the hospital room in a wheelchair and Randy refused to go. He thought if he never sat down in the wheelchair then he'd never be crippled.

"He never wanted to accept anything other than a full recovery," Alan says.

Randy agreed.

"I have to walk, I just have to," he said, tears streaming down his face. "I know I will. I can do it."

Randy dreams of the day he will be back on the slopes, swishing down the mountain to 60 mph, snow flying in his face.

"I loved it," he said. "Skiing was my passion."

Disneyland was once one of his favorite spots, but the last time he went the rides were too scary.

"I cried almost," he said. "I used to eat that stuff up."

But despite missing his thrill-seeking habits Randy says he is still much happier than he was before the incident. He owes his life and his happiness to his brother, he says.

Alan fought for Randy's life the two years he was in a coma.

Although doctors told Alan and his family there was little chance Randy would ever wake up, Alan never stopped believing. He kept on top of the nurses and doctors making sure Randy got all the care available to him, fighting the "system" on behalf of Randy for almost three years. He begged, pleaded, pushed and even harassed many professionals along the way, but all in the name of love and saving his brother's life.

"Had I gone along with what I was told was correct and customary, Randy would still be in a coma or worse," Alan says.

Randy's business would also have been gone.

Alan took over Randy's three clothing stores once he went into the coma.

On the ceiling of one of the stores, he had an angel painted, watching over Randy while he slept.

Alan also made sure Randy's 40th and 41st birthdays didn't go unnoticed. As family and friends gathered at the hospital, the birthday boy lay nearly lifeless with no memories of the year that passed. Food was bought and a cake was made, but no one was hungry.

"It's disgusting to see me like that," Randy said watching a video of his 41st birthday.

While Randy slept his brother visited his bedside encouraging him to wake up.

"Hey you, when are you going to wake up?" he'd say. "Get your lazy ass out of bed."

He played Randy's favorite CDs, brought in wine and cigars, waving them in front of his nostrils and read Randy stories.

Randy slept in the coma ward at South Coast Medical Center.

Many of the patients had ocean view rooms. None could enjoy them.

“It was eerie,” Alan says. “It’s like you check in, but never check out. It’s beautiful, with white water views. It’s this beautiful place you go, but you never check out.”

But Randy did. Slowly over a couple of weeks in 2002 Randy woke up, his body twisted and curled from the slumber.

He woke up in a fog where dreams and reality swirled together.

“I didn’t understand,” Randy says. “I just thought I got too drunk the night before.”

The first year out of the coma he called his brother Steve and the first time he entered his house about a year after he woke up he didn’t believe it was his.

Alan re-taught Randy how to talk and emotionally supported him, even when he wasn’t the nicest.

Being handicapped was a blow to Randy’s self esteem.

“I was destroyed,” Randy said. “I hated looking at myself.” Randy took out a lot of his frustration on those around him, including his brother and attendants, many who quit.

“He yelled obscenities and treated those around him like slaves,” Alan says.

For the first time Alan doubted his fight for his brother’s life.

“I felt like I had gone against nature,” he said. “I had that sense I had done something wrong.”

Alan described his bother as a zombie, ready to terrorize the town – unhappy, miserable and in severe pain.

He yelled at others and argued. He hated having to re-learn things he said he was taught in kindergarten. He cried in public.

His progress was like a little kid growing up. There were setbacks including a surgery to remove an infected brain shunt and the removal of a brain abscess the size of a tennis ball that caused Randy to quickly regress and almost killed him.

There were days when the “Great Alan” felt like he couldn’t handle it. There were nights he couldn’t sleep and times he felt like he was going to snap.

But slowly Randy regained his sarcastic, playful personality, with his brother by his side. About a year ago, Randy enrolled in Coastline community College’s program for brain-injured students where he says he learns to cope with life. He graduates in about a year and hopes to walk through the crowd when he receives his diploma.

“I will walk,” he says. “I am doing so well already, my legs are already straightening out.” And through the journey a strong friendship between tow brothers has formed. The two have become more like each other.

Alan has learned from Randy (that) it is okay to be selfish once in awhile and put yourself first.

“He saved my life just as much as I saved his,” Alan says.

Randy has learned from Alan the meaning of true unconditional love.

“I love him very much. My brother has been so good to me and been there for me all this time,” Randy says fighting back the tears. “He’s a really good guy. I admire him 10,000 percent.”

CONTACT THE WRITER: (949) 454-7367 or astrindberg@ocregister.com

To contact Randy Hall, email him at comadude@cox.net