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### A two-year nightmare

#### ***“Some things you just can’t explain”***

**Doctors, baffled as to how Randy Hall awoke from a coma after 2 years, are not ruling out a miracle**

By CATRINE JOHANSSON

Randy Hall shouldn't be here. Medical science—and common sense—say this 41 year old man should be dead.

Instead, he's moving around, talking and working on regaining his physical abilities. This after spending two years in a coma.

“I have only seen this once before,” said Dr. David Patterson, medical director at the Casa Colina rehabilitation hospital in Pomona where Hall is a patient. But that person's brain wasn't working as well as Hall's, said Patterson.

Medical science cannot fully explain why Hall woke up, Patterson said. He discussed the case with several neurologists who said that it's likely some kind of impulse awakened Hall's brain.

“Or it's just a miracle,” Patterson said. “Some things you just can't explain.”

Hall was left comatose on April 19, 2000. His brother and caretaker, Alan Hall, claims that a woman Randy Hall had a short relationship with beat him in his Beacon Hill home. *(Note: this article was written while Randy's memories were unclear. He now says this is not true).*

Police are revisiting the case now that Randy Hall has emerged from his coma, said O.C. Sheriff's detective Steve Dexter. The case was not closed while Hall was in a coma, Dexter said. He would not comment on Alan Hall's allegations.

That April night, Randy Hall began a two-year journey through the no-man's land between life and death that is coma.

Randy was taken to South Coast Medical Center in Laguna Beach, where a string of doctors told Alan and other family members that there was essentially no hope.

Alan and Randy were not that close before Randy went into a coma. They were very different personalities and disagreed with each other's lifestyles.

Alan is an accountant. He grew up taking care of the siblings and always doing what was responsible. He drove a Ford Explorer and lived a generally conservative life.

Randy was a playboy with a fast lifestyle, Alan said. At the time of Randy's attack, he drove a brand new Mercedes SL 500.

As the months went by, Randy was wasting away in a hospital bed. He was fed through a tube, his muscles were degenerating and his limbs were pulling upward and inward,

returning to a fetal position, doctors said. The longer this went on, the more permanent it would become.

The most devastating time was about one year after the attack, when doctors told Alan that his brother only had about 30 percent of normal brain function.

But Alan said he never considered disconnecting his brother's life support system.

"I could see it in Randy's face that he was still here," said Alan, who insists that he saw reaction in his brother's eyes and that he would grasp at things.

Doctors would call it "involuntary reflexes." Alan didn't buy it. "There were subtle things that only a family member could see," he said.

So at the end of 2000, Alan turned to David Strassburg, a holistic health practitioner in Costa Mesa who performed a form of muscle training called the Feldenkrais Method.

The method is a gentle physical exercise that attempts to reestablish the connection between the brain and the muscles, Strassburg said.

"You move the person in a movement pattern he already knows," he said. "You try to make the movement pattern longer."

Strassburg works with cerebral palsy patients, athletes and coma patients. He said he's never seen the kind of improvement seen in Randy.

And in January 2002, doctors replaced a piece of Randy's skull that had been removed after the attack to relieve pressure on the brain.

Alan believes the muscle therapy and the skull surgery triggered his brother's awakening.

Dr. Michael Muhonen, who performed the skull surgery, said it normalizes the atmospheric pressure on the brain, but he doesn't believe the surgery made Randy wake up.

"It's all very speculative," he said.

Although the reasons why are a mystery, Randy woke up. The awakening took place over a couple of weeks in February 2002.

His body is twisted and curled. His voice is distorted by a hole in his throat from a tracheotomy that helped him breathe. He wears an eye patch because his eyes don't work well together yet.

But Randy Hall is awake and alert. He's even playfully sarcastic toward his brother when Alan nags him.

Randy's days at Casa Colina consist of grueling physical therapy and catching up on the news.

"It's scary," said Randy, who didn't learn about the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks until this spring.

Randy doesn't remember anything about what happened to him or about his Beacon Hill home. He also has no sense of the two years that have passed. He's still trying to accept that he's 41 years old—not 39.

When the attack happened, Randy had just bought his new home and he was busy with his clothing store. After he awoke from his coma, he would confuse the nurses with real estate agents or store employees.

"He fired a couple of nurses and (his physical therapist) twice," Alan said.

Doctors at Casa Colina are impressed by Randy's determination to get better.

The therapies to stretch his limbs and improve cognitive functions are extremely painful.

Many of his physical abilities might never be completely restored, but Randy's determination could help him progress further than other patients, Patterson said.

In many ways, Randy's struggles have just begun. In a recent therapy session, a nurse pushes down on Randy's thigh to stretch his atrophied leg. Near tears, the former coma patient's face cringes.

But determination glows in his eyes.

"You have to walk," Randy said. "You just have to."

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