

Chapter 3

Coma's Silent Emptiness

As I stood on the front porch waiting for my ride, I'd rap on the window then duck out of sight as Fritz—our feisty schnauzer—barked and came running to see who dared enter his territory. Relieved to see that the roads were dry and the forecast good, I was in a fired up mood myself. Not only was I going to my first party in Washington since my second grade homeroom had cupcakes and milk celebrating the principal's son's birthday, but when I go back to school, I'm going to do something I've never done before—ask a girl for a date.

Ecstatic about going out and being included for a change, I would be in a playful mood by the time I saw the '68 Beetle appear on the horizon. A few hours earlier, Paul had called designating the time he'd pick me up and that we were also going to get my long-time neighborhood *buddy*, "Sam." As I instructed Paul how to get to Sam's house, I couldn't help but notice how aggressively he shifted the gears. I thought to myself, Paul wouldn't show off behind the wheel of a car, he's too bright for that; this just correlates with how he approaches life—with effervescence and vigor.

After getting Sam, we headed towards the hinterlands about four miles away where Ilyacoff resides. When hearing from Paul some of my party escapades during the first semester shortly after crawling into the cramped car, characteristic of our interactions since junior high, Sam launched another of his cynical assaults against me. Wanting to start off this evening of supposed recreation on a positive note hardly making any difference, I'd be subjected to Sam's insults again. Recognizing that Paul and I had only recently become friends, Sam felt compelled to fill in my new Mountaineer buddy how I never went out or did anything. Having the boringest of lifestyles, just staying home so much of the time, I felt extremely embarrassed that the guy who had known me so well since we were five and whom I blindly considered a friend was so comfortable "ripping" on me in front of somebody I had just gotten to know.

Sensing my discomfort over the direction this exchange was headed, so that any further character assassination may be suppressed in his squashed VW, Paul interjected that W.V.U. was a great school and that we had become friends; letting Sam know that I had an ally and nothing else bad about me needed to be said.

Feeling as though a good deal of my life hadn't exactly been saturated with peer group advocates, Paul sticking up for me would only strengthen my opinion of him that much more.

Arriving at Ilyacoff's, many familiar faces were standing in the front yard. My appearance at these type of events not exactly customary or expected—to this day—I still have a dim picture of some former high school classmates greeting me upon my arrival and expressing disbelief that I was actually attending a social outing. Being seen anywhere but a ballfield came as a shock to everyone there, for the only time I ever really associated with those guys beyond school was when they came to the plan to play some backyard football.

There are few specifics about the party itself in Ilyacoff's house that I can recall, with the most pronounced being that I spent some time talking to an ex-high school football player who was a couple of years older than me, "Larry." A student at the local Washington and Jefferson College, coincidentally, Larry was the brother of the guy who knew the Penn Hills music major goddess I had met in English class at W.V.U. this past fall semester. About the only thing I can remember about our conversation was asking him how his sibling, Alan, got to know her and the nature of their relationship. Because of what was to ensue, Larry's answer—among many other things—would be forever erased.

Tucked away somewhere in my memory chips, I can still retrieve a good feeling about the time I had at Ilyacoff's. Hidden within the dark corners of my data banks, I could fill the blank slate with a few, faint pictorial printouts and being in a generally positive mood at the time I exited the residence. After all, I spent some time with peers doing something other than wishing to be involved. Around people I get along with well enough, met an older ex-high school football star lineman who was pretty friendly, and with a girl back in Morgantown who appears interested in me, things would finally be looking pretty good. This just might be the last Valentine's Day I spend by myself. Walking on Cloud Nine, I could feel happy about who Craig Meyers was, which didn't come all that easy for me.

Feeling jubilant about this phenomenal fate which was developing for me, I left the party in a natural, high-spirited mood with Paul and "Wayne"—another Hiller '81 alumnus. However, I would not realize that a short time after approaching Paul's beat up Volkswagen, another fate would befall me.

Preparing to assume my customary position in the backseat, Wayne insisted he'd sit back there and that I should sit up front in the passenger seat since I was a lot taller than he. We playfully argued where we were to be situated until I concurred with Wayne and held the passenger seat upright as he shuffled into the cramped quarters of the back seat. Unbeknownst to me, if I were a king in the game of chess, this apparent act of innocence would be the move which would lead to my checkmate.

A little under two miles from Ilyacoff's house, Patrolman Kenneth W. Torboli of the East Washington Police Department was traveling east on Route 136—



Volkswagen Craig Meyers was a passenger in the night of the accident.

East Beau Street—when an oncoming car was speeding erratically on the opposite side of this winding two lane thoroughfare due West. Upon glancing into his rearview mirror, Patrolman Torboli witnessed sparks shooting from the tires as the Volkswagen Beetle crossed lanes and crashed into a telephone pole about 12:45 A.M. Without hesitation, Patrolman Torboli contacted the local ambulance and fire department services from the City of Washington and South Strabane. Because he not only was a patrolman in this East Washington section of town where the accident occurred, but a Sergeant within the City of Washington Police Department, Officer Torboli knew the procedure which would get an immediate response.

The cans and bottles scattered about the steel carnage which was once an automobile transporting three eighteen-year-old boys celebrating an extended break from college glistened, as the “jaws of life”—the fire department’s hurst tool—was cutting its way through the Volkswagen’s roof at a fever pitch to the unconscious boy who had been imprisoned within the wreckage for forty-five minutes. For the neighbors huddled about watching and praying, words of concern—not question—filled the air, for the alcoholic contents of the cylinders spread about their feet was no doubt the culprit of the dismay before them. Passersby, in their pursuit to understand, moved onward at a slow pace as officials from the police department and personnel from the fire department urged them to move on. One of those driving by was E. Ronald Salvitti, M.D., who offered to render assistance, if needed. Paramedics waited anxiously either to retrieve life support systems or prepare to get a stretcher for a young corpse.

Nestled in the hills of North Franklin Township in Washington sets a modest home whose senectuous residents' tranquillity would be incessantly shaken that night. Gwen Meyers' (58) sound sleep was disturbed by the ringing phone by the bed at approximately 2 A.M. Wayne's bricklayer mother had called, asking if Craig was in. Yelling out to her husband, who had been up all night caring for his confused mother-in-law, Mrs. Meyers asked Frank (62) if Craig had returned from his outing. Fearful of what was to transpire, an overwhelming feeling of apprehension anguished them with the force of a dagger piercing a heart. What Mr. Meyers was about to see would forever shatter their peace. Craig's bed was empty—he had not returned.

Wayne's mother told Mrs. Meyers that Craig had been in a car accident and that his condition was bad. Why she would ask if Craig were home when she knew he was in the hospital is anybody's guess. Perhaps she wanted to know if Mrs. Meyers had already been informed of the accident and this was her way of ascertaining that. Mr. and Mrs. Meyers contacted Craig's brother, Scott and sister-in-law, telling them what little they knew about the accident and to come watch Grandma Barnhart.

Wasting no time, the elderly couple discarded their nightwear for street clothes and hurried for the Washington Hospital where their son was fighting for his life. Speeding north on Main Street, accelerating through the flashing yellow lights of this early morning trepidation with little regard for any traffic, the ten minute drive to the hospital took what seemed an eternity. With heart racing at the speed that car was moving, his white hair dripping with perspiration, Mr. Meyers was gasping for every breath while trying to make sense of the reason for this holocaust.

The haunting memory of Craig lying on the emergency room gurney underneath a white sheet with blood oozing from his inner ear while his head was secured with a neck brace will be imprinted in the mind of Mrs. Meyers until her last breath. When seeing the many nurses saying his name/to "hang in there" loudly over and over to keep Craig stimulated while working frantically to stabilize him, Mrs. Meyers knew the nightmare before her was life-threatening. This was confirmed when the doctor supervising the operation of the trauma unit that night said Craig had sustained a severe head injury that Washington Hospital was not equipped to handle and that Craig would need to be life-flighted to Allegheny General Hospital via helicopter, about thirty-five miles away in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Tears pouring from her eyes, the terror Mrs. Meyers felt at that moment was incredible. Pleading for divine intervention that her son not be a sacrificial lamb because some teens wanted to experience the joys associated with overindulgence, this loving caregiver wouldn't have given it a second thought trading places with her dying boy. She could have never imagined that the evening which began with her son joyously coming home for a holiday weekend, would end up as one where intravenous tubes would feed Craig the shock and pain medicine necessary for survival while an oxygen mask increased his chances another breath would be taken.

Because he knew he might be needed, Mr. Meyers gathered all the strength he could to remain cognizant of what was going on around him. Mrs. Meyers was con-

cerned that her husband was going to pass out from exhaustion, for his face was turning a frightful shade of gray and fearful that the excitement would cause him to go into cardiac arrest. However, Mr. Meyers is a strong-willed man whose astonishing strength enabled him to endure the dread which tormented him. Because expression of emotion, either spoken or acted out was taboo, Mr. Meyers resorted to writing memoirs as a way to exorcise the horror which enveloped him. The following is an excerpt of Mr. Meyers' account of the incidences of February 13, 1982:

"Craig was home from college for the weekend. It was to be a long weekend and he didn't have to be back to school until Tuesday morning. I was sitting on the couch when Craig came down the stairs from his room and stated he was going out with some of his classmates for awhile that evening.

I was actually glad Craig was going out for once with young people his own age. The first semester of school, Craig would come home and stay the total weekend with his mother and I. I asked him who was going to pick him up. Craig said, "I don't think you know him dad, but I have his picture in our school year-book." He showed me the picture of the boy. Craig then asked me if I would be up, as he didn't think he would be very late and that he left his keys and money at college. I said I would be up (and) he told me his mother had given him some money and he wouldn't need any more.

When the driver pulled up in an aged Volkswagen, I can remember my thoughts that I was glad it wasn't a "souped up" car. How wrong I was thinking this car to be safe.

As usual, I watched the 11:00 to 11:30 news on television and then went upstairs to prepare for bed. I put on my pajamas and went down to the living room remembering Craig didn't have a key to get in. At about 1 A.M., February 14, 1982, Gwen's mother started her fussing and calling out again so I went to see if she was alright. Some time after that, the phone rang and Gwen called to me and asked if Craig was in. I ran up to his room thinking maybe he had returned when I was preparing for bed—no Craig. As soon as Gwen said "No he isn't," I heard her cry out "Oh no!!" She had just been informed he was in an auto accident and wasn't good.

How I ever got dressed and to Washington Hospital, I'll never remember. How we ever got Scott and (his wife) over to watch Gwen's mother, I'll never know.

The next thing I remember was Gwen asking the mother of the driver if alcohol was involved—the mother said "Yes." They permitted me to go in where Craig was to see him. He was partly cleaned up by then, but still a bloody mess. My first question to the nurse was, "Is there any alcohol on him?" Her reply was, "There is no indication of alcohol."

The hospital had contacted our family doctor and he said he refers all head injuries to Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh and the hospital in turn had ordered Life Flight in to transport Craig to the Pittsburgh hospital. Gwen wanted to go with him, but there wasn't room. This surprised me because I could never get Gwen on an airplane let alone a helicopter

I dislike Pittsburgh traffic with a passion and I did not know how to get to Allegheny General Hospital. But we called Scott, and (his wife's brother) was going to drive us up to AGH because he knew the route. All the time we waited

for Life Flight and our ride to arrive, the nurses kept saying, "Are you alright Mr. Meyers? Can we get you something?" I was in a fog. All I could do is look at that poor, battered boy and even had the thought if that boy doesn't make it, I don't want to be alright. I wanted to go with him. Driving onto I-79 at Washington, we spotted the helicopter heading north."

In a comatose condition, Craig's diagnosis upon admission to Allegheny General Hospital was Closed Head Injury. Sustaining a basilar skull fracture, Craig was barely hanging onto life. Resulting in his having vascular compromise to the right lower extremity, Craig had a right femoral comminuted fracture which severed his femoral artery. If the arterial occlusion caused by the splintering break of his leg cannot be opened and/or if infection has set in, Craig's leg will need to be amputated. Also, Craig had a serous laceration of the soft tissue of the right ear so severe the ear might have to be removed and replaced with a plastic one. If there are complications, Craig could lose the hearing in that ear.

Together, five surgeons, an anesthesiologist, and a battalion of nurses were gathered about Craig's disfigured body that had been mangled when the Volkswagen's passenger seat was crushed against the utility pole. Performing their heroics masterfully, these miracle workers in the operating room of Allegheny General not only had to work with skill and precision, but with speed, for the swelling of the brain had reached a dangerous level. The longer the lacerations/fractures were exposed and not treated, the greater the likelihood that infection would set in.

The neurosurgeon, E. Richard Prostko, M.D., inserted an intracranial pressure monitor into the body of the right lateral ventricle. This shunt, situated in the middle of Craig's forehead, not only measured the significant cerebral edema (the excessive fluid in the main portion of the brain), but lessened the pressure the brain was pressing on the skull. The brain floats on cerebrospinal fluid within the skull which aids in the protection of the brain by acting as a watery cushion. Absorbing shock, this padding is minimal, however. Since there's only a limited amount of room within the skull, if space for the swelling brain is taken up by fluid, the brain has nowhere to go and presses against the walls of the skull. Possibly resulting in significant damage to the brain, force against a skull can actually be more harmful to this portion of the CNS than the insult itself. Safeguarding against choking the brain off of its space is crucial because the billions of cells and trillions of synapses need room to function properly. Whether it be the point of impact/bruise, being starved of oxygen, or squeezed up against the walls of the skull, if the brain's operation is interfered with in any way, its ability to undertake certain tasks could be permanently lost.

A coma has been defined as a profound state of unconsciousness from which the person cannot be aroused. Even neuroprofessionals have a limited understanding of what exactly happens to the brain when it has been injured and why someone becomes comatose. In layman's terms, the brain can only tolerate a certain amount of painful stimuli when it has been injured or disturbed and when the pain exceeds this level, the brain can't take it and shuts off. When the brain shuts off, one is in a coma.

With a brain contusion, prompt action needs taken in order to minimize the effects of the injury. When damage to the central nervous system occurs, no assurance can be made—not even survival.

After moving to a general waiting area upstairs from a private waiting room on the ground floor when Craig was in the ER, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers waited for somebody—anybody—to provide some encouragement that Craig would be okay. This solace did not occur, for the doctors did not know if Craig would make it, or if he'd ever experience some semblance of normalcy again. To provide this comfort to parents whose mind wavered from visions of Craig sleeping in a crib as a baby to the illuminated X-rays of his fractured skull would be a lie.

The dolor of this Valentine's Day massacre was made even more unbearable when, with the ferocity of acid to an eye, one of the vascular surgeons informed an already distraught Mr. Meyers that if the veins used to replace Craig's right femoral artery fail to function properly and do not feed blood to Craig's lower leg, the limb cannot be saved and would he sign a consent form giving the surgeons permission to cut the leg off. Wide-eyed and jaws clenched that a suggestion like this would even be thought of, Mr. Meyers tearfully protested that Craig's a ballplayer and needs his legs; that there's no way the doctors are going to get off easy by him signing a paper stating that if the surgery is difficult, they have the recourse of severing the leg. No way!! Mr. Meyers would not sign.

Exhausted and ragged, Mr. Meyers dropped his head praying to the Higher Power that life not be sifted from his son nor the strength drained from his body. Normally contained and always practical, Mr. Meyers would have bartered his soul to rid Craig of his agony. He loved that boy.

A rational woman, Mrs. Meyers knew enough about medicine to realize her son might not survive and, if he does, may never live a life free from confinement and limitation. All that existed in her universe at this time in space was her son. Her faith never dwindled nor her spirituality questioned. Her belief in the power of prayer and its direct line to God was the tool she utilized every available moment.

Not knowing if their work would be successful long-term, the vascular surgeons who explored the right femoral artery via an arteriogram—Daniel L. Diamond, M.D. and Joseph C. Young, M.D.—finished the operation on Craig's severed artery unable to ascertain how the leg would respond. Ultimately requiring an end-to-end anastomoses, these doctors would later report that only time can tell if the open wound in Craig's right leg had been subjected to infection or if the veins that replaced the artery would continue working.

The orthopedic surgeon, Joseph E. Imbriglia, M.D., inserted a seventeen-inch titanium steel rod in the center of Craig's femur to mend the break. The metal used in this open reduction internal fixation procedure will never have to be removed. After the vascular surgeons completed their monumental feat of getting the substitute veins to act as a surrogate artery circulating blood to Craig's lower leg, two dozen staples were embedded in his inner leg to shut the ten inch open wound. A dozen staples were implanted in the outer part of Craig's leg to enclose the opening

made when the surgeons' scalpel borrowed the veins which, with God's will, would serve as a passageway for the artery that had fallen prey to the shrapnel of Craig's splintered femur.

Dr. Hankle, the oral maxillofacial surgeon who operated on Craig's right ear which was torn from his head when it penetrated the glass of the passenger door window, reconstructed the ear with the artistry of a Michaelangelo classic. However, one hundred-twenty stitches, not a paint brush, were used for this masterpiece. Despite this work of art, no assurance could be made that the blood flow necessary to maintain the ear would continue.

The ravages of this bewildering decimation left Mr. and Mrs. Meyers paralyzed of little emotion beyond the petrifying fear that their eighteen-year-old son, who was devoid of any sensation while in a fetal-like state, would not live to see morning. Expectations and aspirations of what this boy would someday achieve have now decayed into the most elementary rudiments. An infinite number of questions, but not enough answers. For all intents and purposes, has a life that can experience joy and happiness been replaced by one that may know only despair and restriction. Only the preponderant Lord Almighty could have knowledge of this. Trust that God had worked through the surgeons' hands—answering their prayers—was what the Meyers pleaded for.

Weary from the malevolence of this evening, the gray-haired couple slowly got off the elevator trudging towards the pay phone, so they could call a taxi to take them to the bus station, when Scott appeared in the lobby. The disquietude which possessed him was evident and something Mr. and Mrs. Meyers had never seen, for Scott always projected the image of a stoic and the founder of travesty when it came to interacting with his brother. However, the perniciousness of the past twenty-four hours exposed a side of him which had been hidden so well. Words could not even begin to describe Craig's condition when his brother asked. The harrowing looks on Mr. and Mrs. Meyers' faces telling a story of distress and devastation, Scott could tell just how bad off his brother was.

Upon arriving home, a cooked meal prepared by their daughter-in-law's mother awaited the Meyers. The agonizing feelings repressed by Mrs. Meyers during this night of misery were just too overwhelming not to purge. She needed a cathartic-like expression to rid herself of the demons which taunted her.

With tears flowing, Mrs. Meyers was kept from falling to her knees by the support offered by the family around her. She screamed out how dare someone be so conceited and selfish as to critically injure the son she devoted eighteen years of her life caring and nurturing, for the sake of being social at a party. To have a young life full of promise thrown away by someone's thoughtlessness and irresponsibility was something that could never be forgiven. Knowing that her son was in Allegheny General Hospital struggling to stay alive because of Paul's excessive indulgence, incensed Mrs. Meyers with an inundated feeling of furor. This grieving mother felt regret that she could only imagine standing over a restrained and subdued Paul, burrowing a knife deep within his chest cavity, seeking to remove the lungs which sustained him. Enraged and dumbfounded that Paul's

brilliant and worldly parents must not have had the time to provide him with the type of fostering one needs to form moral parameters of conduct, Craig's parents couldn't fully understand how a family could ever refrain from such devotion. Blasphemous or not, Mrs. Meyers damned the souls of Paul and his family for the insensate condition her son was in. Victimized by another family's inability to develop a parent-child bond, for whatever reason(s) healthy development would be stunted, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers wouldn't deserve the consequence.

When a child senses they are not being attended to and are being overlooked, they can feel unimportant and not worthy. And, often because of their inability to communicate effectively, kids will let adults/parents know there is something wrong by their actions. One way young kids show they are disturbed is by smoking and/or drinking at an early age, hoping that a grown-up shows some concern. If nurturing does not occur, the child can feel not cared about. When the child grows to be an adolescent, the teen does not want his peers to realize that he's flooded with insecurities and will go to great lengths to conceal this. Paul's cocksure walk and carefree style were an effective facade, as few questioned his early substance usage escapades beyond being prematurely advanced.

After a sleepless night, while Scott was driving his parents across the Ninth Street Bridge to Allegheny General, an eerie silence lingered, telling a story of three passengers' thoughts that Craig might be dead. Their anxiety rose like the mercury in a thermometer on a scorching summer day as the hospital appeared before them. Did Craig live through the night? Is he overcome with pain? What is he feeling? Can he feel? Questions abound as the Meyers approached the waiting area which was going to be their home for the next eight hours. Between 12–12:30 P.M. and 7–7:30 P.M. they could see Craig twice, thirty minutes in the afternoon and thirty minutes in the evening, while he was in intensive care.

Entering the private ICU room Craig shared with an elderly gentleman who suffered a stroke, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were relieved when they saw the inanimate object which their son now resembled was still breathing. Three trauma nurses, one for each shift, were to be with Craig around the clock. In case something happened, the nurse on duty—dressed for battle—would be right there to render immediate assistance and call for help.

When Scott came into the ICU and saw his comatose brother that first time after the accident, he could feel his stomach tightening and getting sick from the sight of seeing his younger sibling lying motionless; unresponsive to anything or anyone. IV's, monitors, hoses were strewn about Craig measuring his vitals and feeding his body with the medicines and nutrients necessary for survival. Entrenched in his right leg were thick silver staples and wrapped around his head was a sanitary belt holding in place a plastic cup which protected the cauliflower which was his right ear. While the shocked brother stood watching Craig, the trauma nurse was obsessed with the readings of the monitors above Craig's bed, as his blood pressure, heart beat, temperature, and the swelling of his brain were digitally displayed. As urine trickled down a tube from the catheter, Scott needed to excuse himself.

Suffocated by fears of what the next moment may bring, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers spoke to their son and could only hope the sheets covering their boy who had been bludgeoned by the utility pole would continue moving with each respiration. Speaking to a son who could neither hear their words of encouragement or feel the kiss on his bruised face was a task of immense proportions. Encouraged to talk of things which Craig was familiar, the Meyers spoke of what they think the Pirates should do during baseball's interleague trading period, the Steelers' plans for the college draft in two months, and what the critics were saying about Joe Perry's solo project in the papers. They could have been speaking to the lamp by Craig's bedside and gotten the same response, as the only sound coming from Craig's bed was the humming of the motorized oxygen tank and the clicking of the flickering numbers on the many monitors. The only good thing about this perilous morning was that Craig couldn't see his parents' tears of consternation.

Mrs. Meyers gazed at her child's still body hoping and praying that some portion of Craig's personality—no matter how small—would surface, letting the Meyers know that he's still in that body which resembles their son. For Mrs. Meyers, the question and concern were a constant. Was anyone in there? Does he have any life left in him, and if he does, is this what we can expect for the years to come? Or has he already left us and gone to the Afterlife? Wanting to shake him free of this unconscious, Mrs. Meyers would hear herself say, "Where are you? Damn it Craig, wake up and tell us!"

Thoughts about how people in a coma on television just wake up suddenly and say, "Hey, where am I? What happened?" tormented Mrs. Meyers, for she knew this was a scenario conjured by Hollywood and not one based on fact. But just maybe. Leaning on the shoulder of her husband for strength, together they battled the barrage of ominous visions which would overcome most. But because their son needs them, they would become chiseled of valor.

One is supposed to enjoy their retirement, not subjugated by demoralizing thoughts. Retired a little over three years, Mr. Meyers looked down at his son and was being taunted by a myriad of questions about how this tragedy—which left his boy unaware of everything about him—could have been avoided. Languishing from the thoughts that his son's head hit that telephone pole with the force a bat hits a baseball and his lacerated face penetrated the glass window with the power an anchor thrusts into the sea, Mr. Meyers promised Craig that he will do whatever possible to make sure Paul and his family feel repercussions of their actions. Craig's brother-in-law, who served in the infantry during the Vietnam War, wanted five minutes alone with Paul in a locked room.

As their daughter-in-law entered the hospital room, a black gloom beset the Meyers—her arrival meant their half-hour that evening with Craig was over. Mr. and Mrs. Meyers got into an argument over whether or not they were going to rent one of the rooms across the street the hospital reserves for patients' families, or travel the thirty-five miles back to Washington away from the son Mrs. Meyers envisioned would awaken—calling out for them—only to be terrorized thinking he was in this blood-curdling predicament without so much as any support.

Mr. Meyers knew that being vulnerable in the North Side of Pittsburgh could be treacherous and he wasn't prepared to risk the family's well-being, especially when Craig is in a state where he may be dependent on them for his very survival.

Upon their return home, flocks of neighbors told the frazzled seniors that their hopes and prayers were directed toward Craig. Thoughts of Craig's demise lingered, but never conceded to. The pain and worry went beyond description. Images of the phone ringing and a voice saying, "I'm sorry to inform you of this, but Craig's no longer with us," horrified Mr. and Mrs. Meyers.

Consumed by the distance she was from her son and the ravaging perplexity of what—if anything—he is feeling, Mrs. Meyers felt a burning ache in her heart and an icy chill down her spine when the phone rang. Her eyes meeting her husband's, Mrs. Meyers positioned herself ready to leap from her chair and scurry to the phone—only to hesitate. During this momentarily delay, a ghoulish script played in Mrs. Meyers' mind where a surgeon with a blood spotted operating scrub said Craig had suffered some complications during surgery and that a team of doctors tried to stop the hemorrhaging, but couldn't, and that Craig has died. Before the doctor could say "I'm sorry," Mrs. Meyers apprehensively lifted the receiver from its hook—despite its incredible weight—anxiously saying "Hello." Fearful that this script would be played out, the incisive voice of Mr. Michaels corrupted the phone line.

On the one extreme, Mrs. Meyers couldn't have been happier that the Director didn't say "Action," putting into motion the horrid script she conjured, yet, was taken back that she was speaking to the perpetrator of this crime's father. With fingers surely crossed, Mr. Michaels asked the mother of the child his son rendered absent of all sensation how Craig was. When Mrs. Meyers replied that he was alive, the barren trees in the Meyers' backyard swayed ever so gently, as Mr. Michaels must have breathed a shallow sigh of relief. Like a game show host awarding the beaten contestant a consolation prize, Mr. Michaels said that his son would be on crutches for several weeks because he had sustained a cracked pelvis which caused him much pain and that Paul had also lost a contact lens. The pain endured by the Michaels family must be excruciating.

Mrs. Meyers was noncommittal, as she could only picture Paul—realizing the danger of *his* being seriously hurt—veering the driver's side of the car away from the oncoming pole, allowing the pawn in the passenger seat to take the impact caused by his stupor. Possessing the same foresight he had as Paul's guiding influence, Mr. Michaels mistakenly assumed his insurance would cover all Craig's medical expenses, as he assured Mrs. Meyers that his policy was an all-encompassing one. Mr. Meyers, who had picked up the other phone, said little fearing one of his outbursts might result in damaging ramifications later on.

After their grueling day at the hospital, the Meyers needed a sabbatical from this constant overload of disaster, but their calm would be disturbed with the convulsing frequency of a leaking faucet's ever-lasting drip. Crying out how difficult life has been for her—standing in front of the mirror—Grandma Barnhart gazed

at her shoulder, wondering how that scar ever got there. Unable to comprehend how badly her youngest grandson had been hurt because her mental capacities had all but deteriorated by now, Mrs. Meyers' mother could not imagine the toxicity her complaints had on those who opened their home up to her. During this time Grandma Barnhart's daughter and son-in-law needed loving care and support themselves, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers had the cumbersome task of trying to persuade this resistant elder that she could no longer live in the home which had been her residence for approximately forty years.

Feeling a surge of energy that she needed to get back home immediately, the eighty-four-year-old woman pointed her crooked forefinger at her daughter demanding to be taken home that very instant, for she was sick and tired of being held hostage against her will. Despite her permanently being unable to lift her arm above shoulder level, Grandma Barnhart scolded Gwen that she doesn't deserve being mistreated and prevented from driving her car to the store where she could get some spring cleaning supplies for the task which lies ahead this upcoming season. Telling Grandma Barnhart that this was against doctor's orders would have been fruitless, for she was intent on resuming her independent life which could no longer be possible.

Not one to handle too much at one time without becoming aggravated, Mr. Meyers' patience with his mother-in-law had evaporated, for he needed time uninterrupted to focus on his son. Screaming how dare she be so selfish when her grandson could be dying that very moment, like Mr. Hyde emerging from Dr. Jeckyll, Mr. Meyers got in the face of his elderly mother-in-law he normally was on cordial terms with. Back-pedaling from this irate father whom she could not hear, Grandma Barnhart and her son-in-law were separated by Scott who put his hands on his grief-stricken father's shoulders and took him downstairs where he could collect himself. Mr. Meyers needed to regain control and rest, for he would go to Pittsburgh once again in the morning.

For five days, from February 14th to February 18th, little changed in the Meyers' routine. They'd arrive at AGH in the morning praying that Craig had made it through the night, and spent one hour total out of the nine or so they were there speaking to their son whom they could not tell whether he could hear them or not. The nurse watching Craig and his older roommate would tell the Meyers that not much has changed in Craig's condition, and that all staff could really do at the time was to continuously monitor him to safeguard against anything happening. To prevent Craig from getting sores and contracting pneumonia, so he'd be as comfortable as possible, staff would gingerly rotate Craig several times a day. For a few hours, Craig would be lying on his back when two nurses would turn his dead weight body on his stomach, before reinserting the many IV's.

When the Meyers returned home, neighbors would want a report on Craig's condition almost the instant they got back. The phone never seeming to stop ringing, consoling friends of the family would offer their encouragement and want updated. On one hand, this was stressful for the Meyers because each time the phone

rang, their heart stopped and skin crawled fearing they'd receive news that Craig put up a valiant fight to stay alive, but had sustained too much damage to make it and that it might be better off that he didn't survive. On the other, the offering of prayers, concerns, and sympathy was comforting and greatly appreciated. Mr. Brezinski would call everyday to find out how Craig was doing, expressing his family's sorrow and regard. Mr. and Mrs. Meyers also received calls from the Michaels on a daily basis early on, but for a different reason.

After the Michaels made one of their too frequent inquiries, the trees in the Meyers' backyard always seemed to sway after Paul's folks would find out that Craig hadn't succumbed. Dead leaves, fallen victims of autumn's touch, swirled about destiny unknown with these winds of divided concern. Upon speaking directly to the person responsible for this calamity, Mrs. Meyers admonished Paul for his role in the accident which could have been easily prevented had he been the friend to Craig he professed to be and refrained from drinking when he suspected his coherence and coordination might be compromised. Mrs. Meyers asked Paul if Craig was drinking with Paul saying he wasn't.

After informing Paul that Craig's family did not know the circumstances surrounding the accident or about the details of the party, Paul lied saying the party took place in the nearby community of Canonsburg—about ten miles from Washington—at a residence where he didn't know the family's name. It was only later, during one of her pleasantries with Mr. Michaels, did Mrs. Meyers find out that the party was at the Ilyacoff's in Washington. One would think if Paul truly were a friend of Craig's, he would have been more than willing to help Craig and his family during this dark time when so many questions had so few answers. However, Paul was more concerned with not implicating the Ilyacoff's, than helping Craig. Great guy.

In the morning of February 19th, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers saw no improvement in Craig, as he was still in his aware-free state. Trying their best not to let the constant distress they had been trampled by since Craig's been hurt to show on their face, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers put on their animated expression and approached Craig in a sprightly, optimistic manner; not letting on the sadness with which they were shackled.

During the countless hours at the hospital when they were away from Craig, the Meyers learned from the doctors at AGH as much as they could about head injury. To say the news was encouraging would not be accurate.

Mr. and Mrs. Meyers wanted some answers to the multitude of questions they had. The response they were growing tired of hearing was that there just isn't enough known about the unexplored universe which is the brain to pinpoint what symptoms Craig's going to have and their severity—if he survives. The Meyers were informed that if Craig does live, there is a strong likelihood that there's going to be some permanent damage physically and/or emotionally.

Adding to their tumultuous anxiety, the Meyers were told that the longer Craig remains comatose, the worse off they can expect his symptoms to be. With this information, the thought of Craig's not being responsive was a menacing one, for his awakening from this deep unconscious now took on an element of urgency.

The realization that some people never escape this unknown existence of being comatose was eating away at the Meyers like a burning ulcer. Although they were far from surrendering, each minute it became more and more difficult for Craig's parents to remain optimistic. As the thirty-minute evening visiting time for families to see their loved ones in the ICU approached on February 19th, six days after the accident, the Meyers were about to see something which would provide them with a new confidence.

As the precious half-hour when relatives could see their family member in the ICU grew near, outside the door of the room Craig and the elderly gentleman were in resembled the Parkway West when traffic's bottled up entering the Ft. Pitt Tunnels inbound during rush hour. As Mr. and Mrs. Meyers walked down the hallway from the waiting area to Craig's room staring at the floor beneath them, they were hopeful of—yet not counting on—seeing some improvement from Craig's insensate condition of the morning. As each step brought Mr. and Mrs. Meyers closer to the crowd in the hallway outside the ICU room—this time accompanied by Scott and his wife—the unwelcome predator known as malaise had become a constant.

However, the private nurse's beaming smile greeted the Meyers when the door opened, weakening this intruding menace. Flooded with a sea of hope because this astute medical professional was normally as expressionless as a caretaker of a mortuary, the Meyers rushed to their son's bedside and—bent close to his black and blue face—saw that his eyes were open a quarter of an inch!!

Craig's hospital gown soaked with the tears of joy which fell freely from his father's wrinkled face as Mr. Meyers excitedly exclaimed, "You're gonna make it buddy, you're gonna make it!" Mr. Meyers envisioned his son pounding his glove and chomping on his bubble gum as he positioned himself at shortstop in time for this summer's Thoroughbred League competition. When it was the home team's turn to bat, he could hear his son's name echoing throughout the park as the batting order was announced over the P.A. system. Yep, Mr. Meyers promised himself he wouldn't complain anymore if Craig played his stereo too loud or had his amp turned up too high. Hell, he'd even let it slide when prying loose the Kleenex which stuck to the bottom of the trash can because that's where Craig hawkered. In his mind, it was a given now that Craig was going to pull through this. An impeccable craftsman who has been skillful at constructing things for a half of a century, Mr. Meyers could have never imagined that such a small quarter-inch measurement could have such a massive impact on him.

Mrs. Meyers put her hand in Craig's left one saying, "If you can hear me, squeeze my hand." Ever so gently, like an infant holding its bottle, Mrs. Meyers was overcome with elation when she felt her eighteen-year-old son's hand attempting to grasp her's. Flooded with tears, Mrs. Meyers joyfully said, "He can hear us!!!"

A glimmer of hope in their voices and the slightest flush appearing on their faces, Scott and his wife were ecstatic to witness these caregivers emerge a little from the dark clouds of despair which strangles a parent when they lose a child. Upon his looking at his brother, Scott could see that Craig's eyes were not focus-

ing on anything, rather, staring into nothingness. Like that of a corpse with its eyes open, sight would be void. The family of Craig's roommate were overjoyed that Craig had shown a sign of progress. Seeing Craig's parents' agony when they came in every morning, not knowing if their son's alive, was a grim picture.

Wishes that Armageddon would arrive have been replaced with a rejuvenated spirit and trust that things will work out. Despite not wanting to disrupt their positive outlook which the Meyers feared they would be forever deprived, the nurse was obligated to caution the family that, with brain injury, there will be periods of time when Craig seems alright, only to revert to a less-than-promising state. In order to safeguard against a fall from unyielding jubilation to the murk that is melancholy, the nurse informed the Meyers that Craig's injuries still require close scrutiny because at any given moment, he could regress. While reinforcing the idea that all gains need appreciated, the nurse also knew that to allow Craig's family to revel in what could very well be a mirage, would be sacrilegous.

Assuming the insensible state which they have grown all too familiar, Craig would not squeeze or release his parents' hands again this breakthrough day. As the visiting time ended this momentous evening, having witnessed Craig coming in and out of consciousness, the Meyers looked at Craig hoping his eyes opening would be the first step on the road to recovery.

For the first time in what seemed an everlasting deluge of horror, Mr. Meyers was not mired in despondency and swamped with dire portraits of what could become of his youngest. This minuscule opening of the eyes prompted Mr. Meyers to experience an excitement which could not be contained. Although joyful by events of this evening, Mrs. Meyers was more restrained than her husband, not knowing what future dialogue has been written, for head injury can change the calm current the chapter appears destined, into one where rapids become the rule.

The Meyers were home but a few minutes when the phone began ringing. Telling the numerous well-wishers the delightful news of Craig's improvement, these thrilled parents thanked everyone for their prayers and support. A serene comfort warmed the Meyers until the voice of the father, whose son was responsible for their pain, regurgitated from the ear piece of the telephone. A gail force gust of wind uprooted several trees in the Meyers' backyard when informing the caller of the significant gains made by Craig the last twenty-four hours. This driving parental figure fearful of his professional reputation being tarnished if his son would have to go to prison for an accidental slaying, surely would be relieved that an impending sentence could be avoided for this sinister act of irresponsibility.

Not resulting in a death, the real reason for the accident wouldn't get advertised in the paper and a health care professional wouldn't have to be subjected to explaining how his son had committed vehicular homicide because he was driving under the influence. To conceal the true culprit, a mental itinerary would need to be thought out, so that the blame and focus could be shifted away from Paul and his prominent family. In order to maintain his high status in the community, the

company line Mr. Michaels developed would be one where the car his son was driving had skidded on ice, ramming into the utility pole. Part of this story line possibly included Paul risking his own life to save his friend's—after returning home from Bible study. Being that the weather had been mild for a few weeks, Mother Nature was not to blame, rather, Paul's 0.18 blood-alcohol content was the culprit. But that needn't be mentioned.

The trip to Pittsburgh the morning of February 20th was not as bleak as the six other trips, for Craig's eyes opening had instilled a new energy in the Meyers. Wondering what improvement they're going to see today when they get to the hospital, Mr. Meyers' broad smile was indicative of his thrilled mood.

Mr. Meyers pictured a scene where Craig had both his feet underneath the foot of the hospital bed counting sit-ups one-by-one, saying that his busted leg is keeping him from doing as many as he would like and that this hospital stay isn't going to prevent him from staying in shape. Mrs. Meyers would have been happy to see Craig's eyes continuing to open and his spastic right arm loosening from his chin a little.

As the doors to the elevator opened, one of the registered nurses sitting at the nurses' station near Craig's room darted towards the parents. Expecting to hear that their son has made the most miraculous turnaround in the history of neuromedicine, Mr. Meyers surely thought that this white flash rushing towards him was about to inform he and his wife that Craig's complaining of being bored and wants his guitar. However, this was but an illusion, for the RN's stinging words would capsize the Meyers' spirit. Needing to be watched closely—with a doctor on standby—the Meyers would be informed that Craig had been running a dangerously high fever within the past hour.

Embracing one another, hopes trampled, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were horrified when they saw two nurses working strenuously at Craig's bedside beneath the many additional monitors that had been brought in. The Meyers' fears reached a foreboding level when they could imagine hearing Craig's room being said over the PA system, then the word, "Stat!!," which notifies staff of an emergency situation. As the Meyers stood in the small ICU room watching helplessly—without giving specifics—the nurses quickly changed Craig's bed, putting in a cooling mattress to try to lower his temperature.

Since Craig has been hurt, feelings of helplessness have grasped the Meyers with an overbearing grip. Now all they can do is stand by and watch as these nurses control their destiny. The thought that Craig's leg may have been infiltrated with bacteria after all and that these germs were causing the fever was a demoralizing reality that Mr. and Mrs. Meyers hoped and prayed would not materialize.

Despite the Meyers' desire to be close to Craig in his time of need, their intellect told them to stay out of the way and let the medical professionals do their job. Although it was painful to tolerate, they restrained their maternal/paternal instincts, so Craig could get what he needed. With one hand holding her husband's, while the other guided the kiss she blew to her son, Mrs. Meyers emotions had

been running ragged fearing that one of these times Craig just might not be so resilient and come out unscathed.

Within a day's time, their thoughts have changed from one where they were thinking their son was on his way back to one where he was going back—wards. A vicious scene where their boy was lying underneath a blood-soaked sheet with a stump, where his leg used to be, oozing blood ousted the apparition of his fielding grounders and firing strikes. As they would look at Craig, they could only wonder what he was feeling and thinking being in this environment where the numbers on the monitors were clicking as a clock does when time is running out. Strange faces huddling about him like a desperate offense when it's fourth-and-long, the Meyers family's fate was firmly placed in the hands of these professionals "advancing the frontier of medicine."

Craig's eyes were not open and he was as still as the calm, winter evenings of this February 1982. Praying the sheets would continue moving with each respiration, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were terrified that their son would succumb to this evil where his responsiveness was like that of a cadaver.

The parents of this lifeless youth could imagine Paul, with his broad boyish smile, chug beer after beer in front of his adoring teenaged peers while they patted him on the back following another liquid conquest on the night of the thirteenth. Puffing a stream of smoke from his cigarette, Paul would bark, "Get me another one!," which was met with a roaring chorus of approval. With this attention, Paul undoubtedly felt the warm sense of belonging that all young people strive for, especially those from households where the parent's child-rearing capacities are likely compromised, or not foremost in their list of priorities. How unfair that the Meyers must pay the price because truly important values were not appreciated or instilled.

The Meyers could picture Craig in an adjacent room at Ilyacoff's, not paying mind to any commotion because he'd be engaged in deep conversation about what the Steelers need to do to resurrect the "Steel Curtain" which has decayed due to the age of its members and poor drafts which haven't replenished the line. However, the clapping and hails of acceptance were for Paul's ability to chug down some beer and not for any scouting report or draft analysis. Yeah, Paul was king of the hill this night. Unfortunately, the king's ransom might be their son's life.

During the evening visiting period, Craig showed dramatic improvement. Although the reading on his thermometer was still high, it had fallen a few degrees. And when his father placed his hand in his son's, there was an immediate attempt to clutch it. Mr. Meyers couldn't tell if this was an automatic reflex, or a response to Craig's being terrified. To ease his fears, like a mother reassures her toddler not to be scared of the dark, Mrs. Meyers told Craig that he was running a fever, but that it was coming down and not to be afraid. Like speaking to a small child, she didn't know if she was heard.

Flooded by this sea of havoc, the Meyers were being eaten away inside about how their fortunes have changed within a night's time. Since yesterday, their emotions

have shifted 180 degrees. Approaching the day with a seemingly impenetrable optimism, they were devastated to find their son burning with a fever that no one knew why this was occurring. Was his body fighting an infection in his leg, ear, both of them, or has the autonomic nervous system—which controls body temperature—been irreversibly collapsed, thus ending any encore for a Cinderella story? What did the grasping of his father’s hand indicate? Was Craig reaching out for someone? Or was the tightening of his hand a biological response sensing the touch of another? Could Craig even sense? If he could, what was he feeling? Questions. So many of them that may never be answered.

As the IV’s pumped Craig the medicine needed to prevent his getting an ulcer, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were excited to see Craig’s eyes were open about three-eighths of an inch this evening, or a little more than yesterday. They were excited because, little by little, Craig seemed to be “coming to” from the morning, but also wary that this increased conscious might be due to his experiencing unbearable discomfort and sensing a destitute of relief. They didn’t know what to think. What did the eyes opening mean? What was the this fever all about; was this a false alarm or a wicked prophecy of what’s to come? Did Craig hear and understand when he grasped with his hand? How long will this not knowing what to think last? Will this coming in and out of consciousness be the rule or the exception? This fluctuation of highs and lows was something Dr. Prostko tried to prepare the Meyers for, but words alone cannot possibly describe the diabolical symptoms of this disability which so little is known. They could only hope these peaks and valleys don’t deplete them of their will to endure.

Like the sharpened ends of the grave digger’s pick, the Meyers subjecting themselves to thoughts of impending upheaval dug a chasm of desolation which they became trapped. Joyous to see Craig going out for once with some peers having fun, the Meyers could not refrain from thinking that only a week ago at this time, their son was alright. In the fourteen years he’s lived in Washington, the only time Craig ever went out to a party, he ends up almost getting killed—and that still might happen. How unfair life can be. Who would have thought that within seven days’ time, their one-time healthy son could die without warning?

As the Meyers looked out a window from Allegheny General Hospital onto the busy streets and packed sidewalks of downtown Pittsburgh heading towards the elevator going home, they thought that out of all the people in this world, why did their son have to be the one that was hurt so bad? He’s only eighteen; why did his number have to come up? Surely, this couldn’t be his time. He’s a good kid who never caused anybody any trouble, why does he have to be the one that suffers when there’s a lot of miserable bastards out on that street that are nothing but trouble and leeches to society? Why? Why? Why?

In the evening of the 20th, the Meyers reflected on the experiences of their day. In this day where there was a surplus of “Why’s?” with no answers, the Meyers went from being horrified to happily excited again that Craig’s eyes were

showing some life. With his lids opening a little more, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers wanted to breathe a deep sigh of relief, but knew now that to become so filled with joy only to have it escape from their grasp was too crushing a blow to endure again. Mercilessly being teased to believe that the light at the end of the tunnel is hope, only to recognize it as merely being a star in the vast unexplored galaxy—light years away—is an unremitting battle that brain injury will wage. To have the air, which was optimism, leak from their balloon was an intolerable hardship that the Meyers have learned to avoid. Just when Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were prepared to take a little time off from this most trying of chapters of the many that have been written in their life and try to unwind some, the phone rang. It was Dr. Prostko.

Fearful of what they were going to hear and with chest burning like the back of a slave who has just been slashed with a cracked whip, the Meyers listened intently as the neurosurgeon told them that sometimes fever occurs when someone has been hurt as critically as their son, and that everything possible is being done to stabilize Craig. Their boy still has a temperature, but it's coming down ever so slowly. Everything about Craig's injury is ever so slowly—especially answers.

To take a respite from the war that Craig's injury declared was impossible for the Meyers because the adrenalin was flowing non-stop with fright about what the future has in store for the family. Fear of the unknown was the wind which guided their sailboat off to a course not known. With head injury, what lies ahead is anybody's guess because no two brain injuries are alike. This was trying for Mr. and Mrs. Meyers because none of their questions could be answered definitively. With the flu, a pulled hamstring, or a torn ligament, doctors basically know that the symptoms will be X-Y-Z and the treatments, A-B-C. But with brain injury, no one knows what's going to happen—and perhaps worse yet—why.

In particular, one unknown haunted Mrs. Meyers. She would wonder, "If and when Craig wakes up, will he remember us?" "Will the son I've spent eighteen years nurturing, caring, and planning for—forget who I am?" "Will he look at me and ask, 'Who are you?'" To think that Mrs. Meyers cleaned up after, bought the things needed in life, doctored, provided a nice home, educated, helped in whatever way possible, prepared meals everyday, etc., etc., etc., for a boy that might not have any idea who she was, would be a horrifying thought for her. If this did happen, she knew that she would just have to start building a new foundation.

Not knowing what to expect in the morning of February 21, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two and learning to approach circumstances which they may encounter with an indifferent attitude, helped the Meyers cope with what they would see today—which wasn't much of anything. As tempting as it was to become elated last evening when Craig's eyes opened their widest since he's been hurt, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were equally restrained from getting too despondent when Craig assumed the lifeless stature they have become all too accustomed to seeing. Eyes not opening nor hands clutching when feeling his father's, there was no response in either the afternoon or evening visiting periods. With head sunk low, the

parents of the boy they thought was “on his way,” would continue to talk to their son as if he were at the dinner table after a day at the ballyard.

As Mrs. Meyers told her comatose son that Danny was going to the Air Force, Craig Johnson was accepted at Penn State, and Brian was going to Brigham Young as a pre-med student, the private nurse looked on, feeling remorseful for the woman whose son doesn't likely know that she's even saying anything about his friends. The family of Craig's roommate felt sickened when they saw the comatose boy's strong-willed father let a tear escape, running down to his whiskered jowls.

When the evening visiting period ended, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers slowly walked past the nurses' station. Not letting on he was being emotionally twisted by the events—or rather—lack of events of the day, Mr. Meyers tried his best to smile at the ladies sitting there. With her husband's arm around her shoulder, the devastation Mrs. Meyers was feeling could no longer be suppressed, as her voice cracked like one beaten in battle. Void of strength, when this committed mother said “Goodnight” to the nurses, her tired eyes spoke volumes. Watching the elevator doors close behind the white-haired couple, these hospital professionals wondered how much more Craig's parents could take.

Like every other occasion the phone rang at the Meyers' house, time would stand still and be frozen until Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were assured that the message wasn't to inform them of some mishap involving Craig. When they got a call on the morning of the 22nd, their heart pounded heavy, given Craig's condition of the evening before. When hearing Dr. Prostko's voice, they expected the worst.

Did the fever do what the Volkswagen couldn't and burn Craig to a lifeless crisp? Mr. Meyers turned as white as the hair hanging on his brow, fearing the news was one where plans would need to be made to transport Craig's dead body to Washington. A thought passed by Mrs. Meyers that she will need to contact the funeral home in town and determine where Craig should be buried; either somewhere in the Washington Cemetery near their home or in Johnstown, where the family has a plot.

However, the doctor's voice did not sound like one where arrangements of this kind would need arranged, for it would be one of promise. To their shock, Dr. Prostko informed the Meyers that Craig ate a little ice cream last night!!!

Was this the same boy who did not move or respond at all yesterday? Apparently, the synapses, neurons, lobes, axons, stem, and only God knows what else in Craig's brain decided to get its act together sometime after the Meyers left last night. It would have been fabulous if these drained parents would have been able to see Craig ingest something other than through an IV, even if it was just slivers of ice cream melting on his tongue, but the Meyers didn't care as long as their boy was showing some life and ridding himself of that fever.

Wallowing in disbelief, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers just couldn't figure how one minute Craig's on the edge of leaving this earth and the next, showing signs of making encouraging strides. Because of the unpredictability of head injury, the Meyers were learning that the only way to remain sane was to accept whatever

happens and roll with the punches. How many jabs and crosses their older bodies can take remains to be seen, though.

On the morning of 2/22/82, Craig's parents talked to Dr. Prostko in the hospital and the doctor informed them that, provided that no complications develop until then, Craig will be transferred tomorrow from the ICU to the seventh floor head trauma unit where those with neurological impairments are placed. The Meyers weren't sure exactly what this meant, but took it as a turning point for the better because constant observation and limited access to their son would no longer be required. Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were thrilled, for they could spend a good portion of the day with their son from 2:00 P.M. to 8:30 P.M., working on functions Craig's medical team deems necessary for recovery. Being the bearer of more good news, having a difficult time containing his cheer, Dr. Prostko gladly reported once again that Craig swallowed a little ice cream and some juice earlier this morning. Of equal importance was Craig's being able to tolerate sitting in a chair equipped with a chin strap and neck brace while his bed was being changed. Feeling a little nauseous that they should appreciate their husky, eighteen-year-old son being able to let ice cream melt in his mouth before choking it down and sitting on his ass in a chair with a belt wrapped around his forehead to keep his head from falling in his lap, the Meyers kept speaking to their son as if he had just won the lottery to keep his spirits from tumbling.

They talked about what they were going to do once he got better. Mrs. Meyers promised to buy Craig a Fender Stratocaster after he got out of the hospital. With chin quivering and eyes filling with a pool of tears, Mr. Meyers talked of how they're going to have to get their fishing license and go to Dutch Fork Lake this summer. These words were spoken not only to keep Craig stimulated, but to remind themselves what their goal in life is now; what they are subjecting themselves to this hell for—so that a tomorrow isn't out of their son's reach.

During this day where Craig showed his parents none of the magic reported to them by staff, the Meyers cherished the news that the neuro-medical professionals have seen enough improvement in Craig to take him to the next level. Earlier, a representative from the hospital's rehabilitation department told the Meyers that Craig would be starting both cognitive and physical therapy as soon as possible. Although the Meyers understood that it is essential to begin retraining the brain without delay, they couldn't believe their son—who was out of consciousness 99.9% of the time—was even being considered for rehab. Also, Craig's heart rate was still beating incredibly fast, his lungs needed suctioned several times a day, IV's were surrounding him, and a feeding tube was in his nose. To Craig's parents, it was inconceivable that he could begin therapy until the representative told them how basic the work was going to be. Counting, saying his A-B-C's, and following an extended forefinger with his eyes would be the tasks asked of Craig. To think their teen-aged son may find these exercises difficult that any kindergarten student could easily do, enraged the Meyers.

In what has become a common occurrence, the Meyers experienced a maze of punishing emotion which, like a levee breaking, came crashing down upon them with a force not forgiving. All being part of the package when someone you love has had a brain injury, confusion, excitement, thrill, terror, relief, and devastation were but a few of the teasing feelings which stoned this devoted couple each day they were with Craig. Not possible knowing if the carousel of sentiment would ever stop its torment, the Meyers dedication had been rooted for the long haul.

When Craig's parents entered their son's new room on the head trauma unit on February 23, the tenth day of his being hurt, they saw Craig lying on his bed as responsive as a rock in their gravel driveway. When Mr. Meyers said, "Good morning buddy! How you feeling today?," the silence was deafening.

Wearing a smile, Mrs. Meyers told her son devoid of life about him, "Honey, the doctors said you can have this big room all to yourself. A nurse won't be watching you all the time because me and daddy will be here a couple of hours each day."

Taking this Tuesday off to see his brother in his new surroundings, Scott said, "Now that you got this room to yourself, you can fart and nobody will hear you." No response. Nothing. It may have been a different setting, but the results were the same.

Like they heard so many times before, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers were told that when the nurses caught Craig in a conscious moment this morning, they hurriedly gave him juice and ice cream before he slipped into that other world where no one knows where he is—maybe not even Craig himself. Now, because they can spend more than one hour a day with him, Craig's parents might now be able to see for themselves something from Craig other than his unconscious. But that wouldn't be today.

When the nurse knocked on the door and poked her head in saying, "Visiting hours are over," the Meyers couldn't believe 8:30 P.M. had arrived so soon. Trying to gather some salvation from yet another response-free day, Mr. Meyers jokingly asked the nurse if they could spare a few blankets and let them sleep in the corner of Craig's spacious room. The drained father said they wouldn't get in the way and Scott promised he wouldn't feed his brother any more flies. With a smile of her own for the ragged family she admired for their dedication and wit in this incapacitating period in their life, the plump nurse chuckled, saying her supervisor wouldn't go for that, but if she had it her way, they could stay as long as they wanted.

After talking on the phone to their daughter, oldest son, and countless friends and neighbors whose frequent inquiries and encouragement were invaluable, Mr. Meyers looked at Scott and his wife, whose presence and support were vital ingredients to their maintaining the strength needed to withstand this prostration. Thinking how undeserving the family and friends of Craig are going through hell because a boy who has known only a life of privilege needed to be accepted at a party one night, Mr. Meyers tried to acknowledge this as an unfortunate part of history he could not change and would need to tolerate, if he were to proceed in an optimal fashion.

For Mrs. Meyers, hearing from clergy and church members that it is quite natural for a loving mother to have thoughts that a son might be better off dead, rather than suffering through an existence of unfulfilled promise, helped her in the quest to cease feeling overcome with guilt when picturing this alternative. Being a good Christian and an active member of the church, Mrs. Meyers had been burdened with question and self-persecution about this passing image.

Always the optimist, Mr. Meyers would console his wife saying that, because they're not medical professionals, they can't always tell what the signs of improvement are. Stressing that the doctors saw something in Craig that they couldn't see which indicated that some healing had been taking place, Mr. Meyers said encouragingly that Craig being taken out of the ICU and placed in a far less restrictive environment was outstanding. Reminding his wife that Craig's a tough guy who always welcomed a challenge, Mrs. Meyers could only hope that Craig would be on the winning side of this game of survival by the end of the 9th inning. A competitor who abhors losing, Mr. Meyers promised his wife that Craig will win and pull through this; wait and see. As he and his wife discovered the next time they would go to the hospital, Mr. Meyers' words would turn out to be more than wishful thinking.

Although the weather had been dreary most of the week, the mid-day sun of February 24 greeted the Meyers as they pulled out of the tunnel onto the Ft. Pitt Bridge. The slight breeze coupled with the sun's glow made the tiny waves of the Monongahela River beneath them look as if they were the fluttering wings of an angel. The skyline before them glistened with its powerful orange backdrop and the steel pillars of Three Rivers Stadium to their left did not cast the dark shadow it had in days' past. The fountain at The Point seemed to spray water to the heavens with a new strength.

Knowing that hearing is the first sense to return after somebody has been in a coma, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers would talk to Craig about Grandma Barnhart going to a nursing home in Ohio where Claire lives, how Fritz goes in his room everyday looking for his buddy, how the abdominal scan and shoulder X-rays conducted on him yesterday before moving upstairs showed nothing was wrong, and the dust that's collected on the furniture since mom's been going to Pittsburgh everyday.

Allowing a patient to hear a voice which they are familiar facilitates recovery and alleviates any fears they may have that they are alone. Hearing his parents' voice, Craig started to open his eyes gradually. First, a quarter of an inch, then three-eighths of an inch, then a half-inch, three-quarters, and—for what seemed like years—Craig's parents saw his brown eyes open completely!!!

Feeling a warmth throughout his body, Mr. Meyers affectionately shook his son's good arm saying, "Attaboy buddy, attaboy." Mrs. Meyers stood frozen with her hand covering her open mouth looking at the brown, oval iris she was afraid she'd never see again in its entirety. Feeling a rush of adrenalin, the Meyers asked their son if he could see them. Expecting Craig to unilaterally progress and respond, he closed his eyes and fell into the coma again.

The Meyers learned that to prevail through these days where they were unsure of what lurked around the corner, they had to appreciate and remember those

precious moments when Craig showed something other than deep unconscious and feed off this. Their hunger for improvement from Craig was insatiable, however, just after the day reached its halfway point, the feast which Craig's parents were to engage would satisfy them this day.

Sometime in late afternoon while she was knelt to his left along Craig's bedside, his eyes gradually opened again and when a few minutes later Mrs. Meyers got up and walked to the foot of the bed to get some water, Craig followed her with his eyes!!! This was the first localized response Craig has had in eleven days where his eyes were focusing on something, not just staring into space. When his father saw this and leaned forward, this movement drew Craig's attention to his dad as Craig slowly moved his head in his dad's direction. Overcome with great joy that their son wasn't blinded, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers hadn't seen each other smile for what seemed an eternity.

Then, just as quickly as he "came to," Craig fell out of consciousness. Several times during this evening, Craig would follow either his mom, dad, or brother with his eyes before slipping from lucidity again, and again, and again. Although not comfortable that their son was unable to remain conscious but for a few minutes, the Meyers were no longer traumatized by this prolonged lack of awareness, for their son was fighting back.

At 1:00 P.M. on February 25th, one hour before visiting hours were to start, the stout RN at the nurses' station looked the other way as the Meyers—fooling absolutely no one—inconspicuously went into Craig's room. Knowing the Meyers have been enduring twelve days of turbulence since their son was almost slaughtered, the nurse wanted Craig's parents to take a break from constant worry and see the good news as soon as possible.

When his parents walked in, Craig was not conscious, but the oxygen mask which had been a fixture on his face for almost two weeks had been removed because Craig was breathing on his own!!! The IV's in Craig's arms which fed him everything from ulcer medication to anti-convulsants to pain killers to everything else under God's sun, were no longer needed and taken away.

At first, the Meyers were bubbling with joy by what they were seeing, but then became absorbed with second thoughts. They wondered if Craig—who had become dependent on the oxygen mask and the IV's for survival—would relapse and stop breathing because something went wrong upstairs in the autonomic nervous system, or some of the nerve cells in his brain would just explode causing God knows what to happen.

Just when Craig's parents were beginning to drown with anxiety, a nurse came in telling the couple who had "worry" stamped all over their faces that Craig's doing well and that their concerns were legitimate but unfounded, and to relax. Instructed to appreciate the immense gains Craig has made, the Meyers took a deep breath hearing these words of encouragement and reassurance from the nurse. Helping to put their minds at ease, when Craig's eyes opened, a warm comfort blanketed them.

Quickly, the nurse went to Craig's side telling him to follow her finger. From side to side then up and down, Craig's eyes went horizontally then vertically watching the nurse's extended forefinger. With his good hand, the nurse asked Craig to raise a finger. Holding one another, the Meyers saw Craig slowly, and with great effort, struggle to pick one finger off his bed. This tiny movement had an impact of the largest magnitude. It showed Craig could hear, understand, and process information. Skills which the Meyers feared Craig may have lost forever because that organ that weighs but a mere five pounds known as the brain, has a bruise on it.

This great day was made even better when the nurse informed the Meyers that the doctor who sewed Craig's ear back together made his rounds this morning and took the stitches out saying Craig's ear was healing remarkably and circulating blood with no problem.

Basking in the good news of this morning, the Meyers couldn't be convinced that Craig would not be able to make a full recovery given the progress made the past forty-eight hours. Despite past head injury cases indicating there will be some permanent disabling condition, the Meyers were trying not to believe this, figuring their son would be the exception. They had to assume this mindset to avoid being an emotional basket case.

For their own protection, the Meyers had to tell themselves that each day that passes now, Craig will be making equally incredible gains until he's back to his old, shitty self. Knowing that youth is on his side, the Meyers were starting to believe the road from here on out would be one of increasing normalcy. This thought would end in but a few moments when the respiratory therapist would come in.

Although Craig didn't need an oxygen mask on his face all the time now, the doctors knew that it was necessary that he still be assisted therapeutically with his breathing until Craig has shown that he's able to do this long-term without any trouble. When he could feel the oxygen mask touching his nose and mouth, making a groaning sound like that of an animal being hurt, Craig would move his head away from this predator. With the respiratory therapist soliciting the help of Craig's dad, Mr. Meyers delicately stabilized Craig's head for the half-hour respiratory treatment while the mask was being applied. Because Craig did not want any foreign objects touching his face, becoming fidgety and cantankerous, this would be a time the Meyers dreaded, for Craig would not sit still long enough to get much done.

Beyond those moments when he would avoid the respiratory therapist's oxygen mask, this day like the many others since he's been hurt, has been very much the same response-wise. When conscious, Craig will swallow some liquid and/or pureed food. And for those brief moments when his eyes are open, would follow his parents' finger. Then, for what seemed like hours eternal, would fall into his deep coma.

Despite the lack of activity from Craig, this was a memorable day for the Meyers. Knowing that Craig's lungs are able to work and that he hasn't lost the ability to breathe was a gift of immeasurable proportions. And seeing Craig's IV's

removed, provided the Meyers with a glimmering hope that there will be a better tomorrow for their son. Are those dead leaves ever going to swirl tonight.

When the phone rang in the morning of the 26th, Craig's parents were sedate having been spoiled by the events of yesterday. However, the monotone voice and concerned look on Mrs. Meyers' face spoke volumes that something was wrong to Mr. Meyers who nervously sat on the edge of his chair repeating to his wife, "What is it Gwen? What is it?" Rising this morning with a revitalized confidence and an optimistic outlook, Mr. Meyers' heart sank when his wife said that Craig was running a fever.

Despite having made an unwritten pact not to get too high or too low with any of the news they might receive, assuming that because he was out of intensive care and was more or less disconnected from the life support systems, the Meyers were trounced hearing of this setback. Figuring that Craig was "out of the woods" and was not in any imminent danger of either losing his life or that infection had set in somewhere, the intensity of his parents sadness would be titanic. Like a bacteria left untreated, recurring thoughts of Craig's demise and right leg missing spread rapidly.

Caught in traffic on the Parkway West, the view of the Ft. Pitt Tunnels was a tantalizing one because the cars were entering this black hole single file at a pace slower than one can walk. The orange signs which read "Work Area Ahead" told of the culprit to this jungle of motorized confusion. The quake of the jackhammer's drill and the blowing of the car horns made Mr. Meyers' heart pound with a weighted fury. After thirty minutes of driving a distance that could be walked in three, the rust-colored Citation made it to the crest of Greentree Hill before making its descent towards the tunnel at a speed which made the incline on nearby Mt. Washington look as if it were a stock car at Indy. Although not normally superstitious, Craig's parents couldn't help but to think that this is the thirteenth day Craig's been hurt and that isn't such a good number for him through this whole ordeal which started when he went out Saturday, February 13th.

With heart racing and sweat dripping, the Meyers rushed into their boy's room. Craig unaware that anything was wrong, their son was lying in bed with beads of sweat congregating on his forehead and his sheets puddled with sweat. The cup over his right ear had been removed exposing the scarred, scab-laden appendage which almost ripped off from his head. Armed with coolly dampened wash cloths and Hawaiian Punch Craig loves to guzzle when he's sick, Mrs. Meyers proceeded to nurse her son back to health like she has done hundreds of times before. Placing the moistened wash cloths on his forehead and a flexible tube in his mouth connected to a syringe of the tropical juice, Craig's temperature lowered.

In order to prevent his getting pneumonia, the respiratory therapist put Craig in an upright position in a chair and attempted to give him steam treatments, so fluid would not settle in his chest. Like yesterday, Craig fussed and struggled, refusing to let the therapist get anything near his face. Needing to do his rounds with the other patients, the therapist let Mr. and Mrs. Meyers undertake this enviable

duty. Feeling like the pioneers must have during their struggles exploring new frontiers out West in the 1800's, Mr. Meyers held Craig's head still while Mrs. Meyers attempted to apply the mask over her son's nose and mouth. Craig would simultaneously twist his head away and push the cup aside off his face when Mr. Meyers would loosen his grip. As if he could hear, the frustrated father scolded his son, pleading with Craig to leave the mask on. Just when his father's voice took on a tone of urgency and panic, giving his parents the opportunity to finish the steam treatment, Craig lost consciousness, as his head fell limp to the side. This was one of the few times Craig's parents weren't too unhappy of Craig's inability to remain conscious for an extended period of time.

However, when Craig became conscious a little over two hours later, the agitation reared its ugly head to a more pronounced extreme. Moaning as if he was terrified and experiencing unbearable pain, Craig twisted and squirmed in bed thrashing his good arm about as if he had a sword and was fencing a demon happy to see him writhing in misery. The metal frame of his bed squeaked and the guardrails to his side were bending with an uneasy frequency as Craig's arm flung wildly.

Horried, Mrs. Meyers ran out to the nurses' station to get some help. As Mr. Meyers leaned forward to calm his son, Craig quickly grabbed his dad's tie pulling him down with an unyielding grip. Once again, his father's tears soaked Craig's hospital gown, but this time they weren't tears of joy, rather, tears of suffocation, for Mr. Meyers couldn't breathe. Alarmed, Mr. Meyers put his massive hand around his son's wrist and squeezed tightly before pushing Craig's arm down away from his throat. Tilting his head towards Craig's chest, the noose around Mr. Meyers neck finally loosened when the wrinkled tie eventually became undone.

Upon arriving from the hallway where she retrieved a nurse, before the choked husband could warn his wife not to get too close to Craig, the distraught mother immediately rushed up to his bed and bent over the sideguard rail to console her son. Moaning like an animal that's been hurt, the "brain contused" version of Craig would do something the real Craig couldn't fathom doing in a billion years.

Fist clenched, with a stinging blow, Craig struck his stunned mother just below the neck with such force that she reeled back falling into her husband's arms. Incensed at the sight of Craig punching his mother with such violence, Mr. Meyers pointed his thick forefinger at his son telling him that—hurt or not—he's not going to tolerate watching him hit his mother. Submerged with feelings of grief, pity, and anger, Mr. Meyers looked at his son whose raw elbow was turning red with all this thrashing. Realizing Craig wasn't hearing—and couldn't hear—his admonitions, Mr. Meyers quickly focused his attention to his wife.

Disheartened, struggling to fight back the tears, Mrs. Meyers shook. Being hit by the son she had only shown love for, left her speechless and in shock. Seeing her son toss and turn, moving his left arm forcefully across his body and showing no remorse, Mrs. Meyers could only imagine the suffering Craig was going through. The pain from the punch itself was minor compared to the fire in her heart. Although realizing this was not truly her son, the ache still burned like a blazing inferno.

As Craig started ripping the sheets off his bed, the nurse Mrs. Meyers summoned for help came in. Seeing Craig kick and tear his covers off, the nurse joyfully said this is great and what she's been waiting to see. Mrs. Meyers who was rubbing the welt on her chest and Mr. Meyers whose tie felt like it was stretched to his kneecaps, couldn't believe what they were hearing. A World War II veteran, Mr. Meyers never came so close to dying in his fifteen months overseas, and Mrs. Meyers felt like a captain does when his mutinous crew takes over the ship with an unsuspecting hostility.

Sporting a smile as wide as the Liberty Tubes, the nurse said that Craig realizes something's wrong and will express himself the only way he is capable right now, which is through body motions and groans. The jubilant nurse said because Craig knows that things aren't right, indicates he has the ability to perceive things and make an assessment based on these perceptions. Craig's becoming agitated shows this "realization" process is at least partially intact and is a complex skill which very well could have an immeasurably productive impact on his rehabilitation.

Craig's parents listened intently as this medical professional, who had a hard time controlling her joy, recommended to the Meyers that they read as much as they can about the various stages a comatose patient likely would endure. Reviewing the Ranchos Scale of cognitive/behavioral functioning, the Meyers learned that there are eight levels which help medical professionals and families understand what's going on with a patient who has sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) as they go through rehabilitation. These levels apply only to patients with head injuries the first several weeks and months following the injury, not years.

The higher the level, the more functional and responsive the patient is. The Meyers understood that there will be times when Craig appears to be reverting back to a previous level, but not to be alarmed because while the brain is healing, Craig will continue to slip in and out of consciousness, exhibiting a variety of behaviors. Acknowledging that they will see gains occurring rapidly with Craig as the days and weeks go by—but after several months—progress slows at some unpredictable point, the Meyers would prepare themselves for the inevitable stagnation. Bracing themselves for what tomorrow may or may not bring, these trodden caregivers realized that Craig will seem to plateau, not showing the swift, immense gains he had in the first weeks following his injury.

Aware that most of Craig's recovery will take place within two years, these hopeful parents could also hold onto the fact that gains will occur throughout his life. With healthy parts of the brain frequently taking over the functions normally assumed by the damaged sections, the Meyers would never lose faith that Craig would get back on track and be better than ever in some respects. With solemn reservation, the Meyers also gained an understanding that until medical research advances, a contusion on the brain never fully heals, thus rendering the survivor with some permanent disability depending on which function(s) the bruise covers and what signals have been disrupted.

Regarding the Ranchos Scale, the Meyers tried to identify how the different levels may apply to their son. Ranchos #1 is "No Response" where the patient is

unresponsive to any stimulus whatsoever. One could jab Craig with a knife when he was at this level and he wouldn't even have known it. Ranchos#2 is "Generalized Response" where the response is limited and consists of basic reactions which are likely to be delayed. If Craig were jabbed with this same knife, he would respond in some elementary form to the pain he was feeling, such as a grimace several seconds after being punctured. Ranchos #3 is "Localized Response" where, if Craig were jabbed, he not only would feel it, but focus where the jab took place either by moving that particular part of his body or—if he could—look where the stab occurred. Possibly, he might be able to nod his head or motion in some way when asked if it hurt.

With his outbursts and other expressions of aggravation, Craig is beginning to show signs of being in Ranchos #4, "Confused, Agitated." Characterized by a heightened state of aggressiveness, activity, and confusion, these traits would normally be viewed as a negative, but with head injury, it's a positive, for it shows the patient is fighting to recover. With such effort being an essential element to any successful rehabilitation, the Meyers viewpoint of Craig's nasty conduct would slowly undergo a transformation.

Most observers likely could understand the Meyers' difficulty accepting Craig's behavior as improvement given his aggressiveness, so Craig's parents would just have to remind themselves that this is much, much, much better than his just lying in bed unaware of everything. Leaping from a Ranchos #1 to a Ranchos #4 in under two weeks' time, the Meyers would be optimistic that many more gains were going to surface, if progress continued on its current course. Not wanting to push their luck and risk minimizing their increasingly jovial mood of the day, because it's impossible to say with any certainty that Craig will advance to the higher levels, class ended for the day.

Despite acquiring a new appreciation that their son's indiscretions were actually an excellent sign, the Meyers had difficulty accepting their luck on Day #13 as anything but bad. Now, Craig's either going to be profoundly unconscious or so restless, he's unapproachable. Just as quickly as Craig awakened from his coma, thrashing his left arm about, he slipped into his deep unconscious. Looking at her still son who only moments before had been as wild as an untamed stallion, Mrs. Meyers felt ill when she saw blood on Craig's sheet. Getting a close inspection, the skin on Craig's left elbow was gone with the continuous thrashing.

In a few minutes, a nurse put a clear bandage on Craig's elbow. Beginning to look like fresh hamburger, this wrapping would only keep germs from entering the wound and not protect the elbow from further injury. The friction of Craig's joint rubbing on his bed when he would tug his arm created the bloody sore, so a nurse brought in a heavy, canvas restraint. Tying this handcuff on his left wrist and securing his leash to a side panel on the frame of the hospital bed would theoretically prevent Craig from moving his good arm.

As she looked at her helpless, unconscious son tied up like a criminal on death row, Mrs. Meyers was approached by another nurse whose husband was a police

officer. This Afro-American R.N. who knew that Craig was hurt by a drunk driver, put her arm around Mrs. Meyers and said, “Doesn’t that make you mad?”

Hearing from her husband and witnessing too many times herself the tragedy caused by a driver who did not know when to say “When.” this compassionate nurse had plenty of exposure to the crushing dismay families experience when a vehicular operator has “downed” more drinks than they could handle. Sitting to Craig’s right and massaging his spastic arm—magically thinking his light touch might loosen his son’s contraction—Mr. Meyers always felt he needed to defend his son to those who knew that Craig was at a party where alcohol was consumed and its abuse was the cause of his son’s condition. Mr. Meyers would proudly say, “He’s a good boy, he never caused us any trouble.”

Bound like a flesh-eating carnivore after its capture, the sight of Craig lying in that bed prevented from using his only good limb was an oppressive one for his folks weary of paying the price for Paul’s atrocity. Tortured by thoughts that their son might be sentenced to an undeserving conviction of being psychologically slain throughout his life—not appreciated for his virtues, only to have magnified his shortcomings—the Meyers could only look at their son, victim of incredulously trusting Paul to be a friend, and hope Craig’s will to survive hadn’t been sapped.

When Craig “came to” and realized he was restrained, he twisted and turned, trying to free himself to no avail. Attempting to cast out his suffering, Mrs. Meyers explained to Craig that this tie was on to protect himself, but Craig couldn’t comprehend what his mom was saying. After several minutes of trying to maneuver himself free, Craig became provoked, squealing and squirming frantically. Rolling to his left, then rolling to his right as far as his paralytic arm would let him, Craig grunted and groaned as if pleading for mercy to take off this straightjacket. With an empathetic voice and a caring touch, Mr. Meyers was eventually able to calm his son. Feeling powerless to rid her boy of that which harassed him, Mrs. Meyers could only look on, wondering what will come of the days ahead.

Not comfortable with Craig’s inability to remain conscious very long and fearful his patient might hurt the only functional arm he has, the doctor ordered that Craig start getting used to sitting in a wheelchair for a few hours each day. Theorizing that when Craig’s lying in bed, he becomes too sedated due to the many pain-killer medications he takes and loses consciousness, the doctor wanted Craig to be exposed to a stimulating environment, not one where he’s unconscious an extended period of time.

With the wheelchair brakes firmly locked, Craig was placed in this seat by the nurses who didn’t know how Craig would react to being moved. If they’d have seen beforehand Craig’s response to this change of scenery, these nurses would have said, “To hell with the doctors orders.”

Becoming dangerously irritated, Craig would get quite upset. Possibly knowing something was “up,” unlike when he passively sat in a chair four days ago allowing staff to change his bed, Craig wanted to be left alone lying in the bed which has become his safe haven. Bouncing from one arm of the wheelchair to the other,

Craig's moans of displeasure and the wheelchair crashing against the wall reverberated off the walls of the seventh floor hallway with an eerie resonance. Cries of agony congesting the nurses' station, even the Head Nurse on the unit ceased writing her progress notes for a moment.

The tray resting on the arms of his wheelchair bent like a rubber band does before it's flung when Craig's left fist pounded this tabletop with a murderous force. Weaving from side to side, alternately flinging his arm and hammering his duke on the table, it could not be said for certain if Craig was feeling pain or discomfort in his head, leg, arm, ear, all of the above, or something else. For Craig's parents, the *silence* of not knowing and the *emptiness* of not being able to, were the most horrific traits of Craig's condition.

While lying in bed, Craig would readily lose consciousness hours at a time, not being able to remain alert for very long. If Craig were aware of his surrounding for a ten-minute duration, Craig's parents would count their blessings. If one good thing could be said about this wheelchair experience, it was that Craig stayed conscious longer. When awake, Craig may have been the Tasmanian Devil, but the Meyers tried to revel in what they had heard earlier when informed that Craig being mean and pissy was a sign of growing improvement. Pinching themselves that they were actually believing this, Craig's parents thought it might be good news for the nurse that their son's a living terror, but she's not the one being socked and strangled!

After two hours of almost constant restlessness while sitting in the wheelchair, the nurse finally put Craig back in bed, tying his restraint back on. Because she doesn't like to see anyone constrained in such a way, especially her own flesh and blood, Mrs. Meyers would wait until the nurses left before untying her son. Constant weaving, thrashing, kicking, and pounding exhausted Craig so much that when his head touched the pillow, he usually fell asleep immediately.

The Meyers have been experiencing the hell Craig's been going through every inch of the way—and likely more—because Craig possibly isn't even aware of the dire straits his parents have been witnessing all this time. Coming to the hospital every opportunity they could to see Craig and help whatever way possible, Scott and his wife entered the room. Informing them of the perils of this thirteenth day, Craig's parents cautioned the loving couple of his aggressiveness and unpredictability. After being forewarned not to trust his brother, Scott looked at Craig and said that it's good he's unconscious and numb to everything around him because the pain of everything that's happened to him, physically-mentally-emotionally, would be intolerable to bear.

Being Craig's personal nurse, one of the tasks Mrs. Meyers was asked to undertake was to measure the amount of fluid Craig drinks during the time they're with him in order for the doctors to get an idea of how—and if—Craig's kidneys are functioning. Dutifully following through with all that was asked of her with meticulous precision, Craig's mom was then to record the amount of liquid

ingested and give this reading to a nurse before leaving for home. When Craig's eyes opened, Mr. Meyers went out to the nurses' station to inform the staff that Craig was "coming to," so the respiratory therapist could begin doing his thing.

While waiting for the therapy to begin, Mrs. Meyers poured a couple ounces of Hawaiian Punch into a syringe, squirting it into Craig's mouth. Craig worked up quite a sweat from all his bashing about today and was quite thirsty, so his mom prepared a second dose of the fruity red stuff. Before she could finish, however, the respiratory therapist came in donning the look of dreadfulness he seems to have on when working with Craig now.

Not knowing if Craig's temperament was like that of a kitten or an annoyed tiger, the therapist didn't want to take any chances, so he solicited some help from Craig's parents about Craig's mood this day. Finding out that his patient was acting like he thought he was king of the jungle, the therapist swallowed deep, greeting Craig with a smile and a hearty, "And how are we feeling today?" Whoever was in Craig's body didn't buy this "Romper Room" facade for a minute.

When the respiratory therapist placed the oxygen mask over Craig's nose and mouth, Craig violently grabbed the mask, throwing it on the floor. Seeing that Craig didn't want any foreign objects touching his face, the therapist picked up the breathing device, explaining to Craig that if he doesn't get this treatment, he could get very sick and to please allow him to do his job. The encouragement and assurance that came from his parents didn't help either, for Craig reacted with aggressive opposition once more to the therapist's attempts to try again. With shrieking moans of annoyance and rustling about in his bed alerting the therapist that Craig's irritability would require him to operate from the "Be Careful" phase, trying his best to assure that Craig's brain and breathing apparatus work in conjunction with one another, this professional would need to be very mindful of how tactile sensations delivered may be responded to. Not wanting struck or for Craig to hurt himself, the therapist tried to calm the reluctant combatant by telling Craig that there's nothing to fear and that he's just trying to help him. Giving it another go, the therapist's attempts to provide Craig with what he needs for his lungs to function properly were met with even more resistance, as Craig squirmed in bed, shaking his head from side to side. Making a noise as if warning the intruder of the risk being taken—until Craig could be subdued—cooperation wouldn't be forthcoming.

Under normal circumstances, Craig's parents would have been shocked to see their usually mild-mannered son act this way, but these are far from normal conditions, as they have learned not to be overly surprised with any of the tricks Craig might have up his sleeve since his head injury. Usually, one of his mother's threats or his dad's eyes bulging with anger would stop Craig dead in his tracks from misbehaving, however, they had no effect on this new—but not improved—version of their son.

Feeling bad for the therapist engaged in this losing battle, the Meyers made an offer they wish they could have recanted—Craig's family asked if they could be of assistance beyond providing moral support. With a devilish grin, the therapist gladly handed them this responsibility thinking familiar faces would make this

task easier. As the worn trooper happily exited the room, the Meyers would have second thoughts about their offer to volunteer.

Looking at each other with mask in hand, standing over Craig, the Meyers weren't sure exactly what they got themselves into. Kicking and tearing the sheets off his bed which would eventually look like Hiroshima right after The Bomb was dropped, his worn parents urging him to "settle down," Craig wasn't exactly in the kind of abiding mood which promotes obedience. The adventure of getting Craig to breathe in his mask proved equally difficult for his family.

Using the team approach, Mrs. Meyers would narrate what Craig's father was going to do. "Now Craig, you lie still while daddy puts this cup over your nose and mouth, so that you can breathe better." Like telling the opposing team's defense what the quarterback was going to do, Craig must have understood because—for the second time today—Craig quickly grabbed his dad's tie, pulling him down and holding him there. Struggling to loosen himself from this death grip until Scott loosened Craig's hand from his dad's newly formed stretch tie, it just might be Mr. Meyers who needs that oxygen mask before this night is over. Standing mistakenly close to his bed, Craig grabbed a hold of his mom's arm and pulled her close to him, before she too was luckily able to free herself.

It didn't seem as if Craig gripped people to be mean or vicious, rather, it appeared he would reach out because he was terrified and wanted to be near someone he recognized. Craig's constant motion and groans of disenchantment must have been his way of expressing the internal confusion and awful pain he was enduring.

On the surface, the luck on this thirteenth day didn't look so hot. The day actually did start off hot, but that being because Craig was running a fever. Occurring almost immediately after his eyes would open, Craig's frequent bouts with restlessness and irritability would be followed by intermittent periods of marked unconsciousness. Choking his father twice today and slugging his mother, Craig's trauma-induced frustration made him absolutely unapproachable. Also, Craig's agitation left him with an elbow as fiery red as his temperament of this day. His unstable demeanor not likely to get him invited to the respiratory therapist's home for dinner anytime soon, Craig's testiness would still be viewed as extremely encouraging by those caring for him, however.

When visiting hours ended, upon leaving, Craig's parents couldn't be certain that their son would stop using them as target practice when they came in tomorrow, but that wouldn't make any difference because their undying obligation was deeper than any bruise they could sustain. Feeling as if they had bull's eyes plastered on them somewhere, still, Craig's parents were bombarded by images of what turmoil tomorrow would bring now that their boy's belligerently operating from this infamous Ranchos #4 Scale. What they did see the next morning would definitely surprise them, though.

Getting off the Pennsylvania Turnpike at Monroeville this Saturday morning—February 27th—not sure exactly where he was, the driver fumbled with the map to

see how to get to Pittsburgh from this suburb east of the city. As the cars buzzed about him with what seemed to be the speed of light, having just traveled four hours from Harrisburg, the intimidated man ran his finger along the line on the map which he thought represented the route he was on. Confused and rushed, unsure of where he was headed, a flurry of thoughts about the direction he was going absorbed this traveler's thinking.

"Route 48, that's the road I'm on. No, wait. Yeah, that's it. Hold on a second, what's this Route 22? Maybe that's the route I should be driving. Does this lead straight into Pittsburgh? Then what's this 376—and what the hell's the Parkway East?"

With the drivers behind him hammering on their horns, feeling burning sweat streaming into his eyes like the lava of a volcano, the man who had driven on so many speedways during his days prodded along at a turtle's pace. Not having time to thoroughly review the map strategically planted on his steering wheel, this pressured motorist would soon have to find a restroom as well. As his eyes darted from the road chart to the parade of cars zig-zagging before him—looking for any sign showing the way to Pittsburgh—the thirty-six-year-old stranger not accustomed to a vehicular maze of this magnitude, spotted one pointing to the right. Normally cool under pressure, veering his car sharply and tramping on the accelerator, this lost journeyman wouldn't be at ease when discovering he was in the wrong lane. If the weather hadn't been cold and his window up, the many obscenities shouted his way from those he cut off might have disturbed him had he not seen the sign directing him into town—Pgh. 376 West.

Steering to the right again—but not cutting anyone off this time—getting on the Parkway East, this adventurer felt as if he had rewound the hands of time to the days he sped on different race tracks in his youth. Like Jennerstown Raceway near his boyhood home, cars weaved in and out passing one another, only to be passed later on by someone going even faster.

With jaws dropped at seeing so many cars travel at mach one on an urban highway, the driver tried to spot an exit with the words "Allegheny General Hospital" on it, so he could find his destination. Scanning to his left and scanning to his right, the out-of-towner saw signs which read "Penn Hills," "Churchill," and "Edgewood/Swissvale," but none which read the hospital he was looking for. Coming to a tunnel which seemed to have an apartment on the other side, the exhausted explorer got caught in rush hour traffic, wondering if he should ask for directions at a station somewhere when the congestion dwindles. Thinking better of this foolish idea, he'd tell himself, "Nah, I'll find it."

After being idle on the east side of the Squirrel Hill Tunnels for what appeared to be time unended, as if a starting light had just turned green, the wheels of once stationary cars squealed before traffic thinned and finally got moving. Flying past signs reading "Blvd. of Allies/Liberty Bridge," "Grant Street," and "Stanwix St.," zipping down the parkway, this one-time hellion who used to do some drag-racing in his time, knew he was going the wrong way when he came to another tunnel, **OUTBOUND**, about fifteen miles from where he got off the turnpike.

Countless U-turns and unnecessary miles later, the lost navigator finally found his pot of gold just about the time acid was starting to eat away at his stomach lining. As the automatic sliding glass doors of the hospital were opening, this determined thrill-seeker mumbled to himself how Pittsburgh's road system is an architectural nightmare. Marching to the information desk, this stranger identified himself as "Craig Meyers' brother" and would like to know what room his hurt sibling's in.

After stepping off the elevator at the seventh floor, Buck told the nurses he understood visiting hours weren't for a while yet, but that he had come a long way to spend some time with his "bro" whom he hadn't seen in four years, since Scott's wedding. Assessing the brother who almost could pass as Craig's dad age-wise, the Head Nurse cautioned this older brother fraught with excitement that what he was about to see was not pleasant. Prepping him how to interact with Craig, the nurse would then try her best to brief Buck about head injury and forewarn him about what he's about to experience. Taking a look at his brother in tatters, Buck would be in for a jolt.

Seeing Craig with his eyes closed, rolling from side to side, groaning as if in excruciating pain, all Buck could do was solemnly gaze at his brother whose grief pervaded the room with a sickening stench. Oppressively, the plea "Oh Jesus, Oh Jesus," kept echoing in Buck's mind as a means to extract the emotional foul which engulfed him. If Buck thought the acid was flowing seeing all those one-way streets pointing in the wrong direction on his way to the hospital, it was gushing now.

Being told what he's about to see and actually seeing the anguish are two different things. However, Buck tried to discard his somber demeanor the best he could and interact with Craig like the nurse instructed him and approach Craig as if things weren't as dismal as they obviously were. But the strength needed to exert this appearance was not humanly possible.

Grappling for the right words to say to his baby brother—eighteen-years his junior—was an immense chore for Buck because—despite being brothers—the two were virtual strangers. Not appreciative of some of his dad's ways with him—deserving and otherwise—Buck married young, stayed in Harrisburg where the family moved after a lifetime in Johnstown, and never came back.

Holding the hand of the brother he barely knew, Buck looked down at Craig not having any idea what to say. Feeling an aching knot in his stomach, Buck looked at his unconscious brother, wondering what kind of personality is Craig going to have when this is all said and done and how this would ultimately play into his future. Knowing how tragic this situation was, made it difficult for Buck to put on the smile that wanted to wither. After several moments of silence, Buck encouraged Craig to fight hard because there's a worker at his auto garage who had the same thing happen to him and that he pulled through it alright after much effort.

After twenty minutes or so of constant talking, Buck knew he wasn't being heard and that Craig probably didn't even know he was there. But still, jabbering on the best he could, Buck told his little brother that mom and dad don't

know he's here and that they'll be surprised when they see him. And Buck wasn't mistaken.

When seeing their oldest son holding Craig's hand when they walked into the hospital room, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers had mixed emotions. First, they were happy to see their oldest whom dad Meyers christened with his lasting nickname—"Buck"—which mom Meyers never completely forgave her husband for.

With exuberance, dad Meyers barked, "Buck!" and mom Meyers yiped, "Carson!" However, at the other end of the spectrum was the circumstance leading to this reunion. Craig's moans serving as a backdrop to this grave panorama of wretchedness, the salutations would be short-lived.

Mrs. Meyers, her tired eyes filling with the tears which now seem like they have no end, looked at her unconscious son, softly touching his shoulder and said, "Honey, look who's here; Carson came to see you."

Despite feeling impoverished of strength and sensing little immediate relief from the woes of the past two weeks to the day Craig went out, Mr. Meyers briskly walked up to his unresponsive son. Grinning from ear to ear, saying half in jest, "Buck came all this way to see you; the least you could do is look at him and say, 'Hi!'"

After pausing for several seconds—nothing. The permeative silence to this request which seemed simple enough was just too much for Craig's father to take and—after a few agonizing moments of trying to act as if things weren't so bad—became shaken beyond control. Crying irrepressibly, diluting the facade he was portraying for his oldest that he was an impregnable pillar of strength, Mr. Meyers couldn't take anymore. Never seeing his dad like this before, Buck felt uneasy because he knew that his father would want this exhibit camouflaged and left unexposed. Spawning a growth not benign, harboring emotions would contribute to this icon's tumble.

After returning from lunch where they informed Buck of some of the details of the accident and of Craig's condition, the Meyers saw that staff had moved Craig into his wheelchair. Keeping her distance from the son whom she was not certain would lash out or not, Mrs. Meyers pointed in the direction of Craig's older brother and said once again, "Your older brother came to see you, y'know who that is?"

When Craig slowly lifted his head, letting his chin fall to his chest, brightness penetrated the malicious thunderhead which seemed to hover about their every step since Paul's act of maleficence.

Breathing a gust of relief that Craig responded to a question, a cascade of joy, relief, and excitement fell upon Mrs. Meyers as she said, "Frank!!! Did you see that? Craig nodded his head 'yes.' Did you see that? He recognized Carson."

Thinking that his son might respond in some way to more questions, Mr. Meyers asked Craig if he's hurting anywhere. Heaving his body against the arms of the wheelchair as if trying to break free, Craig didn't say a word or even gave any indication he was aware that he had been spoken to. No eye contact. No facial expression. Nothing. Craig just continued to kick, toss, weave, and swirl in this chair

where he felt captive. The *silence* of Craig not responding and the *emptiness* of feeling unable to do more, extinguished the smile on Mr. Meyers' face.

Trying to lighten this mood which was not turning for the better, Buck said with tongue firmly planted in cheek, "Bro, you better let on you know who I am after coming all this way, or I'd have to kick the shit out of you."

Prior to greeting the brother he hadn't seen since exchanging vows with his lovely wife, Scott came walking in and bellowed, "Is he being an asshole again?" For Craig's brothers, they were lucky he didn't hear them, for he was too preoccupied with tearing off his hospital gown and busting his wheelchair.

As the sun was setting on this lackluster day, orange pylons and the splinters of what once was a sawhorse twirled skyward. Not wanting to get chummy with some of the unsavory residents approaching his car, Buck went through a barricade heading home. Drenched with anxiety seeing Buck's car make a wrong turn onto a lane leading towards the West End, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers kept their fingers crossed that Buck would someday find his way back home. Returning to their son's hospital room, Scott was trying to get Craig—who was Mr. Statistic when it came to anything about baseball—to talk about the Pirates. All Craig did, however, was drool on his bib.

Despite floundering in an oasis of ill-fortune which reached malignant proportions, the Meyers went about interacting with Craig and feeding him his perforated dinner with as much vigor as they could muster. Richocheting off the arms of his wheelchair non-stop, it took Mrs. Meyers an hour-and-a-half to spoon-feed her eighteen-year-old infant son his dinner. Making it tedious for his mother to aim the plastic eating utensil for his mouth, Craig's bruised brain wasn't about to allow him to comply. However, Mrs. Meyers would be soaking in a sea of elation that she was able to get Craig to eat a big supper under two hours.

When he would stop swinging his arms long enough, staff placed Craig back in bed where he lost consciousness within minutes. Only moments ago smothered in petulance, Craig would be oblivious to everything and everyone about him once he became comfortably situated for the night. Faithfully holding out hope that an armistice to this assault which had been waged upon them would be declared, even with the incalculable nature of their boy's symptoms, Craig's parents would be far from being gutted of their promise. The *silence* of knowing life was not appreciated to its fullest, and the *emptiness* of it being lost forever, were now all-consuming for Craig's parent as the day came to a close.

Hallelujah!!! The last day of the most hellacious month in Mr. and Mrs. Meyers' life has arrived. Tomorrow a new month begins and a new chapter can be written where prosperity and expectation of fulfillment flourish and abound. If it were only that simple. The passing of time is but one healing agent for those unfortunate ones who have this most complex of debilitating conditions.

Although it's still February, on this 28th day of the month, some definite signs of progress were made. All the staples were taken out of Craig's right leg and the

120 stitches in his right ear were removed. Both were healing exceptionally well. This morning, the doctor ordered that Craig get used to sitting in his wheelchair four hours each day, double the time he had been. The Meyers had mixed reviews about this, for Craig could hardly tolerate sitting two hours without trying to rip the place all to hell. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers can look forward to dodging Craig's attempts to strike them twice the amount of time they had before. However, any change which appeared to be made because Craig was improving, was welcomed by his parents without question. Apparently, Craig was still getting rambunctious in bed, for his nurses fitted him with a heelbo pad to wear in order to protect his elbow from the constant thrashing.

In a few minutes time after being placed in his wheelchair, Craig started getting pissed off that he was taken from his bed and accompanying security blankets. Exhibiting his mood and discomfort over this new position, Craig started to whip his good arm in the air as if trying to swat some flies. The way Craig had been teeter-tottering in his chair, one could have thought a few of these insects flew up his ass.

As Craig was weaving from side to side trying to tip his wheelchair over, he began pulling off his hospital gown. Exposing himself in all his glory, Mrs. Meyers approached Craig saying, "You don't want to do that, someone will see you!"

While Mrs. Meyers was covering up her son, submerged with displeasure that he is expected to withstand the nuisances of sitting and having clothes touch his body, Craig wheeled back and slapped his mother with his open hand. Repairing the guardrail Craig must've broken last night during one of his agitated tirades, Mr. Meyers heard Craig's cracking palm strike his wife's cheek over the clanging metal bars he was trying to fix.

Infuriated, Mr. Meyers approached Craig and reprovved him for this baleful act which showed just how much a brain injury can change one's normal personality and alter it into one where desecration is not even noticed. Like the diamondback rattler's strike, Craig snatched at his unsuspecting father's throat, pulling him down by the tie Craig was not about to surrender. Already burning, when Mr. Meyers piercingly looked into his son's eyes, this father saw a boy barren of all awareness of right and wrong. Choked not only of air, but of spirit as well, Mr. Meyers' feelings of fury immediately evolved into one where remorse and sympathy emerged from the anger. When seeing his boy starving to be released from this world of pain, confusion, and torment—after breaking free from his son's grip—Mr. Meyers looked at his son, only able to wonder if life will ever have any meaning for him again. The *silence* of questions left unanswered and the *emptiness* of a future forever altered, would encroach Mr. Meyers' sentiments like a virus insidiously attacks one's body.

Mrs. Meyers, her eyes bloodshot after spending the past half-hour in the ladies' room re-enacting in her mind Craig's palm stinging her jaw, came back into Craig's room feeling as if her heart had been ripped from her chest. Rubbing her red, irritated eyes, Mrs. Meyers looked at Craig feeling pity—not for herself—but for her boy that no one could know the struggle with which he was engaged.

To facilitate Craig's rehabilitation, everyone needs to interact with him as they once did before he was hurt in order for Craig to regain past instruction of what's acceptable behavior and what's not. With this in mind, Mrs. Meyers put her hands on her hips and proceeded to scold Craig in the same manner she did when he was burning the sidewalk along Burd Drive in Camp Hill with his tricycle, trying to run over any little girl that got in his way. "Nobody likes someone who's mean. And if you want me and daddy to stay, you've got to stop being so nasty." Craig did not acknowledge that he understood, or even that he had heard his mother.

Despite being fatigued by the storm of discontent which had showered upon them this dark morning, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers would attempt to spark some kind of memory in the tangled web which was Craig's recollection. Wheeling Craig down the end of the hallway where there was a picture window with an excellent view of Three Rivers Stadium, the Meyers were hoping some fragment of Craig's past would spring forth. Looking at her son, hoping for some kind of response, Mrs. Meyers said, "Do you know what that is? That's Three Rivers Stadium, where the Pirates and Steelers play. That's where Dave Parker goes whenever the Pirates have a game."

"And that's where Bradshaw, Franco, and Lambert always destroyed the Browns," Mr. Meyers said proudly. Apparently, a "connection" had been made, for Craig stopped the constant, random movement of his head and focused his eyes on the concrete ballyard.

Knowing that Craig's attention for a moment had not been fleeting and had been grasped, Mrs. Meyers said, "That's where you would like to work someday. Why you throw the ball against the wall on the side of the house so much; so your arm stays nice and strong, and your fielding continues improving. That's why you're on a ball field sun up to sun down."

"Yeah, and the way the Pirates are looking, Chuck Tanner's gonna want you to hurry up and get better, so he can put you in the lineup," Mr. Meyers said, choking on the emotion this thought kindled.

Eyes riveted on his injured boy who was absent of all expression, while Craig surveyed the scene where his favorite team hosts their opponents, Mr. Meyers visions of his son flashed back to happier times. Hearing, "Craig, Craig. C'mon Craig" chirped by Craig's Colt League teammates, Mr. Meyers could imagine his boy preparing to deliver another pitch. This gnawed at Mr. Meyers like a vulture devouring its capture and clawed at his soul with a viciousness only wished upon by one's worst enemy. The *silence* of "not knowing what you got 'til it's gone," and the *emptiness* realizing life was taken for granted, would clutch the Meyers as the curtain was finally falling on this fiendish month, February 1982.

A new month, a new week, a new day—but not a new beginning greeted the Meyers this Monday, March 1. Seeing her son's only workable arm tied to the bed rail when she came in and Craig—now wearing a diaper—bustling about in his wheelchair later on, made Mrs. Meyers' anger steam like molten lava. Things did not improve when the nurse handed the weary mother, spinning in this whirlwind

of regression, a baby bottle to give Craig when he's thirsty. The nurse said this was an improvement over the syringe this matriarch had been using.

Putting aside their anger of what Paul's wanton deed did to their son, the Meyers thought that talking about the accident might help Craig remember things, so they went about telling their son what had happened to him. Leaning slightly forward towards her adolescent toddler, nervously wavering in his wheelchair like a wild animal that's just been caged—making sure she did not get too close to his swinging arm this time—Mrs. Meyers said, “Honey, you were in a real bad car accident and you're in the hospital now, Allegheny General in Pittsburgh. You hit your head pretty hard and broke your leg—but you're getting better. Me and daddy have been here everyday with you and we can see how much you're improving.”

Seeing her teen-aged son in Pampers and holding a baby bottle which she was to feed her “bouncing baby” son with, Mrs. Meyers had to turn for a moment to rid herself of the agony that she had to accept what's before her as improvement. Catching her breath, Mrs. Meyers went on, “You were at a party with Paul Michaels, a boy you met at W.V.U. where you were going to college. He was drunk and smashed his Volkswagen into a telephone pole.”

“But you weren't drinking,” interjected Mr. Meyers, “we checked on that.” Craig didn't know what was going on, for he was in his mindless oblivion. All that he knew was that he wanted to bust loose from that damned wheelchair.

During the four-hour adventure Craig was sitting in his wheelchair, there were several signs of improvement that eventually evolved, however. Craig's eyes would open wide and follow his parents as they walked about his room. When they would speak, Craig looked at them. Craig's appetite was good and, for the first time since his injury, he leaned his head toward his plastic fork for his food before taking a bite. Previously, Craig ingested his perforated meals with a food pump, after having been taken off his IV's.

Unfortunately, this dinner wound Craig up with a new energy. The calm having drained from him, a full-throttle testiness would steam. The jovial RN entered the room in the midst of one of Craig's fits and said to the crazed patient's disheartened parents, “He's still at it, huh? Craig's been ‘hyped up’ for two straight days.” Bending towards Craig, the nurse careful not to get nailed in the face, spoke to Craig in a fashion that a mother speaks to a disobedient child.

“Now, you should be ashamed of yourself acting this way. No one's gonna want to be around you, flinging your arms around and smacking your wheelchair with your elbow like that. You better not hurt that arm—it's the only good one you got. Don't you ever get.”

Before she could say “tired?,” the nurse who mistakenly let her guard down for just an instant, had her tray batted on the floor by Craig's flying hand. The surprised—and now “teed off”—nurse felt like an idiot because the metallic tray's crash prompted several staff to rush in, fearing she had been assaulted. Picking up the sedatives and steroids she was going to give Craig, this usually happy-go-lucky nurse turned ogre barked, “If you could hit a baseball that good, you wouldn't have

Craig didn't hear a word said to him, he just kept ripping the sheets off the mattresses quicker than his mom could tuck them in. For a moment, Mr. Meyers was able to detain Craig's rolling and pulling of the sheets, only to have a more energetic encore take place once he loosened his grip. This weary task of trying to contain Craig's agitation forced Mrs. Meyers to think of a way to distract Craig and keep him occupied. What she came up with seemed to have a profound effect on Craig's recovery.

The idea Mrs. Meyers devised to lessen Craig's agitation was to, of all things, put Craig in the source of much of his agitation—his wheelchair—and push him in front of a mirror, so he could examine himself. She theorized that, up until this point, Craig had been told what's wrong with him, but if he could see his image, Craig might be able to at least get an idea of what this stay at the hospital is all about. Actually viewing his bruised face, torn-up ear, and sitting in a wheelchair, Craig just might be able to clear up some of the confusion with which he's been surrounded and allow him to make some sense of things.

Without taking into consideration that Craig might be terrified seeing himself in this way and might suffer a setback, the parents figuring anything's worth a try wheeled an agitated Craig to the entry where a mirror was located above the sink. Seeing the image of himself, Craig stopped shuffling and took note of his appearance. Staring at his face purple from being bruised and cut by glass, an ear red from almost being severed from his head, a black lump on his sore forehead where the shunt was inserted in his skull, and eyes a jaundice yellow from seventeen days of battling this ordeal which had Lucifer basking in merriment, Craig's affect changed from one that was dull, to one which was more alive. As if he had been swallowed by a cognizance of what was going on, a look of comprehension seemed to adorn upon and exude from his understanding.

Wide-eyed, Craig scanned every detail of his swollen face. Laboring with thoughts that her boy may never show any signs of animation again, Mrs. Meyers got her husband's attention with a whisper. Not saying a word, slowly making his way over and witnessing his son's search for answers, Mr. Meyers would be careful not to divert his son's attention away from studying himself in the mirror.

Craig's parents then explained to their son why he was in a wheelchair, what had happened to his ear, and how that lump got on his forehead. Pointing to each, one by one, they told Craig how these hurts came about and of the circumstances surrounding the accident once again. After the Meyers helped their son with some of these questions while he was inspecting himself, Craig appeared to take on a new awareness. He had at least a little zest in his face now, as his affect seemed to brighten with a new aura of life. Seemingly amazed by the reflection before him, Craig looked into his eyes as if seeking a resolution to the suffering which he had been immersed.

Placed back on the mattresses after the period which he was to get accustomed to sitting ended, Craig's parents tried to continue resurrecting some remembrance, before their son tumbled into his deep sleep, not attentive to anything about him.



Craig comatose in Pittsburgh's Allegheny General Hospital with his mom and brother keeping vigil.



Side view of Craig comatose in A.G.H. bedroom taped with mattresses. These underbeddings were placed here to safeguard against this agitated patient from hurting himself.

Usually, toiling with the burden of snaring Craig's elusive consciousness brought about a torment that's cruelty was not forgiving. However, on this day, this cycle of ups and downs the Meyers have had enough of were more tolerable—for Craig appeared to have turned a corner.

Shortly after arriving home from the hospital, the phone calls started pouring in like they do every night. Always appreciative of the encouragement given, exhausted from their day at the hospital and the drive from Washington to Pittsburgh, the Meyers often found the multitude of phone calls trying. But today, a new effervescence sparkled, making the Meyers more than happy to relive this afternoon's events for the well-wishers who called. With the exception of Mrs. Meyers' unfounded paranoid fear that Craig might break his hospital window—falling seven floors splattering onto the street—and some concerns about the sanitary condition of Craig's lying on a floor of mattresses that people have walked on with their shoes, Mrs. Meyers' glow was filling the phone lines.

Also, Craig's parents were grateful one less call would be coming in. After hearing that Craig was more than likely going to survive, the Michaels stopped calling. That's understandable, hearing the grueling details of Craig's stay at the hospital would spoil their appetite for the after-dinner drink they quite possibly have every evening.

Not saying so much as a peep to the anticipatory parents when they hopped in, as she was scurrying out of the room, the nurse responsible for feeding Craig his lunch while concurrently trying to help him form some words, dejectedly shook her head from side to side indicating she wasn't able to get Craig to speak or eat too much this Wednesday afternoon. With the exception of his inhaling and exhaling, Craig was motionless on his bed of mattresses. Despite knowing head injury doesn't work this way, Craig's parents were secretly counting on Craig making progress from the day before. Heart oozing with optimism, Mr. Meyers said, "You think you're going to start talking to us today, buddy?" Nothing. Wearing a smile the best she could, Mrs. Meyers stood in the background with hands folded about her lap, her eyes blank with disappointment that an epilogue to yesterday's triumph did not greet them upon their return. For the parents who have been let down too many times since Craig's been hospitalized, the *silence* of dreams unfulfilled and the *emptiness* of lost expectation, left the Meyers with a numb hollowness only thwarted hopes can render.

To avoid falling into a cavern of disillusionment, Craig's parents had to remind themselves of what Scott repeatedly emphasized. Scott undertook the role of not letting his parents sink too low by offering encouragement and his rendition of humor. He would say that limitations and a lack of immediate progress from one day to the next can make it difficult to see the entire picture and the improvements being made.

After hour upon unending hour of fruitlessly trying to get Craig to respond in some way, Scott would not allow his folks to have a, "What's the use? He's not

hearing us anyhow” attitude when it came to their efforts of revival. Reminding them that addressing the symptoms brain injury can cause is a slow process with many ups and downs that can be worked out better if they stuck together, always provided Craig’s parents with a much-needed resurgence of hope and energy. Just two weeks ago, Scott would remind them that they’d have been ecstatic Craig was showing any kind of activity—even if it was agitation. Now, they have some welts, bruises, and ruined neckties showing how well Craig’s doing.

This wasn’t Craig’s preferred way to get celebrity status, but the unique decor of his hospital room with all the mattresses everywhere made Craig the focus of much attention. It was inevitable for those who walked past the open doorway of Craig’s hospital room to stop and gape at this “Serta” paradise. With one hand clenched in a fist under his chin and the other hysterically going every which way—or when Craig was simply lying motionless on the floor—the occupant of this padded room was indeed an interesting exhibit on his own merits, no matter the interior decorating. Flustered with anything that touched his body or intruded on his personal space, Craig would be a typhoon-in-waiting.

When one of the older RN’s saw Craig in his frenzy, she smiled and said, “This is progress. Craig’s fighting because he knows something’s wrong and can’t do anything about it. He knows he doesn’t like feeling this way and is doing what he can to show his frustration. But when he can start taking control, look out! I can tell he’s a fighter. Craig isn’t going to give up. He’s going to beat this thing, you wait and see. You just wait and see.”

Long after the nurse had left, those words “Wait and See,” continued to play in the Meyers’ minds. When Mrs. Meyers commented she knows that they’ve done a lot of “waiting,” but haven’t “seen” too much, her husband asked what she’s basing this comparison on—the Craig of old or the Craig who was lying in that hospital guerny in a bloody heap just two weeks ago?

As a means to vent the bottled-up harassment which boiled within her, Mrs. Meyers cried, “The Craig of old!! I want him back on that campus at W.V.U. going to class. I want him upstairs playing his guitar. I want him blaring his AC/DC records on his stereo and throwing that tennis ball against the house. I want to see him walking down the street caked in mud after one of his backyard football games.”

Her voice broken by gasps to catch her breath, this beleaguered mother screaming to be awakened from the nightmare with which she was trapped sobbed, “I want him back like he was. I want my boy back. I want my boy back.”

These words, a creation of repressed mournings, drowned as the mother of seemingly infinite strength cupped her hands over the face which too many tears have rolled. The cold silence which followed spoke tearful volumes that they realized the Craig they knew was forever gone.

Standing in the doorway, looking at the maternal figure draped with sorrow, the older black woman with the deep abiding faith asked, “How is he today?”

Mrs. Meyers turned and glumly muttered, “We thought he’d be doing better than he is.”

Dispirited, Mr. Meyers shrugged his shoulders, extending his open hands as if to say, "Here we go again."

Seeing that their confidence was dwarfed by recurring frustrations, the woman who had a family member down the hall said with a doubtless confidence, "He's gonna be alright. God's not gonna take him yet, he'll be just fine."

Impounded in a sea of doubt, the Meyers were happy to hear that someone was so sure Craig would pull through this. Because they can empathize with one another, the words from families of fellow patients can mean so much. And then, just as magically as she appeared, this prophet vanished.

Later in the evening, Craig would become responsive, showing marked improvement. While lying on the floor of mattresses, Craig chewed and swallowed his supper with less assistance from his family. Along with the lessened force-feeding, Craig sucked on a straw for the first time when drinking a can and a half of Hawaiian Punch—instead of the drink being squirted into his mouth via a syringe. Learning to savor every skill Craig has relearned and appreciating any frontier he's trying to master again as a leap of the greatest magnitude, after one's CNS has been damaged, no behavior which resurfaces can be viewed as insignificant or trivial.

Shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Meyers arrived in Craig's empty room on this March 4th afternoon, they heard the metallic squeak of wheels coming down the hallway and a faint feminine voice of a young woman. "So Craig, what did you do in PT this morning? Were they able to get that right arm down any?" This attractive blonde hospital worker's question was met with a mute silence, as Craig's inability to form any clear speech patterns continued. Craig was growing increasingly more frustrated that he couldn't shut his eyes and exit this annoying consciousness, so he started kicking, moaning, and thrusting his body. Making the trip down the hallway feel like a cross-country excursion for this petite nurse expected to transport this patient twice her size, Craig's hyperactivity only worsened.

The one-sided conversation of the nurse's aide and the rusted clamor of a wheelchair that needs oiled were getting nearer. "In Communication Therapy, did you work on. . . .?" Before the nurse's aide could finish her question, she stopped, becoming startled to hear Craig's parents in the room.

"There he is !!" Mr. Meyers boasted. "Did you work hard today, or did you give the therapists a tough time again?"

After a few moments of this everlasting quiet, Mr. Meyers wishfully looked at the aide, asking her if there has been any progress getting Craig to say something. "No, not today. But we're working on it? Aren't we Craig?," she reported without the slightest hint that a response to her question would be forthcoming.

Pushing Craig to the edge of the mattresses, intending to transfer him onto his peculiar sleeping arrangement, the aide locked the wheels of the wheelchair before putting her arms under Craig's. Tapping her shoes on the bedding to get an idea of the footing, the aide sprung with an uneasy recoil. Answering with a, "Don't worry, transfers in difficult situation were covered in my training,"—sweating blood—the Meyers asked if they could be of assistance.

Before long, the nurse's aide's knees were shaking unable to maintain her balance lifting Craig's dead weight body from his wheelchair. Mrs. Meyers squealed when the aide and Craig went tumbling down. The aide cushioned Craig's fall, as she dutifully made sure she was underneath her patient.

After checking that Craig's broken leg and spastic arm hadn't been hurt in the fall, this cute little nurse's aide scampered out of the room. When the initial shock of seeing his son go down wore off, Mr. Meyers thought if Craig only knew what he was laying on top of, he'd have regained consciousness right away.

The remainder of the afternoon, Craig was in his state where nature shuts off the senses because it doesn't like what it's feeling. But when he regains consciousness a few hours later, the accumulation of effort by the family, doctors, nurses, therapist, and people like the nurse's aide, will begin showing some dividends.

After Craig wolfed down the supper fed to him, the Meyers family worked with him on his various limitations. While lying on the mattresses where he wanted to escape into his ozone of unconsciousness, Craig was stimulated by his family.

Concurrently, Mr. Meyers would rub Craig's contracted arm, while Mrs. Meyers explained what had happened to him for the thousandth time before describing where he is for the hundredth time. Shifting gears, Mr. Meyers would then have Craig follow his finger and Scott—giving his mother a break—would then talk about what was happening throughout spring training camps in the world of Major League Baseball and what the Steelers plan to do in the draft. A home economics teacher at the rival high school, Scott's lovely wife would tell Craig how guys he played baseball against are wishing him well. This therapy—Meyers style—continued until Craig became agitated, trying to grab anybody or anything that was within his range.

The work with Craig was slow, tiresome, sometimes dangerous, and often unrewarding, but if Craig showed any benefit from their presence, the Meyers would be there, giving it their all. To relinquish hope was out of the question and, although their spirits had been shot down too many times to count, giving up the ship would never be considered. They would not and could not permit this treason. Their sanity was often hanging by a thread and their hopes, all too frequently, were like the dying embers of a doused inferno. The Meyers will do everything in their power, so their son will have a life where his constitutional right to pursue happiness will not escape him. This determination preserved the Meyers' willpower to keep going and kept them from falling into the clutches of self-destruction.

The immediate satisfaction from working with a person who has had a head injury is almost nil. The results of many hours of cumbersome effort can, many times, be taking one step forward and two backwards. This is trying on the soul and tests one's fortitude. To help a patient who's had a traumatic brain injury overcome the odds which are stacked against them, it is essential—for optimum recovery to occur—that family and/or friends reach inside themselves and gather the strength which they might not have known they had; making a focused commitment to help in any way possible.

“They were able to get Craig to talk! He counted to five this morning,” the aide who looked like she was going to wet herself reported.

Feeling an urge to go herself, Mrs. Meyers asked “What?,” not sure whether to believe what she thought she heard.

Adrenalin rushing to his head, flustered by this unexpected surprise and his wife’s untimely bout with deafness, Mr. Meyers confirmed, “She said Craig counted to ‘five’ this morning in therapy. They got him to talk!!!”

Hearing himself say this, a smile that lighted up the room came from this father treaded upon too many times to recall since his son could have been incinerated. As the aide was giving the details of the speech therapy session which had Craig say something for the first time since he probably screamed, “Oh my God!!!!,— Paul!!!!” just before hitting the telephone pole twenty days ago, the Meyers looked at their son feeling as though God just might pull off a miracle for him. Later this evening, the sense Craig had been touched would blanket the Meyers.

Any progress witnessed or heard would be savored in order for the Meyers to be able to face the next day without going crazy. Although the situation had improved tremendously, the vast majority of the time Craig usually wasn’t doing anything, but lying on his mattresses unconscious. Try watching someone sleep most of the day everyday for almost three weeks and you’ll get an idea of what the Meyers’ days are like.

In order to keep from climbing the walls, the family must find some way to distract themselves from the barrage of decrepid thoughts which want to take refuge in their conscious every waking hour. To focus on a patient’s condition twenty-four hours each day does no one, neither the patient nor their family, any good. To worry, feel anxious or distraught isn’t going to speed up the healing process. With God’s will, the brain’s healing and the repetition of therapy over time are what’s going to make a difference in one’s recovery, not beating yourself up with dysfunctional thoughts. Sometimes, all one can do is take it a day at a time; trying to find some positive in each; no matter how difficult this might be.

It is natural for a patient and those close to him or her to feel as if the world’s coming down on them, fearing what news tomorrow will bring. But in order for the patient to benefit, the family and/or friends must find some way to productively cope. Falling victim to the deluge of horrific visions which will occur with any debilitating condition does nothing to help. In order to provide the best for a family member or friend, those rendering assistance need to be at their best possible condition and try their utmost not to be consumed by misery, so they can think with a clear head what needs done to help the patient.

This is not to say that people shouldn’t grieve, for it is absolutely, positively essential to express the loss any disabling condition creates. However, there comes a point when this grieving process has to be put aside and the physical/emotional/cognitive work begins. Unfortunately, because the majority of recovery occurs within the first two years of the brain being injured, those experiencing the symptoms of head injury may feel the grieving process has not been completed be-

fore the work NEEDS to begin. But that's a fact that isn't going to change, so one needs to ACCEPT it and move on the best they can.

One may ask, "But how does one move on and go about the grieving process?" Talk and learn. Find someone who is not only going to hear what's being said, but is listening too. Family, friends, neighbors, medical professionals, clergy, counselors, and other people who want to understand and can empathize, need to be utilized. The *silence* of pain withheld and the *emptiness* of feeling alone can do substantial damage to the psyche.

Acquire as much information possible. Find out what head injury actually is. What happens to the brain, what the patient and the family needs to do to maximize recovery, discover productive coping strategies which will work for you, learn the basic principles of Rational Emotive Therapy, and locate resources in the community which may someday help the person surviving a head injury.

Notice the words. Person surviving a head injury. Even the term "head injury survivor" can have negative connotations, for it labels the person with the disability instead of recognizing the person as an individual. One may argue this is only semantics, but one's perceptions are vitally crucial to how one handles things. A person has thoughts which create feelings and these feelings precede behaviors. In essence, one's actions at any given time can be attributed to how they're thinking at the time. If one's thoughts are irrational or counterproductive, their actions will correspond with these perceptions. Not to say there won't be circumstances that legitimately will be negative in nature (such as the death of someone close), but to lessen the impact these situations have on one is within control, for people feel how they think.

The positive thing to remember about this is that the person having the thought(s) can control whether or not they keep these perceptions. A person has the control of replacing bad thoughts with more functional ones. And, because thoughts ultimately result in feelings and subsequently behavior, one has control of these as well. This could be viewed as a "Mumbo Jumbo" psycho-babble psychological principle, but it can work. Unless someone's been "brainwashed"—to use a cliché—no other person or thing can completely control how you think, feel, or behave—not even a brain injury.

The Meyers used this power of control in a variety of ways. During those all too frequent times when Craig was "out of it" in his realm of misplaced consciousness, in order to pass the time, the fatigued father would capture a little peace sitting out in the waiting room talking with other family members and the nurses. A very personable man, Mr. Meyers needed to talk to people, so as to remind himself that there really was a world outside of the four walls of Craig's hospital room.

Rarely leaving Craig's side, Mrs. Meyers would often find herself passing the time by doing trivial things. Counting the cars crossing the Sixth and Ninth Street bridges, as well as watching the Life Flight helicopter land and take off were but two ways this ragged mom would use to free herself from the boredom of watching her boy during one of his endless brain contusion-induced siestas. In case she'd

be needed or saw Craig show a glimmer of consciousness, this vigilant matriarch was never too far physically. After those inevitable times when her mind would wander, she would quickly assume her sentry-like role with a refreshed dedication.

The all-important Meyers family therapy was also utilized with discretion when needed. If Mrs. Meyers would be caught in the doldrums, Mr. Meyers would remind his wife of the gains made, no matter how minuscule. Whether it was drinking one more sip of Hawaiian Punch than the day before or keeping his eyes open thirty seconds longer than last week, the positives would need accentuated. If Mr. Meyers—the eternal optimist—needed a rare “pick-me-up,” all Mrs. Meyers would need to do was tell her husband how Craig might need him in some way, and he’d “snap to.” During those not-too-infrequent occasions when both were not at their best, Scott would encourage them, highlighting the improvements Craig’s made and to hang tough; that together they’ll beat this thing.

Head injury has many peaks and valleys, with those pits being easier to climb out of, if someone’s there to give a hand. The trials that will occur after the onset of a disabling injury are going to test the backbone of those it afflicts. Forever seeing a friend or family member different than the way they once were is something one has got to ACCEPT, if they are to continue in a healthy manner. If they can’t, the road ahead will be a rough one. Having a strong, resilient support system goes a long way towards a successful rehabilitation effort. And the Meyers are going to make sure Craig gets all the backing he needs.

When Craig returned from wherever he was, supported by two walls, he’d be placed in the corner of his room because this was the best location for him to be fed. Time to eat not making any difference, Craig was not cooperative, as he tried to return to his comfort zone of unconsciousness.

While Mrs. Meyers would attempt to get the plastic spoon in her sedated son’s mouth, Craig would slide down wanting to go to sleep. Panicking, Mr. Meyers would prop Craig back up and—despite knowing that he probably wasn’t going to be heard—told his son to please stay put, so he could be fed. Seconds after Mr. Meyers said this, Craig was on his way back down again.

It was critical that Craig begin eating, for he was losing weight at an alarming rate. Having lost at least twenty-five pounds, Craig’s cheeks were starting to sink in and his legs were thinning. Being able to make out the skeletal features of Craig’s face was a sight that Mrs. Meyers could never forget.

After over an hour of this dining experience where Craig’s posture was like that of a “Slinky,” he was put in his wheelchair and his parents would commence therapy with him. Wanting to hear something from Craig other than moans and groans, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers asked their son if he would look at them. Moving his head ever so slowly towards these parents who never in a millennium would have thought they’d be spoon-feeding their son again, Craig had a look in his eyes where his parents knew they had his attention and were—incredibly—in the same stratosphere.

Without hesitation, Mrs. Meyers spoke to Craig in her soft, persuading voice saying, "Me and daddy were told you counted this morning; let's keep working on that. See if you can count for us."

With his left arm resting on his thigh and his right contracted under his chin ala a poor imitation of Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker," Craig moved his upper torso in his chair as if positioning himself to make a speech. Taking a deep breath of air and rocking in his chair with a methodical precision, Craig leaned forward and—shut his eyes, trying to elude his tormenting consciousness.

Being so close to "making contact," the Meyers would not allow Craig to disappear. With an encouraging perseverance, the Meyers continued their pursuits to get Craig to utter something. Able to get Craig to look at her and hold his head up, instead of slouching and gazing into space, Mrs. Meyers thought that asking Craig about music might get him to respond. After several questions about some of his favorite rock bands with no response but an agitated moan and a ruffled squirming in his wheelchair, knowing that she was so close yet so far, Mrs. Meyers came up with a gem.

Knowing his love for guitar and getting him to talk about some of his favorite types might stimulate some neurons to connect with each other, Mrs. Meyers asked her son, "Can you tell me what a Fender is? I promised to get you one, once you got better."

With head tilted back and gazing towards the ceiling, Craig gasped, seemingly to gather a lung full of air. Eyes glazed, Craig exhaled a quick, barely discernible, "Guitar."

Feeling a tingling electricity throughout his body—normally one to look down on public displays of emotion—Craig's dad had yet more tears roll from his eyes, wetting the sleeves of Craig's hospital gown. As this grateful father bowed his head in his boy's chest, he would cry out, "That's right buddy, it's a guitar. A Fender's a guitar."

Her heart warmed by these two syllables, Mrs. Meyers sat smiling, paralyzed with a feeling of ecstasy words alone couldn't possibly describe.

While they got him going, these overjoyed parents didn't want to stop. "Craig, count to five for us," an elated Mr. Meyers asked of his son.

With the words falling from his mouth slow and to the point, pronounced in a jumbled fashion, Craig reeled off the numbers, "2-3-4-5."

With magazine in hand and in-between sobs, Mrs. Meyers quizzed her son, asking him to identify different pictures. Pointing to different objects in a picture ad of a kitchen for Frigidare, Mrs. Meyers had Craig correctly respond "chair" and "refrigerator" in the nasal twang that sounded nothing like the Craig she knew. With no elaboration whatsoever, Craig's one-word response may have been short, but Mrs. Meyers never heard anything so brief, sound so great.

This therapy continued until Craig became restless and was placed back on the floor of mattresses where he resumed his state of unconsciousness once his

head touched the pillow. Preparing to take a break themselves and process the joyful events of the day, the chaplain of the hospital rushed in. Reverend Hugh Crawford emphatically proclaimed, "I heard the news that Craig spoke today. My oh my, that's wonderful. You folks must be thrilled. Let's have a word of prayer. Dear Heavenly Father,"

Rejoicing with the minister and hearing this clergyman's words of hope, the Meyers felt more at ease that Craig would travel on the road to recovery.

Shortly after the minister left, a Rehabilitation Nurse from Mr. and Mrs. Meyers' auto insurance company came in, telling Craig's parents that they need to start considering rehabilitation centers which to place Craig. Looking at her son unconscious on the sea of bedding beneath them, Mrs. Meyers was shocked to hear that a transfer was being considered so soon. Craig's condition was still "touch and go" and Mrs. Meyers was fearful that if an emergency arose, which is definitely possible in the early stages of the brain being damaged, Craig would not be getting the constant medical attention he may need.

"Besides," this doubtful mother added, "Craig responds better and is more secure working with his family than staff. And I know whatever rehab center he's at, they aren't going to let us be with him as much."

With this cue, the nurse recommended Harmarville Rehabilitation Center over the other possibility, and emphasized the importance of the brain being retrained at this stage of the ballgame over the risks of anything happening to Craig medically. Empathizing with this anxious mother, this prognosticator assured Mrs. Meyers that Harmarville would be suitably equipped to handle any type of neuro-medical emergencies which Craig might have. Lump growing in her throat, mom Meyers would be delivered a punishing blow hearing how her son will always be at risk of having a seizure since his brain had been severely injured. Told that Craig will need to take anti-convulsant medication all his life in order to prevent having one of these uncontrollable spasms, Mrs. Meyers became raving mad that a well-to-do boy didn't think anything of disposing her son's welfare.

Since Craig's been in the hospital, regarding the limitations her teenaged son is going to have for the rest of his days, Mr. Meyers has heard those words, "all his life," too many times to count. Seeing Craig go from W.V.U. to "Sesame Street" in under three weeks time was insidiously taking its toll on Mr. Meyers.

Eyes fixed on his boy who was about to embark on a long rehabilitation journey of unknown territory where seemingly insurmountable crests and enduring plateaus would besiege him, Mr. Meyers fumed, "I wish that drunken bastard Paul were standing right here; I'd kill that son of a bitch."

There's no way this could happen, for Paul has been out of state, back in Morgantown.

Told of Paul's return to his home turf of cold ones on tap, teasing their emotions, the Meyers could picture Paul playing his role to a tee. After heedfully placing his crutches on the carpet, the Meyers could almost hear a dialogue where Paul

would tell his audience of floormate admirers how his car hit a patch of ice on a blind corner before colliding into the telephone pole. Seconds being of the essence not withstanding, this envisioned portrayal burning their senses, the Meyers could visualize Paul standing in the dorm's hallway detailing his imagined heroics.

Conjuring this lifelike scenario and viewing their boy's lifeless body everyday sparked an unparalleled anger for this older couple who'd be weary of suffering. Practically feeling the thump of the drum roll, with the culprit of this catastrophe highlighting how he ignored personal pain, Craig's folks believed it wouldn't be beneath Paul to say he had no regard for his own safety while under the twisted metal, because he wasn't about to abandon his unresponsive friend. Not even having the depth to refrain from lying to them after he had almost killed their son, liable to explain to this collegiate assembly that he waited until the last possible moment before ceasing attempts at reviving Craig, these victimized parents could imagine Paul basking with the roaring cheers of approval made by his gullible listeners.

With his paternal guiding force knowing all too well, Sigmund Freud once said, "Dreams are the royal road to the discovery of the unconscious." However, for some strange reason, Paul wouldn't mention anything about how his drinking was the road leading to Craig's unconscious. If and when Craig's awareness ever rekindles, so that the "space in time" void he is surely going to experience one day may be filled, the Meyers would proceed to take some pictures of their comatose son when he was dangling onto life.

Although not apparent at first, Saturday March 6th would be a day further conquests would be made. Mr. Meyers reached into the deep pocket of his sport coat and pulled out his camera. Believing that the hospital's policy was one where pictures were not permitted when someone's in as bad a state as Craig, the Meyers would just as soon keep this under their hat. Operating from his optimistic view, down the line, Mr. Meyers thought that if the family ever gets discouraged with the progress Craig's making, they will have a tangible snapshot to remind them just how badly Craig was at one time.

While lying on his back on top of the mattresses, adorned in a hospital gown top, pajama bottoms, and sneakers to restrain his "drop foot," Mrs. Meyers continuously spoke to Craig while Scott would try to push his brother's contracted arm to the ground. As this therapy was taking place just in front of where Craig would be propped-up to eat, Mr. Meyers snapped a picture.

To get a closer snapshot of his comatose son, the jingling keys in his pocket making it difficult to be inconspicuous, Mr. Meyers bounced over to Craig. Standing above Craig at his son's feet, Mr. Meyers leaned a little to the left, then a little to the right, trying to get the picture centered the best he could. Just when this sly fox was positioned to flick himself a snapshot, interrupting this photo shoot, footsteps would be heard coming towards the door.

With one quick motion, the camera would be concealed again. Armed with the tools of her trade, preparing to take his pulse and blood pressure, the Registered Nurse hip-hopped over to Craig. While holding Craig's left wrist and

muttered “Sporting News.” After correctly naming for Scott the baseball teams various players played for, not propped in the corner of his room, Craig ate his supper while sitting in his wheelchair for the first time. If Craig was going to go to Harmarville, he’d have to start being able to sit in his chair for extended periods because there won’t be a room of mattresses awaiting him there.

The minute-hand seeming as if it would never make its way around, the clock’s tick was mesmerizing. Like the clicking fingers of the hypnotist who wants the subject to return, Craig’s incomprehensible cry broke the Meyers from their trance. Apparently wanting to tell someone of his discomfort sitting, Craig’s speech was like that of a backmasking record once again, as the sound coming from his mouth was like that of a Neanderthal Man in distress.

The Meyers’ difficulty understanding what Craig was trying to say, made their son so frustrated that his emotional tone eventually turned into one of pronounced irritability. Realizing his speech wasn’t being unscrambled, not able to figure out what his parents’ problem was, the volume of Craig’s angry voice increased to an alarming decibel level.

Upon hearing the ruckus, one of the evening shift’s Registered Nurses entered the room and couldn’t help but notice the disappointment on these exhausted parents’ faces. Surprised their son’s speaking capacity had regressed to its earlier form, from reasonable clarity to becoming incomprehensible, Craig’s parents would be informed of the effects an injured brain can have on speech. Distraught that Craig’s ability to talk had not progressed as it had earlier in the day, the nurse tried her best to console these tired troopers.

“Now don’t you folks worry yourself sick, your boy’s making some fine progress. This hasn’t been Craig’s first setback and likely won’t be his last. It’s like his ‘in and out of consciousness,’ sometimes Craig has an idea of what’s happening, sometimes he doesn’t even know who he is. But don’t get yourself too down, Craig’ll be talking again. You can count on that.”

The Meyers wondered if they’ll be able to count on anything again. To be primed for victory only to be shot down time and time again, takes a lot out of someone. Knowing that Craig is going to have setback after setback until this is over, if it’s ever going to be over, is something that must be endured. And, if one is to persevere, they need to find the strength to grasp hope and not let it escape. Hope is the key to withstanding the unrelenting punishment a head injury will deliver. If one lets this slip away, there is nothing. Because of the events of the next two days, the Meyers would need to summon all their stamina in order to keep from tumbling into that hole which is evanescent promise.

Sunday, March 7th was not a day of rest for the Meyers—far from it. Clanging the foot plate on his wheelchair with the violence of his mood this day, Craig must really know what kind of shape he’s in now, for he couldn’t sit still. Cautiously approaching his son who was peeved about only God knows what exactly, Mr. Meyers pleaded outloud, “When’s this agitated state he’s in ever going to end?”

Contained for a moment by his father's grasp, Craig let out a muffled moan letting his dad know he wasn't pleased being kept from thrashing his arm north, south, east, and west. Recklessly wobbling his chair, Craig moaned as if he'd been stabbed. Needing to get accustomed doing things that aren't real comfortable at first, Craig wouldn't be returning to the mattresses anytime soon because he had to tolerate sitting in his wheelchair longer, if he was going to Harmarville. No telling when a bed may become available for him at the rehab center, Craig would just have to be tough and endure the prolonged agony.

As she looked at her boy cuffed with misery, Mrs. Meyers couldn't believe Craig will be leaving the hospital once a bed is ready at Harmarville. Babbling like an infant and irritably thumping the back of the wheelchair with his left elbow which still looked like hamburger, Craig was in another galaxy unknown to man. Wanting to talk when he would jabber, Craig must have realized the words weren't coming out like he wanted them to. Not able to communicate because the ability to talk had been forgotten, this frustration made Craig mad as hell.

Despite the never-ending encouragement and optimistic efforts by her husband, Mrs. Meyers could not be convinced her baby would be able to benefit from the rigors of rehabilitation. Shaking her head in disbelief, Mrs. Meyers uttered in a tone of submission, "He isn't ready, there's no way he's ready. Craig's not going to be able to go to a rehab yet. He can't even hold his head up on his own. He can't remain conscious but a few hours, so how's he going to be able to do the work therapy requires. He can't walk, talk, and hasn't moved his right arm in almost a month."

Seeing his wife work herself up in a full-blown "tizzy," Mr. Meyers would remind her that this is why Craig's going to rehab—so that he can work on these things. He pointed out the gargantuan gains Craig's has made already and of the potential he's showing for staff to even consider transferring him to a rehabilitation center.

Pressed into service as psychotherapist, Mr. Meyers said, "When a brain's been hurt, they don't waste any time trying to get it to work again."

Despite this father's words of comfort, empathizing with Mrs. Meyers' doubt wouldn't be difficult given Craig's rambunctious history while at Allegheny General. With the exception of those few brief moments when he showed a glimmer of being mildly coherent, Craig was restless and agitated all day. Being that every precious ounce of energy Craig's parents deposited had been siphoned from them this day, their need to refuel for tomorrow's events was essential, if they were to rise above the anxiety which would not be denied.

Their bodies succumbed to the chill when the phone rang this March 8th morning. Hoping it was a wrong number, the Meyers wouldn't be so lucky.

In a few moments after answering the phone, Mrs. Meyers asked, "And when's this to take place?"

Standing a few feet from the phone, twisted with nervous excitement, Mr. Meyers became unnerved after his wife eventually hung up the phone and said, "That was the social worker at Allegheny General; Craig's being transferred to Harmarville tomorrow morning, about ten."

Anytime he's called upon to drive an unfamiliar area of Pittsburgh, Mr. Meyers becomes fanatical. Like bullets shooting from a machine gun, this hyper father asked, "How's he going to get there?" "Where is Harmarville? Is it off 79 or do you have to take the turnpike? I forgot to look at a map last night; I was too bushed." "Do they have people there to watch Craig? Y'know he can't be left alone." "Will he be able to continue seeing Dr. Prostko? We like him." "What time did you say he was going, again?"

Seeing that her husband was working himself into a frenzy, her turn to use some psychology, Mrs. Meyers praised her partner's driving up to this point when they go to Allegheny General everyday and calmly attempted to soothe this terrorized driver by encouraging him to simply "take it slow" until he becomes acquainted with the route. Battling her own uneasiness, Mrs. Meyers replied as quietly as she could that they would be told the specific arrangements which would need to be made upon arriving at the hospital later in the afternoon.

After learning that they'd have to bring some of Craig's clothes, insurance verification, a jacket, and a picture or two of something which Craig was familiar to set on his nightstand from home to Harmarville, Craig's parents went to their boy's room. About to endure more of what they had seen enough of yesterday, the Meyers could only hope that things would be different with the change of settings.

Having just been put on his mattresses after his morning therapy, an unconscious Craig would not respond when his parents said, "Hi" to him this afternoon.

With the jubilation they show every afternoon they come in, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers spoke spiritedly, telling their boy that he's going to be moved to a different place tomorrow and not to be scared; that they'll be there with him too. Upper lip quivering, Mr. Meyers said, "You're going to a rehab center where they're going to get you on your feet again and that right arm playing that ukele of yours. You'll be on that ballfield again in no time."

Knowing his condition is not one where a "kiss and a BandAid" will serve as a remedy this time, Mrs. Meyers could only hope Craig would be able to get something out of rehabilitation and not aimlessly flounder because his brain cannot cooperate. Ragged from three weeks of battling the furor associated with head injury, Craig's mom has been in a hailstorm of panic and disarray since Paul hurt her son. Only able to capture a few fleeting moments where Craig could tell them what he was feeling and thinking, left this mother paranoid with fear, as she could merely guess what was going on in his head.

The Meyers' minds were not put at ease when they were informed that Craig will not be sleeping on his mattresses tonight, rather, he will be returning to his bed that agitates him so much. In order to prepare Craig for his admission to Harmarville, hospital staff would have to apply some systematic desensitization with their unruly patient.

Mrs. Meyers whispered to her husband, "Here's a boy who needs handcuffed while lying in bed, so he doesn't hurt himself. I can see him lying in his bed at Har-

marville, not supervised, ripping his elbow up. How do they expect him to benefit from rehab when he's 'fit to be tied.'”

Only adding fuel to Mrs. Meyers' fire that her son was not ready for the move, in a little while, Craig would be in his wheelchair fighting his enemy with a renewed vitality.

The squeak heard by Craig's parents was not that of the rusted wheels of his chair being pushed down the hallway, but Craig abusing the sideplates of his wheelchair like that of a deranged, criminally insane sociopath on a mindless agenda to lash out at anyone or anything. Cautious not to escalate this tirade, the Meyers stood helplessly, watching their son go through the motions of his agitated state. Not wanting to provoke him in any way—not that they'd have to do anything to get him on his warpath—all these parental saints could really do was let Craig “ride out” his aggravation, and safeguard against him seriously hurting himself.

Crying out in a muffled moan as if wanting to be put out of his misery, Craig rustled in his wheelchair like that of one being tortured by a pain only Beelzebub could contrive. Seemingly overwhelmed being prisoner in a haze of misery, Craig would unrelentlessly tug at his hospital gown. As if freeing himself from that which covered his body would allow him to escape the petrifying Hell with which he felt enclosed, like the cell of a convict who has committed a crime punishable by death, freedom from horror would be restrained by walls of confinement.

With his contracted right arm, shredded ear, fractured leg, the large lump in the middle of his forehead, a face purple from being bruised, and gazed eyes, Mrs. Meyers could barely recognize her son. Looking like he'd been spun in a blender after having been chopped and diced, making it virtually impossible imagining Craig ever being whole, this victim's appearance would never be the same. As bad as this accident has left Craig physically, the most difficult aspect his parents have to deal with is how his brain being injured has changed his personality from being mild-mannered to someone they didn't know as their son. Since his brain had been bruised, Craig's banging-clawing-kicking-thrashing led Mrs. Meyers to believe that Craig has been struck down by the worst affliction, for it not only affects one physically, but alters the personality as well. With the exception of those times few and far between when Craig momentarily showed a semblance of his old self, the Meyers had no idea who was in that wheelchair. Perhaps, the one sitting in the wheelchair didn't know who was there either.

Ruffled by their son's agony, the disconcerted expression on these seniors' faces told a story of cyclical frustrations and shattered aspirations this afternoon. It was only the day before yesterday that Craig was able to identify some of the players in the Pirates' lineup, but today, doesn't know what the game of baseball is. Such is the case when one has suffered trauma to the brain which affects not only one's physical abilities, but emotional and cognitive ones as well.

The fear that Craig might always fluctuate from one extreme on the spectrum to the other, occupied the Meyers' thinking. Would Craig's coherence and sensibility always be dependent on whether those brain waves decide to work or not?

Or will he one day be able to have some control? And if Craig will have to live a life where independence is a painful reminder of what he had taken away from him, would he want to survive?

It would *have to* be this way, for these parents forever disturbed from their routine could not fathom their son being gone and would do what they could to make Craig's life as tolerable as possible. Preserving what emotional balance remained, these warriors would tell themselves that the Afterlife will just have to wait before their son takes up residency there because Craig has a lot more living to do here on earth. With all the plans made, nurturing given, and time invested in Craig's development, the Meyers wouldn't be going down without a fight. Although this afternoon was an aphasic one, as the day lurked into evening, the hypothalamus and company worked in concert with one another, so Craig could go about his business of showing why Harmarville would be the next logical step in this leg of the mission.

After Craig devoured his gourmet pureed delicacy at dinnertime, not a willing participant this afternoon, the Meyers went about their therapy with Craig. Mrs. Meyers talked to Craig about what's going on in the neighborhood with his friends, Mr. Meyers had Craig follow his floating finger which swung like a clock's pendulum, and Scott worked on getting his brother's right arm down a little more. This therapy was identical to what these instructors did with Craig last evening, the evening before that, and the evenings prior to that. Retraining that brain requires hard work that is continuous, monotonous, usually boring, frequently painful, and always difficult.

Sticking with Craig like his shadow, the Meyers have been on an emotional roller coaster, praying their car does not derail. Their dedication and commitment doing what they could so Craig would progress was impeccable, as his last day at Allegheny General was on the horizon.

Beyond the horizon, the mist of this March 9th morning made it impossible to ascertain whether the day would be one where the sun would rise to the heavens above or be vanquished by black clouds, threatening to make everything dark. No matter, the Meyers prepared to leave for the hospital one last time on this Tuesday; a morning that was thick with tension.

Entangled by a web of uncertainty when they arrived at Allegheny General, informed that Craig did just fine tolerating his bed last night, the doubt which shrouded the Meyers would be lifted somewhat.

After filling out the necessary papers for discharge, the Meyers walked into their son's room, seeing that Craig had already been dressed by staff in the one set of clothes Mrs. Meyers brought in yesterday from home. Seeing Craig in jeans and a flannel shirt brought smiles to his parents' faces.

"There's our old slob," Mr. Meyers said, feeling boyish himself that his son was at least resembling himself from an attire standpoint.

Never believing that she'd be so happy seeing Craig decked out in his customary "Oscar Madison" garb, Mrs. Meyers was absolutely gleeful that Craig

looked like himself clothes-wise, not draped in pajamas and hospital gown around the clock. However, seeing that Craig's jeans were several sizes too large because of all the weight he had lost and his uneasiness sitting in his wheelchair brought reality crashing down again.

As he was trying to rip apart his shirt, before retreating hastily so she wouldn't get in the way of his hand which sought anything to latch onto, Mrs. Meyers bent over to Craig to stop him from breaking off his buttons. Yelling at Craig that he better not lay a hand on his mother, while trying to avoid his rowdy son's airborne arm himself, Mr. Meyers told his soon-to-be- discharged boy not to leave Allegheny General on such bad terms.

After Craig toned-down some, aided by his dad holding down his arm, Mrs. Meyers told her enraged son that he will be put in an ambulance in a little while and transferred to the rehabilitation center "me and daddy told you about." However, Craig's state of mind was once again one where he didn't even know he was being spoken to.

Unfortunately for the Meyers, "a little while" had arrived and it was time to take Craig down to the ambulance in a gurney. With smiles disguising their somber expectation that the future will be one absent of normalcy for Craig, the staff bid farewell to their trooper, wishing he and his parents the best on their walk to the elevator one last time. All the while, Craig laid surprisingly content in his gurney the ambulance personnel were pushing down the hallway. Talking to him in a relaxed fashion, the ambulance driver and his attendant moved hastily along, not about to waste any time while Craig laid there pleasantly passive. This relaxed/non-combative demeanor lasted until the driver started the engine. Then, all hell broke loose.

March 9, 1982 was D-Day for the Meyers, not only because it was discharge day, but because of the battle Craig would put up in the ambulance. Something very disturbing was going on inside Craig's head, for being transported in the ambulance was interpreted as a threat. Thinking that a familiar face traveling with Craig would put him more at ease on his trip in the ambulance, Mrs. Meyers had requested, and was granted, permission to accompany her son. However, this didn't seem to make much difference.

As Mrs. Meyers looked at her frightened son wailing as loud as his bruised brain would allow him to, Craig's agitation and resistance grew more intense. Mrs. Meyers and the empathetic attendant tried to calm Craig by reassuring him that things were alright and that they'll be at the rehab in no time, being that it was only a fifteen-mile drive. The attendant commented to Mrs. Meyers that maybe Craig, sensing his being in a moving vehicle, was terrorized given what had happened to him the last time he was transported by someone.

Pulling onto Route 28 North, the ambulance whisked past the Heinz Factory and by the time it was bypassing such exits as the ones in Millvale, Etna, and Blawnox, Craig was lying in his gurney in the rear of the ambulance dripping with sweat as a result of his being stricken with terror. Slowed by the midday traffic,

the ambulance trudged along, passing the Highland Park Bridge to the right. Before coming to the RIDC Park exit which was where they were to get off, Craig's tolerance made its descent to the point where it took the efforts of both Craig's mom and the attendant to keep him from falling prey to his excessive fear.

Following the ambulance in the family car, Mr. Meyers had no idea that the inside of the ambulance had become like the zoo they were not too far away from. As nerve-racking as the trip was at the beginning, it got worse as the miles accumulated. Like the safaris where the inhabitants of the nearby Pittsburgh Zoo were caught, Mrs. Meyers' and the attendant's expedition was to capture some order, as the ambulance made its way onto Freeport Road.

Trying to pacify Craig, letting out muted screams by now and rolling from side to side, the ambulance attendant told his patient that they're almost there and to "hang tough." By the time they made the turn at Eat 'n' Park onto the narrow, winding, pothole-laden, uphill street known as Guys Run Road leading to their destination, Craig was paralyzed with fear. Because of the traumatized unrest occurring within the ambulance, the past twenty or so minutes with Craig have been some of Mrs. Meyers' longest, as she could sense how Sir Edmund Hillary must have felt nearing the crest on Mt. Everest.

As the driver arrived at this pinnacle and made the left onto Harmarville's long driveway, he flipped down his visor because the sun's rays were blinding this afternoon. The powerful glow brightening the earth below, Craig's arrival at this rehabilitation center marked the juncture where the depth of his character would be discovered. After twenty-four agonizing days at the hospital—which seemed like years—the *silence* of needing to appreciate that which shouldn't be, and the *emptiness* treading a path never traveled to a destination not known, would soon make its appearance.