

# A Back-Broken But Whole Life

Category: Motor Vehicle Accidents

written by Julia C. Spring | March 19, 2026

I was on a blind date, a week short of turning 21, when the Triumph I was riding in crashed into a light pole on the Bronx River Parkway. My date thought the car was burning and rushed around to pull me out; the door was locked, and by the time he got back to the driver's seat he realized the car with spewing steam, not smoke, so he just held me still.

When the ambulance got me to the hospital, it turned out I had jackknifed over the lap belt and broken my back.

After a five hour operation, including a bone graft and laminectomies of my T12 to L2 vertebrae, I was able to move my left foot and right knee. I was in rehab for six months and a year after that was volunteering in Africa.

It is now 60 years later, and I am about to have my ninth additional orthopedic surgery on joints overstressed by my limp and my mix of weak muscles and compensating ones.

My life so far has been good: an enjoyable career, marriage at 36, a daughter at 38, widowed at 43, and remarriage at 47. I keep trudging with one crutch; 10 city blocks a day takes me 30 minutes. A lot of the time I am matter-of-fact about my disability, though sometimes I feel sorry for myself and sometimes enraged.

Breaking my back both changed my life completely and left it essentially the same. I am lucky, determined, and whole.

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