

My Mother's Life, My Life

Category: Motor Vehicle Accidents

written by Melanie M. Thompson | March 4, 2026

A motor vehicle accident (MVA) changed my mother's life forever, and maybe my life as well.

When she was 16, my mother, as a pedestrian, was hit by a drunk driver who went through a stop light. She had such a severe compound fracture of her femur and tibia that she was in traction for three years: in the hospital, her leg hanging in the air from pulleys, for *three years* when she was 16, 17, and 18 years old. We don't do that to patients anymore. She also had multiple surgeries during those three years: for pinning; for osteomyelitis; and for skin grafts—which left 4-inch-square scars on her “good” thigh where skin was removed to cover a 3-inch-square divot in her “bad” leg.

My mother told stories about the kindness of strangers during that period. Her mother was a single, working mom due to my grandfather's untimely death from a cerebral hemorrhage at age 52. My grandmother's colleagues at work rallied and sent a card or letter to my mother in the hospital almost every day of that extended stay. I can't imagine the PT/therapy available in the late 1940s. Was there any kind of counseling for a teenager stranded in the hospital at that time? Was there a TV? A radio? I don't know.

My mother went on to become a civil servant and married my father, an enlisted man in the Army, in Yokohama, Japan, in 1954. They had two children: my brother and me. I know my mother, embarrassed by her scars, never wore a swimsuit again. She loathed that she even had to wear a skirt to “Army wives” functions, as it was not yet in vogue for women to wear pants at social occasions. I know my mother had chronic pain the rest of her life. She suffered from depression. She died by suicide.

Something I'll never know is how the drunk driver's life turned out. Was he hurt? Was he depressed? Was he repentant?

I know my mom would have been happy to meet my children, my grandchildren. But I won't get the chance to introduce her. That MVA changed all our lives.

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