

## One Bad Decision

Source: Michael Nepola, One Bad Decision. Used with permission. [www.onebaddecision.com](http://www.onebaddecision.com).

Video Link: <http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=2546>

[Music]

[Background Noise]

[Silence]

[Phone Rings]

**John Nepola:** Hello. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, Mike's been in a car accident.

It's hard to even describe what it's...what it's like to get that phone call.

[Background Noise and Music]

**Michael Butler:** I have a victim here of a high speed motor vehicle crash, crashed into a culvert. A 17-year-old male was ejected out of the sun roof about 45 feet, he's tachycardic, pulse rate 130, blood pressure is 70/41. Unequal lung sounds.

**Sanjeev Kaul, MD:** here was a fear that Michael would have such a devastating brain injury that he would be comatose forever and would not survive. So the first day I remember when he was taken from the emergency room to the CT scanner and even before we established the severity of his injury I remember walking to his father and the rest of his family and saying that Michael has a very severe head injury and this looks very, very serious and it's a life and death situation. I wanted to brace the family for what I knew was going to be a very, very difficult time.

**Donna Ramsey, RN:** Your first thought is that this person is not going to do well, this is not going to go well, the person is going to be badly injured and they might die, most likely they'll die, that's our first thought and then when they come in and you see them you think...oh, God can we help him, can we possibly save this person.

[Music]

**John Nepola:** Your life forever changes, forever.

[Music]

**Michael Nepola:** Hi, I'm Michael Nepola [assumed spelling] I should be dead.

[Music]

On July 25, 2008 I only had a couple beers. I thought I was okay to drive. It was one bad decision.

[Music]

**Peter Youngberg:** When I arrived on the scene I immediately noticed a vehicle facing toward me, off

the roadway with significant damage and smoke coming from the hood.

**Michael Nepola:** I'm here to tell you that if you drink and drive something will happen eventually.

**Peter Youngberg:** At that time a woman approached me yelling and screaming that there was a person in bushes that were adjacent to the car. I found Michael who was laying on his back, well into the bushes. He was covered in blood, his clothing was ripped apart and he was just sprawled out on his back. As I climbed into the bushes I began speaking with him, he was semi conscious at the time, his breathing was extremely labored, he was able to tell me that there were other occupants in the car and that he had an injury to his neck area. He pointed to his neck, I found a puncture wound that was profusely bleeding and at that time Michael began to lose consciousness.

**Michael Butler:** This boy was badly hurt; frankly you know the prognosis was if you looked at him and you know we tend to talk between us and the paramedics, he wasn't going to live.

**John Nepola:** Getting such a phone call I think you really, you can't even imagine what it feels like. I just recall going numb because it's the one thing that I'd always dreaded you know getting a phone call about my child and not knowing what happened, if he was alive, how hurt he was.

**[Music]**

**Michael Butler:** I kind of forced my way through the trees and managed to get to the patient and it turned out to be the driver who'd been ejected either through the window or the sun roof. The driver was unconscious, the face was covered with blood, he was not responsive when I reached him. The first thing we're concerned about was any spinal injury so a fireman handed...managed to throw me a cervical collar. I put a collar on the patient, I also checked his head, somebody was shouting to me to make sure there were no penetrations, branches whatever that might have penetrated the young boy's head. I checked the head, no obvious penetrations but again he was covered with blood.

**John Nepola:** When we got to the scene Michael was in the back of an ambulance being intubated.

**Michael Nepola:** I was lucky. I only had a severe traumatic brain injury.

**[Music]**

Which I will live with forever...I was only in a comma for 17 days. I was only in the intensive care unit for three weeks; I was only on life support for 19 days. I only received 207 staples in my head. I only fractured five vertebrae and broke five ribs. I'm only deaf in my left ear. I only broke my family's and friend's hearts. I only saw the white light once.

**Vishy Rajaraman, MD:** The skull itself was pretty much broken into bits and we had to take out all those bits and pieces and immediately underneath the skull there was another large blood clot which was removed and in Michael's case the coating of the brain or the dura was actually torn and some pieces of brain tissue was actually coming out through that, suggesting that there was a fairly severe injury.

**John Nepola:** The doctors, the trauma doctors, Dr. Hall and Dr. Rajaraman came and showed me a...showed us a the first CT scan of Michael's brain and it had swelled to completely one side of his skull. You know, he could have died at any minute, they had to perform an emergency craniotomy on him to relieve the pressure and they don't give you any guarantees you know, there was no guarantee he'd survive the operation, no guarantee anything at all. And I remember after they went...they brought him into the operating room I just froze, like my whole body actually froze and I curled up in a ball. And I think sometimes nobody really understands or certainly those who haven't experienced it understand

what it's like to go through that when your child, you know, is injured in that way and may not survive. Um...your life forever changes...forever.

**Michael Nepola:** I'm lucky to be alive, it could have been worse. I had two friends in the car who were wearing seat belts, they could have died but they walked away. I can be paralyzed or in a wheel chair, I could be unable to speak, I could be dead. One bad decision changed my whole life forever.

**John Nepola:** We're lucky that Michael was strong enough to survive with the help of the care at Hackensack and it's been a long road, a long road for my son back. You know he had to relearn how to walk and how to talk and a year later he's still...he's still struggling to relearn how to use his right side, his right arm, hand but he's a miracle, he's a real miracle.

**[Music]**

**Michael Nepola:** Before the accident I had great life. I made first team All State in golf as a sophomore, drove a hot car, had a great girlfriend, I liked to have fun, maybe party a little, life was good. I never thought anything would happen. One bad decision rocked my world; the road to recovery is hard. After about a month at Hackensack University Medical Center, I was in the children's specialized hospital for seven weeks of rehabilitation.

**Erin Leahy:** He couldn't talk, he couldn't walk, he couldn't move the right side of his body. He couldn't do those simple things that we all take for granted on an everyday basis like sit up at the edge of your bed, walk to the bathroom, brush your teeth, brush your hair, talk to your friends on the phone, anything that you can think of that you do in your normal day, Michael couldn't do without the help of somebody else.

**Michael Nepola:** I had to learn to talk again. I had to learn to walk again. There were days I wished I had died. Today life is really hard, most of my time is spent working to get better. I still have trouble speaking sometimes; I go to physical therapy where I still walk with a limp. I still don't have full use of my right hand and arm. I try to play golf but I might not be as good as I once was. I go to occupational therapy so I can do simple things like text my friends, play video games or tie my sneakers. My car insurance is now \$18,000 a year. There's no guarantee I'll ever be 100 percent. I was lucky but not everyone is.

So please if you walk away with anything today, remember these four things. 1. Don't drink and drive. 2. Don't text and drive. 3. Don't ride with anyone that has been drinking. 4. Wear your seatbelt. I got a second chance, not everyone does. Life is sweet, don't mess it up.

**[Music]**