



3 Days to Save Your Life

A letter from your sister, Erin

Dear Chris

I know you may have some gaps on how you have come to be on this journey, this life-long recovery from traumatic brain injury. I wanted to write down some of this story for you, from my perspective anyway, to see if that helps fill in some of those gaps of knowledge.

I would like to tell you that we, as a family, have been always near you and in the background, as you have come along this awful, life-changing journey of brain injury. We wanted to give you a chance – and so we took all the chances for you to survive.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN BALI?

No-one knows exactly what happened. Your friends in Bali believe there was definitely a motorbike accident. You were found in a gutter in Kuta, your scooter nearby, your helmet was on and you were unconscious. You were taken by taxi to hospital where a surgeon said you needed an operation, a piece of skull removed and bleeding on your brain stopped; your brain had nowhere to expand and you would die without surgery. At 9 am or soon after, you were admitted to surgery – nearly 12 hours after you were found in the street.

WE GET THE NEWS

Monday, 10th September 2012, Perth

I am in the canteen at Sam's primary school. The Eagles had won on the weekend, giving them a preliminary final in Melbourne. I thought it would be an exciting adventure for Sam and I to have a long weekend in Melbourne as the Eagles may not get the chance of a final again, or in years to come. Just for fun.

I had managed to book plane flights, accommodation and tickets to the game and was talking about this with great excitement in the canteen when just before 9 am my phone rang and I can see it is your friend Jason calling. It was unusual for him to call so I left the canteen to take the call.



Advocacy Training Awareness

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As he was telling me this news, I felt my stomach lurch. I knew it would be an enormous emotional blow for Mum and Dad. It felt like a stack of dominoes had lined up and were all falling in different directions, all in the space of a millisecond. My heart was racing; I needed to get into action – but what to do first?

I drove straight home, knowing I needed to get information. I needed to find you. I turned the desktop computer on. While I was waiting for it to warm up, I knew I needed to spread the word.

I phoned Dad. He was just getting on a train in Mandurah, he said, “Call me when you have some more information. I will be 45 minutes getting to Perth.” We arranged I would pick him up from Leederville.

I googled “Hospitals in Bali”, Sanglah Hospital was the first on the list. I rang three times. Twice the receptionist didn’t speak English, put me through somewhere else, also couldn’t speak English, and then hung up. The third time, when I said your name the receptionist voiced your first, middle and last name so I knew straight away that I had the hospital where you were, that someone had a passport or knew your full name.

We needed to let Mum know. We now had some more information; the situation was pretty serious and we needed to decide what we needed to do. I thought it best if we went in person without telling her why we were coming. I rang and asked if she was there without letting on that Dad was with me.

I knocked on the door and went in, Mum was down in the laundry she saw me and we said hello and then I said, “Dad’s here too and we need to talk about something,” and she said straight away, “It’s Chris, isn’t it? Something’s happened to Chris,” and I said, “Yes. But he’s alive”. We discussed the situation, who would go, how long might we need to stay. This was potential long-term care. Mum wanted to go. We would all go.

With that, Mum needed to start packing a suitcase, finding her passport, her medical needs. We booked two rooms at a hotel in Bali – having no idea what length of time we would need to be there. Dad and I went off to prepare.

By this time, it was nearly 3 pm so I went up to the school to talk with Sam. I saw him and sat him down on the wall at the school and said, “Something has happened,” and he looked at me and said very seriously, “What?”... “Uncle Chris has had an accident in Bali. He’s hurt very badly, some broken bones and has had an operation on his head. Grandma and Pa and I are going to fly up to Bali to see what has happened and I don’t know how long I will be away. It could be a few days or a week or two.”

He said, “Ok. What about Melbourne?” I said, “We will sort it out. He gave me a big hug and had tears streaming down his eyes. Beautiful boy.



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WE ARRIVE IN BALI

Tuesday 11th September, ICU, Sanglah Hospital

The surgeon came and spoke to us, in the little office just outside of ICU. In broken English he went through the list of injuries and what surgery had happened the day before, we asked him when you could be moved – if it was possible to move you – whether a week or two?

The surgeon sat back in his chair and said, “Soon...as soon as possible. We can’t do anything more here. He needs better care, care from Australia.”

After a conversation with a doctor at Royal Perth Hospital (RHP) we gained further information. He said that “by day 3, a chemical cascade happens in the brain when it is severely injured like this and it takes very special care for that to be managed.” So the race was on – we had a timetable now. You needed a flight today to be back in Perth by tomorrow – Day 3.

After much research, many telephone calls and a deposit of \$45,000 being paid the flight was booked. We had a plane, an ICU doctor and ICU nurse, and a pilot of course!

Eventually, with your friends gathered and waiting for many hours in the visiting room at ICU, you were wheeled out of a side door, wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy. I took a photo, very blurred, my hands were shaking. Your friends one by one came up and said good bye, and we followed behind the trolley, as an entourage, through a now-quiet Sanglah hospital corridor to a waiting ambulance, which would take you to Denpasar airport.

BACK IN PERTH

Wednesday 12th September 2012, Perth

From the airport Dad jumped into a taxi and you were whisked away into a waiting ambulance. The race was on down Great Eastern Highway, sirens blaring, overtaking Dad in the taxi.

You needed more surgery due to further bleeding on the brain, your other injuries were still considered secondary, at this stage. It was still touch and go. We would know in about an hour if it was successful. This was now around 3.30 pm in the afternoon of Wednesday, 12 September.

We got some news a bit after 4 pm that you were out of surgery and in recovery. After a while, we were able to go into ICU at Royal Perth Hospital to see you. Mum and I went in first. I pulled up a chair for Mum and she sat on your left side, touching your forearm. “My boy, my boy, my darling boy.”



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So this was the reality of catastrophic brain injury. It was diffuse, meaning many areas of the brain were involved, and there had been bleeding. Blood is damaging to brain tissue. There may be secondary injury from a delay in draining off the blood – meaning, injury to the brain.

As would unfold in the next few days, you had a number of exotic Bali bacterial bugs, one being particularly resistant to antibiotics – a top of the shelf antibiotic would be needed. You would develop pneumonia a bit later, temperatures and cooling blankets. The antibiotics had to run a couple of courses to get on top of the infection in your chest

After nearly a full week at RPH ICU, so about 12 days in an induced coma, the ICU doctor, said they were going to start reducing the coma drugs to see what response there would be. He didn't know if you would wake up.

You started to open your eyes and follow some movement in the room, but you couldn't speak. Every time we came in we would say something like, "Hi, Chris. It's Erin here. You have had an accident and you're in Royal Perth Hospital. We're here with you," And we tell you every day.

It is now May 2014, your journey so far has included so much more and I hope these words go part way in our pursuit to understand what has unfolded, and for you, what happened immediately post accident and in the days, weeks and months following that life changing day in September 2012.

Your loving sister

Erin

May 2014