

Note from the Author

Because this is a sample reveal, some formatting discrepancies may occur.

Monte J Perepelkin

The Perfect Life

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Monte J Perepelkin

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This book is for anyone who has faced adversity, self-doubt, or hopelessness,
or felt disadvantaged at some point during their life.

In order to successfully navigate through life as a quadriplegic, the value in having and maintaining reliable caregivers is extremely important. Therefore, I want to dedicate this book to the many nurses and caregivers who have worked with me throughout this long journey, especially one in particular who has had my back without fail for the past fourteen years, John Szabo. My life would never have been possible without people like you. Thank you!

I would also like to thank Alberta Health Services for providing me with the financial support to live on my own through the self-managed care program.

To my mom, Betty: I am thankful for your honest effort in raising me the best you could despite the adversities we faced. The experiences we have shared together throughout our lives has brought us closer and shaped me to become the man I am today. For that, I am eternally grateful and would not trade it for anything. Love you, Mom!

My one regret is that I cannot hand my stepdad, Bill, a copy of this book. Since he played a large role in influencing pretty much every good thing that ever became of me, it would have been a pleasure to hear him say, "I told you so." It seems, in more ways than one, he knew how this story was going to end before I did.

Very special thanks to my daughters, Danielle and Haylee, for their support and encouragement throughout this process. They have always stood by me, even in my darkest hours. Without them, I am not sure that I would be here today. Love you both very dearly.

Thank you to Laurie Ann Ross for painting the beautiful sunset for the cover of this book.

Most of all, I am thankful to our Creator, Jehovah, for giving me the strength, ability, and determination to endure this life and write this autobiography.
(Psalm 83:18)

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– Author’s Note –

Music is a universal language that can provide the soundtrack to our lives. Songs often define moments in time for us, and memories of those moments can be instantly triggered by those songs as we age. Even people with dementia are not immune to this phenomenon. You hear an old tune that was playing in the background on your first date, for example, and BOOM...a treasured moment in time lights up for you. Or you hear a song on the radio that serendipitously accompanies the emotion you are currently experiencing, and suddenly you find yourself relating to the lyrics.

For this reason, I list the name and artist of certain songs at the end of select chapters throughout my autobiography. Because this music adds another dimension to the story, I invite you to listen to the music after reading each chapter that has such a list. Doing so may intensify your perception of the moods and emotions I was truly feeling, further enhancing your reading experience. In our digital age of the internet, we can access this music in a matter of seconds. Simply scan the QR code with your smart phone, and the song should immediately begin to play. You can download the QR code reader app for free on any smartphone. If you are reading this in ebook format, simply click or tap on the link above the QR code. Or you can look up the song on YouTube. Throughout my autobiography, you will also find the occasional QR code after certain paragraphs. Scanning the code with your smartphone will take you to a photo or video that pertains to the story. To make the most of your reading experience, I encourage you to take advantage of this technology.

– Introduction –

As a person who has always been fascinated with looking back on life and trying to figure out why I did or did not do something, and why certain things happened or did not happen, writing my autobiography has been an educational, therapeutic, and enlightening process. While it taught me much about myself personally, it also enabled me to make sense of certain things and connect the dots—so to speak—by helping me recognize some of the reoccurring pitfalls I have found myself in. Second-guessing ourselves and trying to make sense of certain things, especially if they don't seem to make sense, is human nature. However, just as memory serves to remind us that touching something hot will burn our hand, the experiences we have encountered during times past can be of significant value in learning a great deal about ourselves, especially when we take the time to analyze each notable occurrence with a degree of humility—conceding that not every decision we made was justifiable or even correct. That's when many occurrences that didn't seem fair or make any sense start to make perfect sense. One thing I've learned while digging through my memory banks is that for the majority of life's situations, it's our choice as to which fork in the road we travel down, but every once in a while, the road chooses us. How we walk that road is up to us.

In hindsight, my decision to race dirt bikes may not have been the best choice, but then again, hindsight is twenty-twenty. At the time, taking up cross-country racing, which would lead to motocross and arenacross, seemed like the thing to do. Although I entered the sport relatively late in life—compared to most who take up off-road motorcycle racing—I considered myself a decent

rider. And after learning the ropes of handling a dirt bike while riding the trails of my adoptive province, Alberta, racing was an inevitable choice for a competitive-by-nature guy like me to make. Pushing myself to be the best I can be has always been in my blood; therefore, sanctioned racing filled that need perfectly. You're up against dozens of other riders who think they're good enough to make a statement on a motorcycle. Even if the best you can do is to finish a cross-country or motocross race, you've made a statement. That, in itself, says something about your character and ability to ride a dirt bike. Of course, for most of those who enter racing, it's about finishing on the podium and winning championships. That's when you're making a big statement!

As anyone with experience will attest, dirt bike racing is not for the faint of heart. It's a sport that takes no prisoners, especially motocross and its offshoots: supercross and arenacross. Motocross is the original "extreme sport" and one of the most physically demanding endeavors on the planet. Like any motorized sport, it is dangerous. That is part of the attraction for those who choose to pursue it. Fortunately, fatalities and spinal cord injuries are relatively few and far between when taking into account the tens of thousands of people who race dirt bikes worldwide. Injuries, however, are common to all three of the sport's major disciplines. The more years a rider is active—except in rare instances—the more injuries he will accumulate. For many, the accumulation of injuries will see them enter into forced retirement from the sport. Injuries in motocross, supercross, and arenacross are so prevalent that anyone who races accepts the fact that an injury is inevitable at some stage in their career. If they don't, they are seriously deluding themselves. It's not a matter of "if" but "when" an injury will happen.

Knee injuries are some of the most common in motocross, supercross,

and arenacross—injuries to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) being at the top of those that affect ligaments. A broken collarbone, acromioclavicular (AC) joint sprain, broken wrist, broken or sprained ankle, broken arm, and broken leg belong in the “most likely to occur” injuries category. Any one of these will see most riders return to the sport after recovery. In Canada, only a handful of dirt bike racers have been killed or suffered a spinal cord injury.

Life-altering injuries have claimed both amateurs and professionals in Canada, as they have in every country that includes dirt bike racing in their sports catalog. Whether you’re a middle-of-the-pack amateur or an elite pro champion, one mistake—big or small—can dramatically change your life forever. The best known Canadian dirt bike paraplegic is Blair Morgan, a rider who not only made a huge statement in motocross and arenacross, but in snowcross as well. Morgan was a superstar by any definition of the word: a multi-time Canadian National Motocross champion as well as a multi-time World Snowcross champion and five-time Winter X-Games gold medalist. Morgan was a fan-favorite in the sport for his sheer speed and determination, and after his many come-from-behind victories. On September 21, 2008, he broke his spine while practicing at the Montreal Supercross and was paralyzed from the middle of his back down. When I heard the news of his crash and injury, my heart went out to him. I could definitely relate.

Racing dirt bikes, however, makes up just seven of the forty-seven years I have been alive. While paralysis encompasses seventeen of those years. In this autobiography, I give you an in-depth account of my life as a quadriplegic, woven into a narrative that dates back to when I was two years old—when I miraculously escaped becoming paralyzed. From that frightful moment when I was a toddler until I crashed in an arenacross twenty-eight years later, it seems I was walking on borrowed time.

My autobiography also delves into my experience with being introduced to the Jehovah's Witness faith by my parents at a young age, which I abandoned after leaving home only to find myself on a lifelong search for the true meaning of God—a search that culminates after losing my father, grandmother, and a close friend.

In order to commit my autobiography to paper, I poked away over four million keystrokes—one key at a time—with a mouth-stick between my teeth. I mention this not to dramatize my efforts, but to underscore the resilience of the human spirit to triumph over adversity. During the course of writing this book, as difficult and uncomfortable as it was in some instances—not that I'm claiming to have confessed all my sins; that would take a series of books—I made a genuine effort at providing an authentic and forthright account of my life. In doing so, I have laid bare a journey that has taken me from childhood to convicted criminal, and then to maturing into adulthood and enjoying a brief encounter with what I believed was the perfect life. I had it all: a beautiful and dedicated wife, two wonderful children, a thriving carpentry business, a dream home on seven acres of land with a panoramic view of the Alberta Rockies, and a dirt bike racing career that brought me fulfilment. Then my seemingly perfect life evaporated within the blink of an eye, only to be rediscovered once I came to terms with my injury. This process led me, after clawing through a dark forest of loss and adversity, further than I ever imagined in understanding why we are here—that there is indeed a time for every purpose. In the process of revealing my story, I relate the many lessons this life has taught me. I hope you will enjoy taking this journey with me.

Chapter One

Déjà Vu

On February 12, 1999, thirty-four days after my thirtieth birthday, I was in Lethbridge, Alberta, at the Canada Games Sportsplex—later renamed the Enmax Centre Arena. The arena is home to the Lethbridge Hurricanes WHL hockey team and further serves as a multi-purpose venue, hosting pretty much anything, from world class concerts to national curling championships, international basketball games, skating events, banquets, and even three-ring circuses. On that particular night, the Canada Games Sportsplex was ground zero for rounds three and four of the Alberta Arenacross Championship. That was my reason for being there, not as a spectator, but to compete in the 125cc Pro class. Because the event was part of the provincial title hunt, the Lethbridge Arenacross, as it was referred to, was for all intents and purposes a big event, and it catered to a fairly decent-sized crowd. With a seating capacity of 5,479 at the time, the Canada Games Sportsplex provided the perfect stage for Western Canada’s best arenacross racers to duke it out.

It was shortly before 7:00 p.m. I had just returned to the arena from one of the town’s Italian restaurants with my wife Nicole and some friends. We had enjoyed a nice, relaxing dinner. The calm before the storm. Now it

was time for me to get focused, time to slip into racing mode. Although I was already familiar with the race track—I had set up my pit area and participated in scheduled practice earlier in the day—I decided to walk the course one last time before the event began. I headed out to the arena floor, where the hockey rink and playing surface markings had been replaced by between 100 and 150 truckloads of dirt carefully sculpted into an arenacross track. My pulse, still beating normally, was ready to ratchet up a few notches. I loved the intensity of racing a dirt bike. I liked flying through the air on a two-hundred-pound (90.7 kg) machine. Poetry in motion, some call it. I felt the adrenaline slowly beginning to course through my veins. My anticipation of getting the racing underway was electric. While I was walking the track, I could see people settling into their seats, getting ready for the action to begin.

The track was prepped beautifully, with perfectly formed corners and every jump symmetrically placed as if it were sculpted from clay with God's own hands. While walking the course, I made mental notes, choosing my lines—lines I believed would give me an edge over the competition. Although I had already done exactly that in the afternoon, re-familiarizing myself one last time wouldn't hurt. I was there to win, and I left nothing to chance.

With consistent, tacky soil, the course looked sublime. The fresh, moist soil emitted an all-too-familiar odor, creating a somewhat nostalgic atmosphere. Upon walking around to the final section, I noticed the maintenance crew had made a significant change to the small triple-jump. To my amazement, the take-off was somewhat steeper and definitively more difficult...even dangerous! But it was just one more challenge to deal with. I didn't dwell on the change. During practice—earlier in the afternoon—I would rail around the corner, grab third gear, and sail over the triple with ease. I was feeling awesome and excited to be taking part in this arenacross, my third

of the season. The week before, I had raced in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan—a town close to my heart—where I had recorded fifth and third-place finishes respectively. And the week before Saskatoon, I was in Red Deer, Alberta, for rounds one and two of the Alberta Arenacross Championship, where I ended up watching from the stands because of a broken clutch.

<http://monteperepelkin.com/photos-1>



After exiting the track, I walked over to my pit area. I didn't have to worry about checking my bike again, as prepping and maintenance were being looked after by my very good friend Chris Bonneau. Chris had agreed to be my pit mechanic for the series. I knew I was in good hands. All that was left for me to do was get ready to race. Every veteran dirt bike racer has a certain checklist they go through as they prepare for battle. For me, it was all about the goggles, making sure they were super clean, with two fresh tear-off lenses loaded onto them. As any racer knows, clear vision is an essential piece to the winning formula. And when it's cold outside—like it is in Alberta during the month of February, even inside the arena—fogged lenses can be an issue, especially when you're breathing heavy. However, I had learned a little trick...fabric softener! Rub a small amount into the goggle lens with a soft cloth, and problem solved. I slipped into my brand-new racing gear, generously provided by my apparel sponsor, AXO: jersey, pants, chest protector, gloves, and helmet. Dressed to the nines and feeling like a rock star...I was ready to race! There's something extraordinarily special about wearing brand-new gear.

It somehow gives you the impression that you're a little bit faster the first time you wear it.

It was time to head out to the starting line, where Chris had my bike warmed up. As I walked over to the starting area, I could see that my gate pick wasn't too great—fourth from the far outside. That's what a seventh gate pick—pulled from a hat containing numbered slips of paper—will get you. But that was OK. I liked a challenge. Throwing a leg over my two-stroke Yamaha YZ125, I got comfortable and took the bike over from Chris. With a few seconds to spare, I looked up and around at the crowd in the arena: people were sitting in their seats, some glancing at their programs; others had their eyes directed on the starting gate. This was it—show time! The announcer began introducing each rider over the PA system. When my name came up, I nodded and put my hand up for a quick wave, surprised the man behind the microphone had actually pronounced my last name correctly. Then, as per tradition, the national anthem was played, and everyone stood to pledge their allegiance. Not particularly fond of the opening ceremonies, I was glad when they were over. I just wanted to race.

Even though this first race of the evening was just a qualifier, it was still very important. With only two spots advancing from this heat race, it meant I needed to finish top two or else ride the semi-qualifier. Failing in the semi—God forbid—I would have to face one final attempt in the form of the last chance qualifier, or LCQ as it is known in racing jargon. In other words, if I didn't nail a berth for the main in the first qualifier, it entailed a lot of extra racing. This was something I, not to mention my rivals, desperately wanted to avoid. In order to conserve energy for the main event, you needed to qualify first time out. Failing to qualify at all meant watching from the seats with the fans, or heading back to the hotel to watch a movie.

Feeling a slap on the back of my helmet from Chris let me know the thirty-second board was up. It was time to get serious. Beginning my pre-start ritual, I checked, at least a couple of times, to make sure the fuel valve was turned on—didn't want to be running out of gas during the race. Next, I clapped my hands together briskly till it hurt, to feel the blood flow through my fingers. Then I did a few neck and torso stretches, with a final vigorous headshake to clear away any unwanted outside interference, thus bringing all my senses into pinpoint crystalline focus.

While sitting on the line, waiting for the thirty-second board to go sideways, a familiar odor permeated my senses. It was the aroma of racing fuel after it's been burnt, lingering among the exhaust fumes. It's a sweet, pleasant odor. Almost perfume-like. A motocrosser's cologne, if I may call it that. The thirty-second board went sideways, and that meant the gate would drop within five seconds. Because these indoor races have short start straights, that first jump out of the gate was paramount. And being that I'm five foot ten inches, 165 pounds—while some of these kids next to me were barely 120 pounds soaking wet—I desperately needed that advantageous burst off the line. The first corner, being a left turn, meant I needed a half bike length lead or so in order to squeeze off the riders lined up on the left of me while I drifted into their line down the start straight towards the first turn in pursuit of that elusive holeshot. Every rider wanted it; only one would get it. Being at the front of the pack, going into turn one, doesn't guarantee you will win the race, but it certainly gives you an edge. And you're definitely not going to get stuck in the first turn if there's a pileup.

My right hand had the throttle gripped tightly, holding it about halfway open. The motor was screaming at the top of its RPMs as my left hand's middle finger engaged the clutch, just enough to load up the rear suspension.

Meanwhile, my right hand's middle finger held in the front brake. Feeling as if I was seated upon a rabid beast that was chained to a wall, with its prey just inches out of reach, my reflexes were on full alert and razor sharp. I was ready to attack! With intense, pinpoint concentration, my eyes were fixated on the little metal tab on the ground in front of me, which held the start gate up. Once that moved, it was go time!

After watching the amateur races earlier that day, I knew the gate would drop right after my three count: *Thousand one, thousand two, thousand three*. Then the tab would move and the gate would shake slightly. That was my cue. While releasing the clutch, with tactile precision—like I had practiced a thousand times—I turned the throttle hard, wide open, right to the stop, as if trying to break the cable. At that moment, I felt my front tire rub, just slightly, against the gate as it fell to the ground in front of me. Precisely what I was hoping for. Every racer just knows when they've nailed the perfect start before they're even ten feet out of the gate. It's one of the most sublime feelings you get from racing a dirt bike, whether it's arenacross, supercross, or motocross. With a slight tactile feathering of the clutch, I grabbed second gear right away, continually holding the throttle firmly wide open as I shifted my weight to the center of the bike. My feet were planted firmly on the pegs as I squeezed the motorcycle tightly between my legs. Nearing the end of the start straight, with the aid of my peripheral vision, I could discern that I was clear of everyone on either side. Perfect! This allowed me to drift to the inside and get hard on the brakes to take the nearest rut, and then I was tight around the start corner and in first place. What a sensation that was! It almost felt as if I had already won. No matter what happened next, at least I'd gotten the holeshot. That was an accomplishment in its own right, especially at this level of racing. With my

Yamaha performing perfectly, the feeling was nothing short of amazing. It was almost euphoric, like there was nothing that could possibly go wrong.

For most of the local competitors, this arenacross was only their first or second time they had raced since last fall, when the outdoor motocross season came to an end. This gap in racing causes most riders to tense up, which results in arm-pump. Arm-pump is a common phenomenon in racing arenacross. It happens when you grip the handlebars tightly for an extended period of time without ever relaxing, inducing your forearms to tighten so much you can barely hang on. It happens more commonly if you haven't been on a motorcycle for a while or you're not relaxed enough. Having just returned from Southern California—where I'd been practicing and testing for two weeks just before the arenacross series began—I had a considerable amount of seat time on my bike. This allowed me to feel relaxed and confident on the track—I knew I was capable of winning this heat. Nevertheless, while overeagerly attempting to maintain the lead, I made the smallest mistake exiting the first turn on lap two and got passed by a fellow competitor. I was ticked off big time! Not that he passed me, but that I had made a minuscule error, like some rookie. Which I wasn't. It's amazing how close in proximity two riders can be to each other in a racing situation; all it takes is a split-second mistake, and he is by you just like that. Second place, however, still qualified me for the main, and after sensing that I was starting to gap the rider behind me, I decided not to pursue the new leader. Instead, I focused on riding smoothly. My objective at this point was simple: ride my lines, rail the corners, and hit all my marks to set up a comfortable distance between myself and third place. My number one concern was getting to the main event. If I maintained second place, then I was golden.

By the end of lap three, my experience as a racer told me I had enough distance between myself and third; I didn't need to protect the inside line anymore. This allowed me to ride wider in the corners and carry more speed. This translated into a quicker lap time. After jumping the big crowd-pleasing step-up, I came around to the corner before the small, altered triple. Thus far into the heat, I hadn't attempted to jump it yet; like the rest of my competitors, I'd chosen to double in and single out instead. Knowing that jumping the triple was determinately faster in terms of lap times made it a critical obstacle to dial in before the main event. Having successfully jumped it a number of times earlier in the day, I had no reservations to go for it now that I had some breathing room between myself and the rider behind me. Because the track crew had changed the trajectory of this triple, I fastidiously rounded the corner nice and wide to carry a little extra speed. On my approach to the triple, with the throttle held wide open to the stop, I feathered the clutch slightly to grab third gear and went for it. As my front wheel hit the face of the jump, I gripped the bike tightly between my legs and launched up and forward. Upon nearing the apex of my trajectory, however, I felt the back end of my bike still rising, pushing the front end downward, as if I was about to go over the bars. Then that "uh-oh" moment hit me. I was becoming a passenger, and my options to regain control of the bike were slim. I knew I was in trouble. Suddenly everything went silent. The sands of time began to float instead of fall. It was as if reality was moving in slow motion. In an attempt to correct in mid-air, I hit the throttle and leaned back, hoping the centrifugal force of my rear wheel would lift the front end. But the maneuver had little effect. Gravity took over from there. I was definitely a passenger now. My heart was in my throat. Suddenly the front wheel of my bike planted itself into the face of the landing. The momentum carried me over the bars head first into the ground, where the

chin guard of my helmet dug into the moist, hard-packed soil. My head stopped instantly and abruptly while my neck absorbed the energy created by the weight and velocity of my body. Rolling onto the ground in ragdoll fashion, I lay motionless while the bike bounced over me and fell on its side. I was aware I'd just gone down hard... Just how hard would soon become apparent. For some reason, I wasn't rendered unconscious by the crash. At that very moment, a warm, pleasant wave transferred through my entire body, as if a powerful drug had just been injected into all my veins at once. That's when the realization hit me: *I'm paralyzed!* Then the strangest thing happened. I experienced what amounted to the strongest déjà-vu-like phenomenon I had ever felt in my entire life. But it wasn't quite the same as the more common déjà vu moment, the intuition that an experience has occurred before. This was different. This was the recollection of a memory that I had long forgotten but suddenly remembered. The memory of *knowing* this was going to happen to me. That's when a momentary sense of panic set in, and I silently began to reject the revelation: *No way! It can't be! This can't be real!*

Lying there on the track, unable to move, an unexpected feeling of what I can only describe as bliss suddenly came over me. There was literally no pain at all. In essence, I felt nothing, not even the slightest sensation. It was as if I was alive inside a body that wasn't connected to my brain. In the thirty seconds or whatever it took before someone came over to check on me, I was surprised by how much data could pass through my mind. I reflected on how perfect the last twenty-four hours had been. I remembered coming home from work just yesterday thinking I had the perfect life, and how Nicole and I were excited about this weekend in Lethbridge—her mother was babysitting our two kids so we could have Valentine's Day weekend alone. And just last night, how we'd gone for a nice romantic dinner together and then headed back to

our hotel, where we relaxed in the establishment's hot tub before returning to our room for the evening and making love before falling asleep. As I stared helplessly through my goggles at the dirt around me while lying motionless on the track, I realized that the intimate contact I'd once known as an able-bodied man with Nicole had just come to an end. While reflecting on how that part of my life would never be the same again—that nothing would ever be the same again—a momentary sadness enveloped me. I was paralyzed. The entire experience felt incredibly surreal, as if it were all a dream. A bad dream. I was experiencing every dirt bike racer's worst nightmare. I wanted to wake up. But I was awake.

For some reason, I recalled the last song we'd heard on the radio during the drive back from dinner less than an hour ago, "What It's Like" by Everlast, and the formidable irony it portrayed. I thought about my little girls and how this would affect their lives. How just a couple of days ago, I'd come home from work and chased my eighteen-month-old around the house, caught and tickled her as she giggled. How I'd gone skating later that evening with my five-year-old in our backyard on a skating rink that I had built—I'd skated around the rink while she'd sat up on my shoulders and yelled, "Go faster, Dad!" Then I thought about work and how it was strange that all my current jobs had been completely finished just prior to this race—and how that was so very much out of the ordinary in itself. I couldn't ever remember a time in my career as a contractor when that had ever happened. There was always something on the go. It was as if something had been preparing me for this moment, and somewhere in all of that I found a certain peace. Over the course of those thirty seconds or so, I somehow came to terms with the fact that my entire life was about to change. Dramatically! Even though I knew exactly what had just

happened, that this was permanent, the small amount of anxiety and fear I was experiencing began to dissipate.

At this point, the race must have been red-flagged and all motors shut off—there was a deafening silence. No more roar of the bikes. I did hear voices. Mumbled voices. Probably spectators engaged in subdued conversation while looking down on the rider who'd just crashed. A rider who wasn't moving... Me.

While lying on the track for what felt like an eternity, finally, someone approached and asked me if I was all right. Completely cognizant, in a clear, calm voice, I replied that I couldn't move anything. He made some motion that I surmised was to summon help. Next, the EMS crew came onto the scene of my crash. The crowd, nearly silent now, knew that whatever had happened to me was serious. One of the EMS people began to ask me a series of questions. What's my name? Do I know where I am? After answering correctly, the paramedic asked if I was able to wiggle my fingers? My answer: "No. I can't move anything." As the expression of controlled panic illuminated her face, the female paramedic hesitantly reassured me that everything would be fine. But I knew different. Life as I had known it was over. A new journey awaited me. As the next few grains of sand floated through the hourglass, I twisted my eyes upward, past the immediate foreground of my line of vision, and looked at the ceiling of the arena—at least I could do that—and unceremoniously accepted this new adventure.

Finally, after what seemed like another eternity, now with a neck brace in place and my helmet removed, I was very delicately placed on a stretcher—as if I were made of glass—and carried off the track. That was when the crowd began clapping and cheering loudly—a customary gesture when an injured rider appears to be okay and is cleared to safety. I know they were all hoping

the best for me. And it was best, under the circumstances, that they didn't know I was paralyzed. It was time for the other guys to resume racing. The show had to go on. Besides, apart from being paralyzed, I was feeling no pain whatsoever. I was alive, conscious, stable, and breathing...so I was okay. I could have been dead. People have died racing dirt bikes. I was a bit confused, though, about what had just happened and wished I could turn back the clock. But life doesn't work that way. The best way I can describe how I felt at this point is that there was a reassuring silence inside my head indicating that I would come out the other side of all this.

Once I had been carried off the track, I was placed in an ambulance that was waiting in the wings for the ride to the hospital. It was time for me to leave the building. Nicole, my dear, loving wife, had joined my side. The look on her face was controlled, but I could tell she was freaking out inside. I knew my wife, and I could tell she was horrified! I forced a weak smile, but it probably wasn't very convincing. It was probably pathetic. I knew she wanted to comfort and reassure me, but she was too distraught to even go through the motions. I wanted to comfort and reassure her that I would be fine, but words didn't materialize from either one of us. Perhaps this wasn't the time for words. They would come later.

As I lay completely immobilized in the ambulance, the young female paramedic recommended in a shaky nervous tone that giving me a powerful sedative to put me out might be my best option right now. Considering there wasn't any pain to feel, I wondered if perhaps remaining conscious might be useful. However, after a quick examination of the situation, sleeping like a baby in the company of dreams wasn't such a bad idea either, and I decided that postponing this nightmare until I awoke in the morning, or whenever, suited me just fine. The final image my eyes took custody of before nodding off was

the terrified expression on the paramedic's face as she attempted to reassure me, once again, that everything was going to be okay. I wanted to believe her, but the terror-stricken expression on her face painted a much different scenario than the one she was trying to sell. With that, she injected me with a syringe full of mercy, sending me off to dreamland. Before drifting off, I had just enough time to register one final thought: *Maybe I should say a prayer.*

Cue music: "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight" by U2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91lw-hfafdw>



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