NEWS »

Accident leads to recovery

Life-changing event precipitated movement away from drug and alcohol addiction

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It was two or three in the morning and Eli Leyland, fighting drug and alcohol addiction, had been on a bender. Stumbling home in Edmonton in February of 2020, Eli woke up about 100 metres from his apartment.

"I was completely mangled," said Eli. "My left foot wasn't attached to my leg anymore. The bones were sticking out of both of my legs and feet. I was missing my front teeth and my jaw was kind of hanging off.

"The only thing that made sense to me is I had been involved in a hit and run. Somebody must have hit me early in the morning."

He has no recollection of the incident.

Eli said it took about 10 minutes to fully grasp what had happened. He was calm, but in shock. The first thing he did was remove his belt and tie a tourniquet around his leg. He managed to find his phone, about 15 feet away, which he crawled to get.

"I called 911 and they asked whether I needed police, ambulance or the fire department," said Eli. "I said I needed an ambulance. They said, 'okay, sir, do you know what happened?' I said I didn't know what happened. I was very calm and I was not freaking out."

Eli said it took 15 or 20 minutes for the ambulance to arrive. One of the paramedics covered him in a blanket. Eli told him he was not cold.

"He said: 'it's not for you, man,' and injected me with fentanyl, assuming I was in pain. The problem was, it took me out of shock, so by the time I got to the hospital, I could feel everything, and I was screaming and screaming, and passed out from the pain."

Eli said he woke up much later in hospital and was hooked up to machines. He does not know how long he was out, but it was into March when he came to. He said he was yelling, and a nurse finally came to his room in a hazmat suit, telling him to calm down. She advised that the hospital was in the middle of a pandemic.

"I had watched every zombie apocalypse movie, and it always starts with someone waking up in a hospital bed, alone," said Eli.

His medical treatment for his injuries was intense. Eli had three back-to-back operations, and several more after that. When he was finally discharged from hospital, he had to deal with his physical recovery, but also, his recovery from drugs and alcohol.

"It was just horrible," said Eli. "Very few people were able to help me. I lived on the 10th floor of a building. I'm in a wheelchair with multiple broken bones. It was as bad as possible. I was very lucky to be alive."

Eli's addiction, which led to the life-changing accident, had become all-consuming in Edmonton. He had moved there from Vancouver and started working in the bar industry.

"I helped run nightclubs, I bartended, and that kind of stuff," said Eli. "I was kind of introduced to alcohol and drugs. It wasn't until I left the bar industry when I lost my meaning and purpose.

"I didn't have a job. I had no reason to wake up in the morning, but the thing I knew how to do best was party and use drugs. I was getting to the point where I was drinking 40 to 60 ounces of vodka a day on top of any drug that was put in front of me."

Eli said he ended up being hospitalized more than 200 times for either overdosing or for withdrawal. He was visiting the hospital three or four times a week, and medical staff knew him by his first and last name.

"It was an absolute mess," said Eli.

He came from a caring family that had some measure of affluence. They were able to afford to send him to treatment, where he went more than a dozen times.

"I went to 11 different treatment centres, some of them multiple times," said Eli. "All these excursions cost $20,000 or $30,000 a month. It was extremely expensive to keep me alive.

"I went in and out of treatment centres and I would have 30, 60 and sometimes 90 days of sobriety under my belt, but I'd be constantly relapsing.

Eli moved around, having lived in Montreal for a bit, as well as Vancouver and Edmonton, where he finally had what he termed as the best day and worst day of his life – the day of his accident.

"The thing that almost killed me saved my life," said Eli.

Given the difficulties he was having in Edmonton, his father Loy went to pick him up. The family had a place in Powell River that had been purchased several years earlier. Eli said he had been to Powell River as a kid and had many nostalgic memories of the community.

"My father had just had enough," said Eli. "My family tried to save me hundreds of times, and I can't even express how indebted and grateful I am for the love and support. I wouldn't be alive today without that.

"My father essentially dropped me off at this house. We arrived in Powell River, and my father had a full-time job to go to and a life to live, so I was here alone."

Eli said he was "pretty disabled" at that point, so care was set up.



NEW LIFE: Eli Leyland, with his sister Hannah Leyland, attended the opening ceremony for the Miklat Recovery-Arbutus Centre, which Hannah, an architect, designed. Hannah had written a story featured on the front of a section of the Globe and Mail newspaper, headlined My Brother the Addict, outlining Eli's battles with drugs and alcohol. Eli has since found longstanding recovery in Powell River, through affiliation with Miklat, meetings and many people here in recovery. **PAUL GALINSKI PHOTO**

People here looked after him, getting him to appointments, cooking food and helping him with essential tasks.

"All these wonderful people started to come into my life," said Eli.

He said he'd lived in cities his whole life and didn't have a sense of community, or friendliness from random strangers.

"I soon realized this was a community that really cared and loved one another," said Eli.

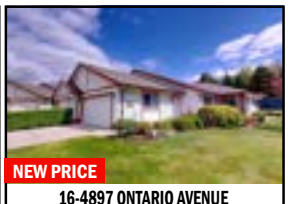
He was also determined to remain clean and sober after his life-changing accident, so he connected with the recovery community here, which was difficult because of the pandemic, but again, he found great care. He said he was able to connect with Rob Fitzpatrick from Miklat Recovery Society (now Together We Can Drug and Alcohol Recovery and Education Society).

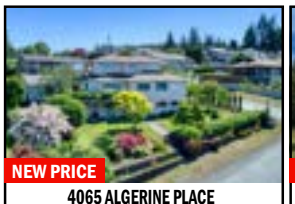
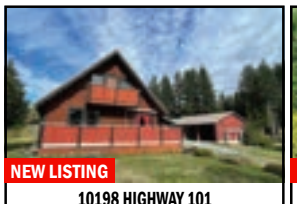
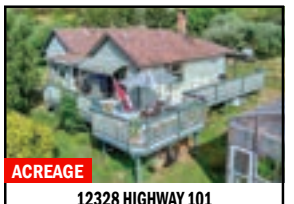
"I was very fortunate that Miklat was open and available, and just for the sheer fact that I could connect with other individuals who understood my plight," said Eli. "I connected with Miklat and would do some of the day program. I never went to Miklat as a client, but I would show up there, I'd hang out with the guys and attend some of the groups that they would have. I connected with Rob. I connected with other people through meetings. I went to five, six and sometimes seven meetings a week.

"I couldn't have done any of this on my own. I began to take my recovery seriously. Slowly, but surely, I got back on my feet. I got ingrained in this community and I love this place. This is going to be my forever home."

One where he can slip the bonds of addiction and lead a clean, sober and productive life.

National Addictions Awareness Week is November 16 to 22.


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