



## “Three years, by Tess McEnery and Jeff Pool:”

“You know, you’ll look back in a year, and this will all seem like it happened a lifetime ago.”

I remember the trauma surgeon saying this to me, minutes or hours or days after my husband, Jeff, first arrived at the hospital, barely clinging to life. She had seen this, countless times before. She had treated people at their worst and seen them survive and felt the years go by.

It was August 2016. Jeff was riding his motorcycle on Richmond Highway in the Potomac Yard area of Alexandria, VA. He safely braked for a traffic light ahead that was turning red, but a speeding driver in a very large SUV—a GMC Yukon XL—struck Jeff and four other cars from behind. My husband was violently thrown from his bike and broke his back, pelvis, both of his shoulders, ribs, his left hand, right leg, and ankle. He suffered internal bleeding and road rash over much of his body.

I was with my husband in the ICU, bleary-eyed and curled up in a chair next to his bed. He had breathing tubes; feeding tubes; surgeries; plates and screws and fixators; and drugs, drugs, and more drugs.

A year from now was a concept of time I couldn’t grasp. Not then, not in that clammy, vinyl recliner that I slept on day and night, the ICU nurses leaving me to sleep in the bright daylight when my bedside vigil was on pause, whenever Jeff was wheeled away for surgery #1 or #8.

But here I am now; it is three years later. I am typing this at my kitchen table, next to Jeff. He almost died three years ago, and now, he sits next to me. Grimacing at having to work on a weekend. Leaning down every few minutes to pet the dog. Reaching over to pour more coffee into his cup. Things he did before The Crash.

Of course, many things are not the same. Almost every bone in his body is fused to a metal plate; he has chronic pain every day; his leg brace compensates for a foot that doesn’t receive signals from his brain anymore; and his beard and hair grew in shockingly grey from the trauma. And yet. He’s sitting here next to me, an Old Normal and a New Normal sharing space with me every day.



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**Time Will Pass.** This lesson is more profound than it seems. Some things will change, some will remain the same. You will feel your heart drop into your stomach when he mentions how the cold weather hobbles him with pain. You will feel your heart leap out of your chest when you realize—for the thousandth time—that he’s still alive. You will zone out, wondering when chronic arthritis will put him back in a wheelchair. And you will smile uncontrollably because he texted you a heart emoji.



You will always balance fear and hope. Gratitude and anger. “It could have been worse” and “This is the worst.” The scale will tip back and forth, and you will try and land on a little more good than bad. Everyone has their own way of getting there, and you are entitled to make your own way: turning to friends and family, bonding with other survivors and caregivers, finding a good therapist, finding a new hobby, restructuring parts of your lives, cherishing old memories, making new memories, saying no sometimes, saying yes other times.

The art of recovery and survival comes in many forms, and it will change over time. The only constant is that time will pass. One day will become one month will become one year will become 1,228 days.

“Hey, there’s something I never told you,” Jeff interjects, as I am typing this. “If you look right out this window... the yellow house across the alley looks just like a cartoon dog!” He hugs me from behind, wrapping his arms tightly around my chest.

Three years after The Crash, my husband is at home, gazing out the window into the frigid weather that hurts his bones. Today is a good day. Today is a bad day. Today is another day of recovery.

We are conditioned to breathe a sigh of relief when we read about a crash and learn there were no fatalities. Jeff feels lucky to be alive and able to walk, and is grateful every day for the good luck, good timing, and tremendous skill that saved his life. But behind every debate on changes to road design is our pain, grief, loss, disabilities, and a whole range of lifelong effects. And we know we are unfortunately not alone in our experience.

—Tess McEnergy and Jeff Pool

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**DC Families for Safe Streets confronts traffic violence** and its epidemic of tragic injuries and deaths. We are comprised of victims of traffic violence and families whose loved ones have been killed or severely injured by aggressive or reckless driving and dangerous conditions on District streets. We represent the full breadth of the District's diversity and demand an end to traffic violence.

**We bear witness** to our pain and suffering to press for the elimination of fatalities and injuries on our streets. Through our stories and advocacy, we seek cultural and physical changes on our streets and the rapid implementation of Vision Zero.

**We envision** a city where people who walk, roll, bike, and drive can safely co-exist, and children and adults can travel freely without risk of harm – where no loss of life in traffic is acceptable.

**We advocate** for life-saving changes and provide support to those affected by deadly crashes in our communities. We seek changes toward safer streets that might have saved our loved ones, or prevented injuries, as a meaningful way to channel our grief and honor our family members. We work so that no other families suffer the loss or life altering injuries that have impacted our families.