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Sitting here today with an eight inch scar/ on my head, I can't wait to get back to a normal duty status. Still to this day, the lessons learned in Germany stick with me. I can't seem to think that what most people complain about is futile and really insignificant. Life is really a precious thing that everyone takes for granted. ~~This~~ is a lesson I learned the hard way.

It was a typical rainy Whidbey Island day, except I was getting ready to get on a plane to Germany for a six month deployment. The plane took off on a ten hour flight across the Atlantic. I was trying to get some sleep, but I couldn't stop thinking about my <sup>six -</sup> 6 month pregnant wife and unborn son I was leaving behind. The plane landed about 10 a.m. Germany time and the weather there wasn't much better. On the car ride to base, as I looking at the wide open grassy rolling hills of Germany, I realized I wasn't excited like others were. I was homesick.

<sup>new</sup> We arrived on base around noon in a mad rush. They had given us an hour to iron our uniforms and get back to work. Stressed and exhausted, we worked until 8 at night. Before dawn even broke, we were up and out breaking a sweat doing physical training. Everyday that week we were working not a typical 9-5 schedule as I heard others back home brag about, but a 4 in the morning until 10 o'clock at night schedule that was killing me- literally. There was no time to go to the commissary for groceries, so I was eating T.V. dinners and drinking soda all week. The routine was starting to take a toll on me.

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On day seven in Germany, I woke up and went to work as usual. When I arrived my supervisors told me there was a high priority job that had to be done immediately. So, I gathered all the necessary tools needed and got to work. We had to replace an E.C.U. (Environmental Control Unit) that weighs about. After lifting the new one in place, I started to get a headache, so I went and sat down to have a cigarette. While having a cigarette, I began feeling a lot worse. All of a sudden, ~~a~~ I felt panic because I knew something was not right with my body. The feeling

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rushed over me like a tidal wave. I yelled for somebody to get the medic and I told them I needed to go to the hospital. A sense of urgency and disorientation started setting in. The world appeared to be spinning in a different direction. The medic got there with the van and we headed off to the clinic on base.

Sitting in the air conditioned van seemed to help until the nausea set in. We showed up and the medic told me to wait in the van until she got back with somebody. I felt so helpless, scared, and like I needed to go find them. I got out and immediately threw up in the grass. As I walk through the clinic doors, my head was pounding like I was being hit with a hammer. The hallway seemed to be moving as my vision blurred. I ran down the hall hitting both sides and knocking pictures down yelling, "Help me!" A nurse came around the corner and helped me to a room. As they called for an ambulance to take me to the hospital, a dark feeling came over me and I thought, "Am I going to die"? After the ambulance pulled up to the hospital, they immediately rushed me in to get a CT scan of my brain, gave me drugs, and had me rest for the night. The next morning, the doctor came in with the results and told me two blood vessels in my right front lobe ruptured and there was a blood clot putting pressure on my brain. As the doctor discussed my treatment with me, my wife was home in Minnesota receiving a midnight call from the Command Master Chief telling her the news.

Once I was able to get a hold of my wife, tears were running down my face as we spoke by phone. I felt so alone I would push my call button in my hospital bed just to have someone to talk to. I started to think about how I might not ever see my wife again or even know my son. The second day in the hospital the doctor came in my room to discharge me. He said they were going to let the brain reabsorb the blood and I was sent back to work. I felt relieved, but not completely. They had me on three different types of medications, which took away my appetite.

→ <sup>new</sup> Later that night, as I was sitting in my barracks room feeling sorry for myself, nausea hit me again. I was worried throwing up would cause more bleeding or a rupture in my brain, so I tried to fight it off, but it didn't work. On my way back to the hospital, I contemplated how fragile life really was. I had never been more scared in my entire life. Once back at the hospital, they did more tests, gave me more drugs, and made me wait for answers once again.

Finally, the doctors decided to medically evacuate me back to the States for possible brain surgery. The next morning I found out the Navy was arranging for my wife to meet me at the hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. Finally a positive feeling rushes over me, a sigh of relief, and a sense of hope. My wife and I were both anxious and hopeful.

When I arrived at the National Naval Medical Center, I was crushed to find out my wife was not there. I felt empty inside, hopeless and homesick all over again. All I really wanted was my wife by my side through all of this. Especially, since it was my birthday the next day. To my surprise, the next night I was woke up by an angel... my wife. Her touch was like God's hand telling me everything is going to be okay. I could feel positive energy running through my body. For the first time since my injury happened, the world started to spin in the right direction again. Not only was my wife there, but also her mom. For my wife and mother-in-law to show up on my birthday was the best present I had ever received.

We decided to go through with the brain surgery to repair vessels and remove the clot since the doctor thought it was the best route. I had to go through more testing before surgery, and then they allowed me some freedoms to leave the hospital. The week before surgery, I was able to go back to the Fisher House, a free home for military patients and family members to stay in, all day and most of the night with my wife. It was such a relief to be able to have a regular

meal at a table with the one I love the most in my life. I never really knew how much it meant to be able to sit down and watch a movie like a normal person.

Coming close to the day of my surgery I started to feel like a porcelain doll and my nerves were making me uneasy. The day before my surgery, I felt really scared being only 24 years old and having something this traumatic happen to me. My wife tried to reassure me, but nothing was working. I left the Fisher House around 8 at night and my wife told me she would be there in the morning. It felt almost like we were saying our goodbyes. I got back to my room, and I was so worried about the next day I couldn't sleep.

The morning of surgery I woke up to my wife by my side, and before I could fully awake I was wheeled down to the surgery room. Later, I woke up in the intensive care unit with my head throbbing with a big bandage wrapped around it. The drugs were only enough to stop the pain for only a short while until it felt like I had been hit by a train once again. I was on bed rest the entire 24 hours after surgery next to automatic doors that were slamming shut all night. It really should not be called "bed rest". <sup>new</sup> The next day, I was on the regular floor once again, but extremely irritable. Partly because I hadn't had a cigarette in over 24 hours, and partly because the doctor was telling me I wasn't allowed to leave the hospital on a day pass. My mother-in-law and wife arrived to my hospital room to me <sup>9. ?</sup> arguing with my doctor! I was so anxious to get away from the white walls <sup>which</sup> that were beginning to feel like a prison.

The second day after surgery, to our surprise, the doctors discharged me on convalescent leave from the hospital. After sixteen days that felt like an eternity in the hospitals, I was finally free. Free from worry, free from needles, free from IVs, and free to be with my wife all I wanted. I truly believe without my wife and mother in law, I would not have recovered as

quickly as I did. One day during my recover somebody approached me in a store and asked how I was doing. I looked at him and said without a thought, "I'm just happy to be here." Those words still ring true in my heart to this day.

I remember times when I didn't have enough money to go <sup>buy</sup> by beer and how bad that upset me. I think about it <sup>now</sup> ~~know~~ and realize how insignificant <sup>it</sup> that was and how screwed up my focus on life was back then. Life is a precious thing and you should live everyday like it's your last because you never know when your time to leave this Earth will be. It is funny how you can go from living just to get your next pair of jeans or a new car, to waking up being thankful just to have the opportunity to go to work and having a second chance to give life your best. This experience has given me a more focused view on life. I am just happy to give everyday a shot like it may be my last one.

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