

STUDY 3: JOHN'S STORY – 'A SECOND CHANCE'

Hamish is an eight year old boy who was hit by a car during the summer school holidays. He sustained extensive head and arm injuries. He spent a week in the intensive care unit. His dad John talked about his experiences and what he needed during Hamish's hospital admission.

'I was at work when it happened. It was my first day back after a family holiday with my wife, Anna and our kids Hamish and Ella. Anna had taken the kids to see a movie. I got the call late in the afternoon to say they had been involved in a major crash.

They were walking home from the bus stop when a car veered off the road. Anna was holding Ella's hand. They were bruised and in shock, but no major injuries. Hamish was walking near the curb and he took the brunt of the impact.

Hamish broke his arm in two places but the worst damage was to his head. He suffered severe brain injury and was placed in an induced coma. John says *"I feel the same as every other parent, you'd do anything you could to swap places with him. I pray. I believe in God but I'm not one who goes to church or anything at all like that, and I prayed. I've prayed that many times over the past weeks, for him to be okay and just whatever it takes, I didn't care. Take him out of there and put me there."*

John found the hospital environment confronting. He found it difficult seeing his son lying in intensive care, hooked up to tubes and monitors and machines. He says *"the hospital has been amazing and they've helped us understand what's happening with Hamish. They even organised accommodation for us, but the whole thing has been so expensive. We got charged \$189 in parking fees, but that's getting sorted. We have to pay \$15 a day now instead of \$30, but if your kid is maybe dying in the ICU, you really shouldn't have to pay. Some people don't have that money"*.

John explains how he felt about having Hamish in hospital, *“I’ve felt some big highs and I’ve felt the lowest I’ve ever felt in my life you know. There was a day there where in a couple of hours I felt every single emotion a human could feel, I’m sure of it. Everybody used to say to me, ‘you’re strong, you’re doing this so great’, but it’s not me, he’s the strong one. All I’m having to do is stand beside him and be Dad. I’ve just got to watch my son go through it. I don’t have to feel them sticking me with needles, I’m not getting tubes down my throat, I haven’t had my head drilled into. He did all of that, I’ve just got to sit here and hold his hand”*.

John and Anna decided that John would be the one to stay with Hamish in the hospital. His job was more flexible and allowed him to take carers leave. It seemed best for John to look after Hamish and for Anna to care for Ella. Although Anna visited most days, John missed her and Ella and their normal routine. Hamish’s injuries placed a real strain on every member of the family. John says *‘We’re not just worried about how he is going at the moment but about what’s going to happen in the future. We don’t know if he is going to make a full recovery. We don’t know if he is going to have ongoing problems because of the injury to his brain’*

John hasn’t dealt with all that has happened on an emotional level. No one at the hospital has really asked him about how he is feeling or how he is coping. For now he just wants to focus on getting Hamish better. Once Hamish is better and back home John may find the time and space to consider his own well-being. He feels he might “crash” then, but at least he will be surrounded by people who love him like Anna. He says *“We’ve been given a second chance with Hamish and he’s been given a second chance. We aren’t going to waste it, not at all. We will never take anything for granted again”*.

‘We are lucky Hamish survived’, ‘his injuries could have been so much worse’. The experience taught John that hospitals are important places that provide extraordinary care to children and their families. John accepted with thanks any help and advice from the hospital which would make a difference to Hamish’s recovery. His motivation for taking part in our study was to ‘help others going through a similar situation’.
