



Interviewee: **Ed Crinnion**

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Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg, Judy Barricella**
& Tony Buba

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Ed Crinnion
Voices of our Region

Interviewer: Okay, we start out with you telling us your name and where you're from, and why don't you tell us... This all stems from your head injury, right? So why don't you tell us about when you first had your head injury?

Ed: Okay. My name is Edward B. Crinnion, Jr., or Ed Crinnion. I tell everybody I'm Mr. Ed especially when I'm horsing around with the pretty ladies. My accident was September 19, 1989, a Tuesday night in Carlisle, at 9 o'clock at night. I was just coming back from Connecticut and made it as far as Carlisle, and was putting thirty dollars worth of gas in my leisure van. I was just pulling out of the gas station and there was a 19 year old kid with a load of steel following another loaded tractor trailer and kept his eyes on his and turned, and his flatbed came through the window of my leisure van, tore my whole section of my brain, and my eye, too. They put my eye back in and my engine came out of my cabinet and shattered my right leg into a hundred pieces. I was, my wife was called. They took me to Carlisle Hospital and saw that I was a donor opter, and transferred me to Harrisburg and put me on life support for my organs.

Interviewer: Let me stop you a minute. You were getting gas, but this happened when you were on the road?

Ed: Just as I left. I had just pulled out of the gas station and there was this tractor trailer turned in front of me, and luckily, I had witnesses. Two cars stayed for the Police and signed papers for witnesses. They said that I had gone to switch to the left lane to get out of the way and saw there was a man and woman with kids in the car, pulled back in my lane, still trying to brake. And there was another car behind the tractor trailer, said that they saw me and couldn't believe the tractor trailer.

So I have pictures of them and videos of them using the jaws getting my body out of the vehicle. When I teach, when I teach my courses, that's shown in the starting classes, I show them and say, "That was me."

Interviewer: So you were in Carlisle and then --

Ed: Then Harrisburg Hospital, Life Support, and my wife at the time, Nancy, called my daughter Charity, who was the third week, freshman year in Mt. Union College in Ohio, and told that I had just been killed by a tractor trailer and had to go to Harrisburg and sign my organs away.

They put me on life support for my organs – ten hours later, they got to Harrisburg, signed the papers. They took me in the room, shut the unit down to take my organs, and I started breathing. So, then Charity's still crying in the counselor's room, I found out, said "He's not dead, he's not dead, he's in a coma, never going to wake up again."

So I was in a coma for ten days, then twenty days out of my coma I didn't know who I was or anybody was. They were teaching me to read and write again and to talk again. And then exactly one month after my accident they had me in a padded room at, it's now Healthsouth, but it was Harmarville in Fox Chapel. A padded room and a padded

wheelchair, tied in, and Dr. John Barker, my minister at Brentwood Presbyterian Church walked in, and I looked up and I said “Hi.”

And he said, “Hi.”

And I said, “Why are you here? What are you here for?”

He said, “Well, I’m here to say some prayers with you and for you. Why do you ask?”

I looked around and I said, “Where am I asking it from?” Him walking in, my pages started to open for me.

Interviewer: What year was this?

Ed: 1989. Eighteen years ago. That’s why I tell everyone I’m only eighteen years old, since I have a death certificate.

Interviewer: So, you went straight from Harrisburg to Harmarville?

Ed: No. At Harrisburg they did these surgeries and reattached my – this section of my brain was tore out, so that’s what I lost, all of my... I used to speak, German, Japanese, French, Latin. Lost all my foreign languages.

Interviewer: Did you really?

Ed: I used to write COBOL, FORTRAN, SAS, Assembler. Lost all my computer languages, they’re gone. I say I’m lucky, my animal-based inner brain stayed intact, so my English stayed.

But I’ve been publishing for over twelve years, cartoons, articles, two national psych books, I have sections in, they tell me, and list me as a reference. And I get letters from the NFL and from the Federal government as Dr. Edward Crinion. I tell everybody “I have too many BSs and I haven’t got my Master’s yet, but...”

Interviewer: So how long were you at Harmarville?

Ed: I was inpatient for about five months.

Interviewer: Who was your doctor up there?

Ed: The section of my brain, I also lost names. I had twelve hundred guys at the steel mill, that called me Boss. I used to know every one of their names, their wives’ names, their kids’ names, everything about them. I went back in the mills and it was “Hey, Buddy.”

The answer was “Yeah, Boss.” Everybody became my buddy. So the main section is gone. As a matter of fact, my daughters I haven’t seen. Charity I saw three years ago. She and her husband met me at a restaurant, so I could meet my granddaughter for my first time. But my daughter, Michele, I was never her father again, cause I couldn’t remember her name. So, since I couldn’t remember her name, I was no longer her father.

Interviewer: That was her decision?

Ed: Yes. But also sort of my wife’s. My wife is a psych nurse, and I’d say, you know, after I started walking again and getting my abilities back, I’d say, “Where are the car keys?”

And she’d say, “Where do you want to go. I’ll drive you.”

And I’d say, “Where’s the wallet, so I can pay.”

She’d say, “Who needs paid? I’ll pay them.”

She wouldn’t let me have any of my hats back.

I’d say, “I just wrote a million dollar check to the electric company for LTV Steel. I’m their comptroller.” I said, “I’m their financial analyst, too.” And she just wouldn’t let me have any of my hats back.

So when I teach, too, I say, “As much as we’ve lost function, cognition, status. A lot of times we lose family, peers, society in general, and you’re not who you used to be.”

Interviewer: When you first had your head injury, were you violent?

Ed: No. When I teach, I say that the brain injury is different. Some just can’t...the impulse control. That is one of the side effects from a brain injury. Luckily, I don’t have that. I give dirty looks, but I don’t hit.

Interviewer: I was in rehab with a girl who had, was in a terrible automobile accident. So she was out of the hospital and into rehab, but she was screaming and hitting and climbing out of that bed, and –

Ed: One of the families that, I haven’t seen for a long time, but one of the families I dealt with the mother, she works for the County Mental Health, and she has a son, brain injured, and the wife left him and left him with the kids. So here she has a son with a brain injury, as soon as he gets mad, he slugs her and knocks her back. He can’t control the anger impulse. So it’s, you know, --

Interviewer: But this girl got over it, you know, as time went on...

Ed: It's mostly medication, to deal with, to control the impulses. As a matter of fact, Mike Webster, from the Steelers, he was in my support group for a couple of years before he died, and his daughter called me from out Wisconsin. She did. She said, "Mr. Crinnion, are you brain injured? Would you please link with my dad because he's not who he used to be."

So I'd go to a signing. I'd say, "Hey, here's my card. Give me a call."

Didn't. Six months later, I'd go again. "Mike here's my call."

Well he didn't, and you know, just cycling. Well he got arrested up in Beaver for stealing prescriptions from his doctor. Well, I testified for him in the court hearing, that he's a brain injury, he doesn't understand limitations, the laws. They put him on house arrest.

Well, I found out who his doctor was and I told his doctor, "You have to change his medication for a brain injury."

Three weeks later his daughter called me and said, "What did you do?"

I said, "What?"

She said, "I have my dad back."

So, it's just the strain. You know, the hidden scars. And people don't realize the needs and the, the missing controls, missing function, missing pieces.

Interviewer: So you were in Harmarville, who, where did they tell you you would never walk again?

Ed: Harmarville. Cause I had no motion.

End of Track I

I still feel nothing. As a matter of fact I went back for LTV Steel. I was working in the coke companies. I was an IE, Senior IE, Project IE, Financial Analyst, Systems Analyst, Environmental Engineer. On weekends I was a battery foreman, door foreman, yard foreman, and I'd be up on top of the coke oven, standing there talking to the guys, and they'd say, "Boss, Boss," and I'd look down and my shoe would be caught on fire, cause I'd be standing on those 900 degree inspection caps.

Background Voice: Which LTV plant did you work at?

Ed: I worked at the South Side. On the South Side I was the IE, Senior IE. And then the coke ovens, I worked as the boss down there, too. But I run the Kennywood, Steel Workers' Kennywood Days. This is my twentieth year for running Steel Workers'

Kennywood Days. And because of that I have a Kennywood Challenge Day. I have free access to Kennywood every year for wheelchairs and escorts. This is my thirteenth year. I have busloads coming in from Ohio, Erie, of wheelchairs and escorts for my Kennywood Challenge Day and this will be my thirteenth year. So I do things like that. I call it my busy work, so I can ignore my deficits.

Interviewer: Well, let's do this chronology. You were at Harmarville for how long?

Ed: Inpatient for five months, and then outpatient for about six months, and then I went to Milford, PA for nine months to H.I. Tech. It was like a training school for disabilities, and they made sure I could cook again. I worked my way through college as a chef and a bartender, so I can cook. And just organization and – I lost my computer languages, so they taught me a new Model 204, a new computer language to replace the ones I lost.

Interviewer: And you were able to pick that up?

Ed: Yeah. The old pages were gone, but I still have many empty ones to drop stuff into.

Interviewer: So, then you went back to work?

Ed: I went back to work three days a week. And they insisted I come back, go back to work full time. And one of my side effects from my brain injury was I was never completing my projects. I always told them I needed more time to make it as good as I used to be able to do. I didn't want to turn something in deficient, that showed my losses. Luckily, they terminated me. They got a new doctor. "He's not disabled. He's just procrastinating. Fire him."

So they fired him and after a couple of months, I said "Maybe I should see if I can get on, try and get on disability." So I applied for disability. Got turned down. And then eight or nine months later, I found out that I could, you know, try and fight it. So I applied to appeal it.

And they said, "Sorry, you only have six months to appeal. It's now a new case."

So I filed a new case in nine months and went for my hearing with an attorney. And the judge would ask me a question, and I'd turn to my attorney and ask, "Is that for you to answer, or for me?"

"Ed, you try to answer the best you can."

So I'd answer. I said, "Yes, I have lost the..." I said I swear they invented Post-It notes for me, cause on my door it says, "Keys. Wallet. Coffee." And the coffee was to remember to shut the coffeepot off before I left. So I lived by Post-It notes. As a matter of fact, I have some beautiful canes I lose. Because if I sit down for awhile, then stand up, I leave, my leg's okay. And so I forget I came with a cane. As a matter of fact, my brother had a cane that he had hand-carved for my dad with a circle on it, a beautiful

cane, and I haven't told my brother yet that I lost my dad's cane. Matter of fact, I'm writing a newsletter, and it's called Loss. It's my next newsletter, loss of status, loss of function, loss of family, the different losses after trauma. That's going to be in my newsletter in of the next 2 weeks, I'm putting together. And I have a new cartoon. My cartoon is going to be me sitting at my desk, at my computer, with papers piled all over, and it says, "What do you mean? I am organized. Everything important is on this desk, somewhere." That's my cartoon for my TBI newsletter I'm doing next.

Interviewer: So did you finally get the disability insurance?

Ed: Yeah. And the nice thing was the judge determined that I was late... fighting the loss of it. He gave it to me to day one. So I convinced him very well that I'm very disorganized.

Interviewer: What part of town do you live in?

Ed: I have five acres over in Ross. It's the Judge Tuppet's estate. Brighton Road, Baskin Avenue, you know the Giant Eagle down in the hollow there? I'm the five acre mountain across from that the Giant Eagle. It's the Judge Tuppets estate. Russell Tuppets was a friend of mine. I'm also in AUP Association... Association of University People. Parents Without Partners, BIA-Pa. PA-BIA. I group well. But he was a friend of mine with AUP, and we had a picnic there, and here his mother had died. And he was so anti-government, he didn't want to sell the house for five years. So, he was looking for somebody that would rent it for five years and then buy it. So I convinced him that I'd rent it for five years for a thousand, then twelve-fifty, then fifteen hundred a month. I gave him forty thousand up front, and then that amount. And most of that went into, how should I say, deposit on the house. So after the whole period, I ended up owing him like one hundred and fifteen. But he died, and here his trust fund manager called and says "Hey, we can figure it, but about ninety-three thousand you owe?"

And I said, "Hey, that sounds good. I'll start sending you the two thousand a month." So that's what I do, too. That's my little house on the North Side.

I have a house in Carrick, too, that's a hundred and ten years old. The house in Ross is only sixty-three years old. But the house in Carrick is one hundred and ten years old and I call that my Edward McCrinnion House. It's got seven bedrooms and four baths and when any of my disabled needs housing, that's where they stay. That's what I do.

Interviewer: And you still keep the house? And you keep it up.

Ed: Yeah. Except, I just got a certified letter from my friend John Pastorias who's in that picture with me in my Community Service Award thing. His daughter is living there with two babies, and now a third baby with her, one of her boyfriends who just got out of prison. She just sent me a certified letter that she's moving in thirty days, so I'm about maybe just sell the house. I don't know.

Interviewer: Where is it? Carrick?

Ed: It's in Carrick, on Madeline Street. When you come up Becks Run, if you bear to the right and go up into Carrick, it's that four-story yellow brick house on half an acre. It's a hundred and ten years old, so I was just able to cut my grass, too, three acres of grass in Ross, and half an acre of grass in Carrick, too. My exercise.

Interviewer: What did the doctor say, why you're walking?

Ed: Determination. I have to be very careful at night walking, because I need a visual reference for balance, so I've taken some nasty falls at night if I don't have good balance. I'm 6'3", I like looking down at people. I was going to be in a wheelchair being looked down on the rest of my life. So, I'm sorry, but... Perspective....

Interviewer: But it's hard to walk if you can't feel your feet.

Ed: I know. Matter of fact, this leg was shattered into a hundred pieces and I have a special heel thing. This leg's a half inch shorter than the other. So I have to cope many ways, but it's just strange. But the thing is I'd say "But there for the grace of God go you and I." I could have Lou Gehrig's Disease, I could have Muscular Dystrophy, I could have AIDS, and tomorrow it's going to be worse." With a brain injury I plan on a better day every day. Tomorrow it's going to be better. Today it's going to be better. I just set an objective. Set, you know...

Interviewer: So are you able to handle the finances and stuff?

Ed: Yeah, yeah. Well, as a matter of fact, here's my finance machine. Everything's in my computer. I kick it on and said "Okay, this one's..." Ahe bottom it says this is one's been paid and this is what's due. And I kick it and I say "Oh, 13th and I kick it up to pay today." Most of everything I do is automatic, too. I have direct pay to electronics, the gas bill, the electric bill. The only thing is I just found out I haven't paid

End of Track 2

my cell phone. One of my friends, he's a TBI survivor, and my mother died and my sister's an OCD schizo. And she got half of my mother's estate, and she thought the whole, my mother's whole estate was hers. We had a house up in Dallas, PA, north of Wilkes-Barre, and she didn't want any of the family possessions to go to anybody, so she set fire to the house and burned the house down, too.

So, luckily they put it out and we got some of the stuff out of the house, but it's been fun. She got two hundred thousand out of the estate and is still living in some motel. With one of her dogs.

Interviewer: So, after you retired, so to speak, and you got disability, you became active in advocacy, really.

Ed: Right. As a matter of fact, I'm one of the four national advocates for all disabilities for some organization out of DC. There was four of us chosen from Pennsylvania and I'm one of the four. And the basketball player that was shot at Duquesne, I teach at Duquesne. They called me up the next day, in the Emergency Room, I was in there the next day in the Trauma Room with the mother and the brother. I used to work as a medic for LTV Steel, and I got him to do some response squeezing with his left hand and do some eye tracking for the mother.

“That’s the first thing he’s ever done! The doctor –“

I said, “The doctor’s only allowed to give you status. I’m the opposite. I’m here to give you all the hope and false hope I can throw at you.” And I showed her pictures of me in a coma, and that was me . He still goes to school at Duquesne. As a matter of fact, the brother lives with him on campus to make sure he goes to classes, and you know helps him, and he’s practiced with the basketball team, but never played in a game.

But when I teach at Duquesne, some of the basketball players come in to learn how their brother... .

Interviewer: So what do you teach at Duquesne?

Ed: I teach at Duquesne a course, and the title of my course is “The Hidden Scars from a Traumatic Brain Injury: Physical, Mental and Social, and the New Challenges of Life Ever After”.

Interviewer: And what school is that in?

Ed: The school of Special Ed. I teach for the classes on disabilities. I teach for the classes on Special Ed. I just came from a Master’s Class at the University of California, for Speech Pathologists last summer on brain injury. As a matter of fact, in a couple weeks, they’re going to broadcast me all over the world, teaching my class, to all the Veterans’ Hospitals.

Interviewer: Who’s going to do that?

Ed: Right now, it’s supposedly Armando Rotundi, and the VA Hospital here keeps saying they’re going to do it, and that’s been a couple of months. Well, at my conferences, I met some bigwigs in the Health Department, and one of the women at this conferences, just last week, said something about – we’re devastated, Pennsylvania’s got the second largest contingency of soldiers for the war, and we’ve got them all coming back with disabilities.

And I said, “You know, a lot of them are coming back with brain injuries, because I’m families calling me. I’ve been trying to teach a course...”

And she said, “Great!”

She said, "I'm giving you the grant. We're going to do this. We're going to broadcast you teaching, to the VA." You know to the Veterans' Hospitals.

'Cause the kicker is... One of the kickers is, too, I called something the five-fold. After brain injury we have a five multiplier. We're five times more likely to be divorced. We're five times more likely to be homeless. We're five times more likely to be alcoholics. We're five times more likely to have another TBI. We're that careless. It's just... Five times more likely to commit suicide.

And a lot of the soldiers are committing suicide, because of their change of status, change of function, loss of family from their changes. I call it my five-fold factor from traumatic brain injury. It's one of the tokens. My wife divorced me as damaged goods. She got half the settlement to care for me, and as soon as the check came in, there was two policemen at the door the next, one Saturday morning. One of them says, "We have a PFA that you tried to rape your wife last night."

I said, "How does a husband rape a wife?"

And she got me thrown out of the house.

When I talk, one of the things I tell them I lost from my brain injury was my male annoyance. And then I talk for a little while and I say, "Oh, but good news, I hope." Five and-a-half years later the annoyance came back and it's been annoying me ever since.

Interviewer: So she couldn't handle you?

Ed: No. It came back that morning. I came up... From my brain injury, this nose was shattered, and I snored real bad, so she had me living in the basement, in my basement office down there, on the couch. And I came upstairs to go to the bathroom, and I couldn't because of a certain situation, and she was sleeping on the couch. "Go the bathroom and..."

And I said, "I will, but I can't right now."

"I told you go to the bathroom and get back downstairs."

I said, "I will, I will, but I can't right now."

She said, "What do you mean you can't?"

I said, "You really want to know?"

And she says, "Yeah."

And I says, "Well, that's why." And I went back in the bathroom and she ran upstairs. And the next morning she wasn't there, and there was two policemen at the door and they PFA'd me, and had me thrown out of the house, cause I tried to sexually assault her that night, that morning.

Interviewer: Were you having problems before that?

Ed: No. Um, well...

Interviewer: But she was a psych nurse. This is not computing for me

Ed: Well, her family said that I had the brain injury, but she had the mental breakdown from the stress. And I wear the... And I say to them, "I wear the tag, I had the TBI, traumatic brain injury." So survivors wear the tag, but the family doesn't get to wear the badge. I was ten days coma, twenty days in, so I had no impact for thirty days, but trauma's immediate for the family. But they don't get to wear the label, they don't get the support. But it's strange. It's...

Interviewer: So your kids were young enough to be living with you?

Ed: No. Well, Charity was in her third week of college at Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, and Michelle was a Junior in high school. As a matter of fact, I found out later that when Nancy and Michelle got to the hospital, they had stopped for some food at one of the stops along the Turnpike. And Michelle came into the room, saw me and ran out in the hall and vomited all over the floor. It impacted her. It's just, you know... She's always been... She's won photos and... She's a cartoonist, illustrator, you know. So that's one of the side effects that she has, too. And she has one of my gifts, I guess. And she's been in art shows. She's had huge posters for the art shows, a long time past and stuff like that. But she's been very independent.

Remember I told you, I used to speak German, French and Japanese. Of course, she learned Spanish, just to be different from me.

Interviewer: Does she live around here?

Ed: No. She lives out near Columbus, Ohio. That's where she went to school. LTV moved their headquarters to Cleveland. They wanted me to go to Cleveland. I said, "No, no, I want to stay in Pennsylvania, so my girls go to Pennsylvania schools." Well, Charity, went to Mt. Union College in Ohio, and Michelle went to the college in Cleveland. Pennsylvania employee, Pennsylvania rates, and they picked other state schools. But she has a degree in Spanish and a degree in Art from that college, Michelle. Charity has a degree in Education. So they both luckily... My IQ before my brain injury was 175. It dropped to 140.

Interviewer: That's still pretty darn good.

Ed: I still pretend to function. (Joking.) “Duh... What did you say? I know nothing. I see nothing. I do nothing.”

Interviewer: What’s your biggest struggle?

Ed: Short-term memory. “Where’s the keys and what day is today?”

Everybody says, “You have a date book.”

And I say, “It’s my memory book to remind me where I was supposed to be fifteen minutes ago.”

As a matter of fact, I’m working with Bill Gates’s crew. I’m on the CMU clan, Pittsburgh Plan Advisory Board, CMU. I help run events and stuff at there also. I’m an alumni there. But I’m working with Bill Gates’ crew, his atomic data watch. And It beeps and says, “Feed Sam” in the morning, and in the evening it beeps and says, “Feed Sam.” And I hit the button, “Feed Sam.” But I’m working with Bill Gates’s crew because I want it to beep me fifteen minutes again to feed Sam. Until I hold it for five seconds, “I fed Sam. You don’t have to remind me any more.”

(Beep sound.) See it beep?

Or maybe if I’m working with a crew, and if Timex can’t do that, have it beep twice. I push it twice and it meant “I’ve done the project.”

But mainly, I’m working for the elderly. “I can’t leave my mom at home because at noon, she has to take a pill and I’m never sure who is going to...” Give her a watch. Beep. It says, “Take pill.” Fifteen minutes later, “Take pill.” “I took the pill.” You know?

End of Track 3

It’s, uh, text messaging on it. And I’m also looking at it maybe making voicing. So crazy ideas I have with as a brain injury.

Interviewer: Well, they have clocks that do that.

Ed: Right. Yeah. Do it as a little mini-watch.

So I’m working with Timex in Bill Gates’s crew at CMU and that’s on my to-do list if I’m in town long enough to do it one of these days. But it’s, you know...

Interviewer: So your Mom’s from around here?

Ed: No, my mom lived up in Dallas, PA, and my dad lived in Wilkes-Barre. They were divorced. I lost my mom in July, three years ago. She had a stroke and died. And my

dad, he had just turned eighty and he had a problem with, a problem with mobility. And his significant other went away for a week with her friends, and I went up there to spend a week with my dad and stuff like that. Do computer work, too. We have some patents on retaining walls. We just put the railroad to Chicago on our family's patented retaining walls. So I wanted to go to Cooper's Union in New York to be an architect. I was my dad's draftsman for his projects in high school. And fortunately, there was too many of us from New Jersey trying to get into Coopers Union. MIT didn't accept me. It was either Ohio State or Carnegie Tech. My parents made me go to Carnegie Tech cause it was closer.

Unfortunately, I was on the basketball team and I worked at the Harbor Restaurant near Mt. Lakes, NJ. One of the summer waitresses was the head cheerleader at Ohio State. We became good friends and the summer of my Senior year, I went to work and she said, "Okay, all my girlfriends are waiting to meet you. You did apply to Ohio State?"

And I said "Yes I did."

She said, "Okay, I told them you're basketball."

And I said "Okay, good."

And she said "Alright, great."

And I said, "But there's a problem."

And she said, "What?"

I said, "I also got accepted at Carnegie Tech and my parents are making me go there." So the girl's got to come from Columbus to Pittsburgh, or I have to go on weekends to see the girls, so I went to Carnegie Tech first. But that's where I had my first two comas. My freshman year, winter, right around New Year's. I was President of the Freshman Class at CMU. I was also President of my Pledge Class for PKE Fraternity house. It was Pledge Night, and they threw all us pledges in the shower. Well I was Mister Star Basketball Player for the college, and I had one of the brothers on my shoulder, and I was going to throw him in the shower. They tackled me, and there was a nail board in the bedroom for wake-ups. And one of the nails went into my skull right here. When I fell down they thought I was just drunk. They put me to bed. Well, two days later, I woke up and rolled over and the bed was full of blood. The college put me in the infirmary for a couple weeks.

Then the summer after my Sophomore year, I was walking through Squirrel Hill and three kids came across the street to ask me directions and I turned to one of them to give them directions, and one of them had a brick behind his back, and they hit me with a brick on this side of the head. I had two hundred dollars of rent money in my pocket, so I wasn't going to go down. So I fought my way through, made it three blocks to a friend's

girlfriend's house and said, "I don't feel too..." It was in a five-day coma at Shadyside Hospital.

So this one was a ten-day coma, so I keep doubling it.

Background Voice: What years did you go to CMU?

Ed: I went from '65 to '67. But by the time I got out of the hospital from my second brain injury, my Junior year had already started. Well, my grandfather, we have a family island up in Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire, a ninety-six acre island, and one of his friends was the head of Belknap College up in New Hampshire. So they said, "Come up to Belknap, and start the semester late, just take a couple of courses, just to get acclimated back into school."

So I went up to Belknap and took a couple of courses, and the next semester took six courses, and the next course, seven courses, and liked it up there, cause I worked... in the Spring and the Fall I worked as a busboy and a bartender and a chef at the big turkey restaurant up there, and in the wintertime, when that shut down, the restaurant shut down, I worked Ski Patrol at Stow and Killington. So I had a rough college, but I ended up with a BS in Math, a BS in Physics, a degree in Psychology from there. And I had a fellowship to come to Pittsburgh to get my Master's in Education at Pitt. After taking four-and-a-half years, I got out in January from Belknap, I came to Pittsburgh. I said, "I'm here."

They said, "Okay, well, you start in September."

I said, "September?" So I said, "Let me find a job."

So Westinghouse offered me a job and J & L offered me a job for forty-five dollars more. So I said, "Okay, that's closer to me here than going all the way to East Pittsburgh," so I took the job at J & L. And here they started me out at like seven hundred thirty-five dollars a month, and I said, "I'm going to go for a Master's to work for four hundred dollars a month as a teacher." I said, "This is crazy."

So I was an IE, then six months later they promoted me to Senior IE, then a year later Project IE, then a Financial Analyst. I just kept getting promotions and a lot more money, so that's what I started doing, instead of becoming a teacher.

For LTD, I taught computer software, and how to use computers for my steelworker and stuff like that. I was also a CCD teacher for up at St. Sylvester's, and up in Brentwood, too.

So, as I told you, I'm Presbyterian. Well, I became Presbyterian, because after the steel mills started shutting down I was a CCD teacher at St. Sylvester's.

I said, "Hey, I need one of the halls to have parties, night parties for kids, so they can have pizzas and food to feed the kids of the steelworkers."

And the Monsignor says, "Oh, well, they can only come into the building if they go to our Catholic school. Have them transfer to Catholic school."

And I says, "But that's a tuition."

And he says, "Have them fill out the papers and since they're unemployed, we'll give them waivers."

So a friend of mine says, "Hey, Brentwood Presbyterian Church. We're across the street and you don't have to be members of our church. Set up your Youth Groups here."

So I set up my Youth Groups at Brentwood Presbyterian Church. Then one day I came home from work and John Barker is in the house. He said, "I'm here with the papers."

I said, "What papers?"

And Nancy and girls said, "We didn't say anything to dad. We just think it would be a good idea for us."

I said, "What idea?"

And they said, "Well, we were thinking maybe changing to become members of the Presbyterian Church."

I said, "Fine. Where's the paper." I said, "God has many houses here and as long as our focus is the same, it doesn't matter which roof is over us." That's the way I looked at it.

Interviewer: Was this before or after the head injury?

Ed: That was before my brain injury.

Interviewer: Brentwood. Speaking of Brentwood I just saw Cramlington....is that his name? He used to be....Cranmer. Bob Cranmer. He was crossing the street.

Ed: But, yeah, it's strange. My past. You know, everybody asks me about my recovery. And the worst part of my recovery was being receiver instead of a giver. I started the food banks at Brentwood Presbyterian Church for the steelworkers. I was giving the food. One of the worst things that happened to me, one day at Harmarville, one Saturday, Nancy got there late and I said, "Hi, how's it going"

And she said, "I got delayed."

I said, "Why?"

And she said, “There’s a knock on the door. It was the Food Bank.”

I said, “What was the Food Bank doing there?”

She said, “They were dropping a couple boxes of food off for us.”

I said, “What? I’m the Director of Food Bank for this region. They can’t bring food to my house.”

She said, “Well, it was nice.”

I said, “Why?”

She said, “Because Mellon Bank won’t cash your paychecks, cause you’re not there signing them.”

So it’s strange. Plus, one of the things, after I got out of the hospital, I used to run the Indian Princess programs for the YMCA. I was on the Board of Directors at the YMCA’s also, and I was the big chief. As a matter of fact, my name was Chief High Noon, and Charity’s name was Evening Sunset, and Michelle’s was Morning Sunrise. Those were my two daughters’ in Indian Princesses.

But there’s a knock on the door and they says, “Okay, Mr. And Mrs. Crinnion, we’ve got six hundred dollars to give you.” They says, the Indian Princess and the Indian Guides had a fundraiser for you and they raised six hundred dollars for you.”

And I said, “We can’t take money. I will not take money from the Y.”

And they said, “Why, we got this money?”

And my wife said, “But Ed, our refrigerator’s going, it’s barely going.”

I said, “We’re not taking money.”

All of a sudden, a couple of days later, there was a knock on the door from a appliance company, dropping a six-hundred dollar refrigerator off. So they snuck it in on me.

But, you know, other than that it’s... You know, everybody says, um... After, especially...

When I give my talks, there’s differences of, whether it’s birth, trauma, or just aging. You acquire disabilities. It’s rough, no matter what. It’s just less than others.

End of Track 4

Interviewer: What are you most proud of, then?

Ed: Being an author. As a matter of fact, I found out from one family I was dealing with, their son, who was three days after his accident, they found him off the road in a coma, in his car, and he's brain-dead, everything else like that. But I go and visit him, and they have him in one of those tent rooms and stuff like that. I walk in. He sees me and he goes (panting noises) and he gives me a high five. He recognizes me, even with his brain injury.

But one time I got there and they said, "Mr. Crinnion, why didn't you tell us you're a published author?" I said "What?" "Our family has found your name in two psych books listed. And your writings on brain injuries, and they list you as a reference."

I said, "Wait, they didn't pay me to put me in their book."

I keep saying, "What's the name of these books?"

They say, "Oh, we don't know."

I say, "You got to find out so I can add them to my library."

But it's strange, so...

Matter of fact, my dad was a B25 pilot. He's in a book that was written over in England, on the B25's, and there's three pages about my dad as in the war. He flew sixty-four missions in the B25 and won all these medals, and there's all these dissertations about my dad.

As a matter of fact, the Veterans Center in Oakland, they now have bricks. You can buy a brick for a soldier, for like thirty dollars. I'm having one of the first bricks for my dad put in. I was just out there a couple of weeks ago for the Disability Awareness for Veterans and I have a table for brain injury there. I have tables with Senator Orrie's seniors events. And I'm going to have a table in a couple of weeks at the Kids Fest for kids, too. Matter of fact, I'm trying to work with Dick's, I want to have them give me a couple of helmets. And we measure the kids for bike helmets, and I'm gonna have them put their names in it and have the who won the helmets from my table.

I've given away three hundred helmets, at the zoo and stuff like that. Matter of fact, Mike Webster was supposed to be... the poster said Mike Webster was coming to autograph my helmet. He died eight days prior to my helmet giveaway. And Andy Russell called me up and he said, "What are you going to do?"

And I said, "I'm going to have to tell them Mike left town and I can't bring him back."

And he says, "Well, I'm not as famous as Mike, but how about if I come and autograph them for you?"

So I bought gold permanent ink pens and he put his name and number on three hundred helmets for me at the Pittsburgh Zoo, no charge. So that's what I do.

Interviewer: So you're busy?

Ed: Yeah. I'm -- that's one of the nice things from my brain injury. I live on five hours sleep. When I go to sleep, I go into full REM almost instantly. I go to bed about one o'clock, and I'm up at six almost every morning.

One of the strangest things from brain injury, though, is, and I'm not the only one, I've had other people tell me. I'd be driving along, early in my recovery when I was first driving and all of a sudden I'd hit the curb and wake up. My brain shuts down without any warning. Luckily, I'll be on the Turnpike and I've developed a system. All of a sudden I'll get a twitch. My neck will twitch, and a couple of minutes later my neck will twitch. And that's my brain telling me I've got to find a rest stop in fifteen minutes, cause it's gonna shut down on me. So I call on my phone and says, "Okay, I'm going to have to take a fifteen-minute break. Call me in a half-hour. Make sure I'm up and I'm on the road again for the next, for the next support group or next conference I'm traveling to."

But it's, you know... You learn new signals. New nudges to your life.

Interviewer: So, who's had the biggest influence on you through this journey?

Ed: Fellow survivors, I guess. When I have my support group it's like everyone becomes brother and sister. Whether they're the caregiver, family, or a survivor. "Hey sis, hey brother." You know, it's just -- the most embarrassing thing is when a mother comes over and starts crying on my shoulder and says, "Ed, what you've done for me, understanding him and getting him the treatment that he needs."

I get called in by Western Psych and the hospitals... directly into trauma rooms with the families or onto the floors if they're having difficulties with one of my fellow survivors.

If you look in the Yellow Pages, the phone book? I'm listed under Support Groups. I'm listed under Disabilities, and I'm also listed as a Counselor, for Trauma. So I'm a good actor. Matter of fact, when I teach, when I teach the things, the nurses come up and say, "You cannot be a TBI."

I said, "I'm a good actor. I act almost normal."

So it's strange how --

Interviewer: I was thinking about the support group, do you have support groups all over the county or just a big one?

Ed: I have – it's strange because I used to have about forty support groups that I traveled all over the state with. As a matter of fact, I started some of them all the way out in areas... Altoona, and I've started some out in Pennsylvania Dutch Country, and stuff like that. But a bunch of them are folding. Because the director of the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania, he's a doctor in Philadelphia. Well, he got a state grant to hire a support group coordinator for thirty-five thousand dollars a year. Well, I sent him my resume, I went through the interview and didn't hear anything. And all of a sudden I got an e-mail that here his niece got chosen for the job because she had a Master's degree. Master's degree was one of the requirements for the job. That's why I say I have too many BS's. I am getting a Master's degree from the University of Washington in Brain Injury.

Matter of fact, I was supposed to fly to China in July and teach in China for three weeks. Brain injury. But with the earthquakes and stuff like that, the medical and whole country's focus has changed, so we're gonna probably do it next year. So I'll delay it another year.

Interviewer: Now, there's been a lot of public funding for people with brain injuries, right?

Ed: No. There is some good, the Pennsylvania Department of Health has a TBI Grant project funding. We also have, with... When we formed the BIAPA eight years ago, we forced the state to open a department of brain injury in their Department of Health. And all of a sudden, there's this tobacco money started coming in for brain injury. And we started the comp care waiver fund, which is a fund for, it's like a year's worth of project for getting somebody back into community living or out of community living into independent living, like a restaging of function or life after trauma. The state of Pennsylvania also has a Pennsylvania Assistance Program, which is about \$100,000 funding. Stuff like that. Funny thing is, too, is the state used to have the CAT Fund (Catastrophic). Well, it was eliminated on September 1, 1989, and eighteen days later I had my trauma.

But, I don't remember doing it, but my State Farm agent sold me a six month policy for seventeen dollars, a million dollars replacement plan. It cost State Farm \$450,000 to put me back together again. And I have life medicine, for life, my TBI medicine, it comes out of State Farm. Except they're not sure, but one of the side effects from my brain injury, I sweat constantly. Ten below zero, I'm constantly sweating. As a matter of fact, I just showered to get here, cause around my house I was a little sopping wet. So I had to clean up my act a little bit. So one of the side effects from my brain injury was sweating and if I don't take a medication, I break out in pimples all over my body, and they don't believe that's true. I said, "I never had pimples as a child." Luckily, my wife Nancy was

End of Track 5

a nurse, and somehow, through the internet, she found out that from brain injury your skin can go into an agitated mode, and then it's breaking out in pimples. They just couldn't understand it. And I didn't take the... I missed the pill for two days and I got to go down to Falk Clinic and show them, I have welts, bubbles on my back hip areas. Luckily, I found some old pills. They put me on a new pill, one a day, and I got a container of about twenty pills for one every other day, so I've been taking them and I'm getting ready to talk to State Farm. I just gotta call them today, but I'll do that when I get home or tomorrow.

She says, "Okay, the doctor didn't write you the right..." She was a new doctor and she wrote that my skin condition was because of my trauma, and she wrote "maybe."

I said, "You guys have been taking care of me for sixteen years. It's not a maybe." So I hope she's changed her dissertation.

Interviewer: Do you have any questions, guys?

Background Voice 2: My usual one of how you found out about the project and what made you want to be involved?

Ed: In one of my files, I got a flyer on it. It said call this 866 number and see if we can annoy you with some questions. I mean talk to you.

Interviewer: I think you're doing great.

Background Voice: You must be one of the last employees of LTV. It folded.

Ed: It folded about fourteen years ago, I guess. That's why I'm saying, I was lucky that they terminated me. So, was I going to spend the rest of my life on Unemployment, or hoping for Unemployment? Or being sent to McDonald's to flip hamburgers.

Background Voice: 26 weeks would've been it on unemployment.

Ed: So I lucked out. I went the Disability route. It embarrasses me when I see some fellow survivors getting four hundred and some dollars a month to live on. I was making a big salary at LTV Steel, as one of the big bosses, with my overtime and everything else like that. I get like thirteen hundred a month, plus the Cat Fund the replacement from State Farm. I get two thousand a month from them.

Background Voice: I was just reading in Sunday or Saturday's paper, about the repeal of the helmet law for motorcycle riders. The amount of deaths and head injuries.....

Ed: Guess what? When they had the thing, I was on Honsberger Live. I called up Honsberger. They had the ABATE guy. I said, "Great, the governor's getting ready to sign the bill." So I called up and said, "I'm Ed Crinnion. I'd talked to Hons. before..."

Ten seconds later, Hons says, "You're next! Whoever else is on the list, you're next to talk to this guy!"

So, I'm talking, talking, and this guy says, "Well, I want the right to choose."

I said, "Well, you just proved it."

The guy says, "Proved what?"

And I said, "You don't have any common sense worth protecting."

And Honsberger started laughing, and the guy would try to say something and Honsberger would laugh some more. To this day Hons says, "Don't you ever have me laughing at one of the other guests. Cut your humor when we're having a talk show."

And then I told Hons, "But Hons, don't ever tell anybody, I don't know anything. I used to have a Honda 305 Dream in Pittsburgh here. I used to rebuild cars and motorcycles and I had a Honda 305 Dream. And I'd take my girlfriend up to Erie to go swimming. One of the girlfriends. That was before I79 was built, so I'd always make the mistake and go up through Ohio. And say "Hey, we're in Ohio, we have to take our helmets off." But I'd never admit that. So I'd go up on my bike in Ohio with no helmet on.

I deal with one now of our survivors. He's a state trooper, he was a state trooper. He was going out through Ohio and wiped out with no helmet.

Interviewer: I can't believe the legislature did that.

Ed: Well, I get calls from some of the families, you know. "Come in to the trauma room. My husband's in the hospital. They told me to call you and talk to you. And I'd go in to the hospital. Motorcycle accident, helmet... no helmet."

I say, "Well, I'll come in and talk to you," and I'm in there talking to the family and he's on life support and else like that. And unfortunately if it's most of the time with no helmet, then a couple of weeks later I go to the funeral. So it's, you know... And unfortunately, one of the side effects from my brain injury, I tear very easily, and I'm sitting there looking at the guy and crying cause I cannot tell them it's, the outlook's not looking good.

Interviewer: See, Ben Rothlisberger really did that, because he survived.

Ed: Guess what? I went to Mercy Hospital to go meet with him and the family, okay? I walked in and said, “Yeah, I’m Ed Crinnion. Brain injury. I’m here to talk about whether the family wants to talk about his head injury from the motorcycle accident.

“He doesn’t have a brain injury. He just has a broken jaw.”

I’m like, “You’re the medical people here in the hospital tell me he has a head injury.”

“No, no, just a broken jaw.”

I said, “Okay, goodbye.”

But, you know – as a matter of fact, I’m trying to hook up with some of the Pirates, too. Getting hit with the head and knocked out. You know, sports. I worked with Mario Lemieux, too. Like with him, too, because I used to be one of their practice players. I used to be a Penguin many, many years ago, when they’d come in before pre-season. One of my buddies, steel worker buddy, we’d skate around, and they’d have the hockey stuff in, and he and I would go out there and start playing hockey.

They said, “You guys are pretty good.”

And I said, “I was on a hockey team in New Jersey.”

And my buddy said, “Yeah, I was on a hockey team in Michigan.”

They said, “You guys are staying.” We’re short some guys tonight. So we were the puck targets for the team. So I used to play goalie and center in hockey. As a matter of fact, at CMU I played water polo, too. I was the forward and goalie, the rest, in water polo for my fraternity house. I was on the basketball team, the soccer team, volleyball team. Whatever got us out of, you know, delayed our studies for the courses.

Interviewer: Do you play any sports now?

Ed: Um... Matter of fact, I’m gonna be, I’m putting my horseshoe pit up in my house for the PWP party. I’m going to put in my new horseshoe pits. And I’ll probably get a volleyball net up there, too. I gotta get out to... I’m going over to Dick’s to see if they’ll give me some helmets. “While I’m here can I buy.....I need a volleyball court for my party. Give me a couple helmets on the side.” So I’m working on that, too. I do that too.

I run with my Brittany Spaniel. Matter of fact, I run about 5K with my Brittany Spaniel. One of my fellow survivors, who found me through the internet, Joan Ulissa. She’s been in a couple of book and written her own books. And from her brain injury, she made one of the... When I show everyone my jaws, the next thing that I show is her being on the TV show. Being shown, you know, pictures of her smiling, waving with her dog, and the vehicle is demolished. She was visiting in the wintertime with her family. She was working up in New York, one of the big executives for IBM. Going way back to work,

and she was passing a tractor trailer on the highway in a snowstorm, and the tractor trailer didn't see 'em, and switched lanes, knocked her across the highway into the oncoming traffic. She spun and went backwards into a semi coming the other way. The rear brain is technically blind. But she runs twenty-six mile marathons. She's paralyzed on one whole side from a stroke during recovery, and she runs twenty-six mile marathons. The Pittsburgh Marathon, she was running a race a couple of years ago and her spotter with her looked at something else and didn't tell her there was a manhole in front of her. She hit the manhole, fell, dislocated her shoulder, broke her jaw in eight places, and was bedridden with that. So she's back to running. And I told her, I want to run the Brentwood 5k on the Fourth of July, as a running mate, and say, "Hey, I'm paralyzed, can't walk, but I'll run" and she's blind. I'll be her running mate. That's one of my objectives, too, to do one of these centuries.

But I now jog and run with my Brittany, around me house. I walk all the way down the hill from my driveway to the Giant Eagle, to save gas. My driveway is 170 yards for me to walk to get the mail, in the mailboxes, too. Get my morning Post-Gazette and my morning Trib.

Interviewer: So your address is on --?

Ed: It's 630 Baskin Road. You come up out of the Giant Eagle, that first driveway, there's a 630 on a stone pillar. That's my mail pillar. Go up that thing, up a hill about, oh, seventy yards, and then turn and go fifty yards to the house. As a matter of fact, --

Interviewer: I wrecked my car on Baskin.

Ed: Oh, you were the delay!

Interviewer: I'm very familiar with that road.

Ed: Did I bring my datebook? Oh yes, I did. I'm also known at the YMCA as Mr. C?, Count Dracula. I used to design haunted houses for the YMCA's, and the funniest things is Halloween night I was out of coma out at Harmarville Hospital in bed, not moving yet. This guy snuck in to see me like at 9:30 at night,

End of Track 6

10 o'clock at night, one of his family was on the staff there, and he got in and he said, "Hi."

"Hi," I said, "How you doin'?"

He said, "Well, I'm here to tell you we had your haunted house."

I said, "What to you mean?"

He said, “Don’t you remember the summary you laid out the building, and what to do with every one of the rooms in the building and then you told us what nights to be open and what weekends, on the weekends have a half-price day during the day for kids, and we did your whole project.”

And I said, “Great.”

And he said, “Well, I’m here to tell you”

I said, “Well, I figured you could make about twelve or thirteen thousand.”

And he said, “Well, I’m here. We made fourteen, eight.” He said, “But almost every group that came through the haunted house complained.”

And I said, “Why, what was wrong with it?”

He said, “They went through the whole house and where was the Count? You weren’t there to say “Ahh lovely neck, what blood type? Ahh yes. I’m getting very thirsty.” So another one of my little side effects.

As a matter of fact, I told you I act, I’ve been in the movies. Soon after my trauma, did you ever hear of the video, the church video called Heaven’s Gates, Hell’s Flames?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ed: I was in South Hills Assembly of God. Early out of recovery, like two years post, my wife Nancy had joined that church, and we were there. And they needed help to set up the church for this play. Well, they had us all read parts. Well, the next day they came, they said, “Well, guess what? You’ve got two days to practice your part because you are now in the play.”

My play was, Nancy and I were driving in onstage with our two boys in the back seat, And it fades... a mand and a son are talking, they’re going to hockey practice and stuff like that. Our part is we crash and are all killed onstage.

I says, “Wait a minute. I’m reliving my accident from two years, I get chosen for this part,” so I convinced the company to let us videotape a church record. I have that video. And in closing, when I teach for three hours, other than playing my one hour video and me giving my class, I’ll show that in closing, as part of my closing. And then the final thing I close with, I play the video part of Garth Brooks’s, Light My Fire. Okay, Garth Brooks... It’s a song that he writes and the whole subject of the thing is about a mentally-retarded son in school, going up to sign up for the track team. And the coach goes and grabs his hand and pen and moves him a couple of yards down the wall to the Disability Olympics team, and the coach smiles and leaves. And as the coach leaves, the kid goes back and signs up for the regular team, and it’s a video of him practicing and everything

else like that. And the coach is shaking his head as he's practicing, shaking his head as he's practicing. Well, he's in the race, okay? And of course, he's the last one thing, and he goes and falls down, and his dad and his mom say, "This is ridiculous. He's just doing it for attention, he's never going to do anything."

Well, here, the mother and everybody's running over and to go touch his son, but dad races over and says, "Don't touch him. Don't touch him. If you touch him he can't finish the race." And he says, "Son, get up, get up, get up. You can make it, you can make it." And the son staggers across.

And that's the song I end up. Determination and non-acceptance of label, position. That's how I close, and everybody applauds when I end my talk. So that's how my closer, Garth Brooks' video. As a matter of fact, they want to put me on the internet and broadcast me, and I'm gonna put my talk on my website, one of these days. And I've gotta write Garth Brooks a letter, asking if I can drop his song on my website for closing, cause that's how I close. And I'm not alone and you just have to keep trying.

That's what I do.

Interviewer: That's nice. Okay, I think we're done.