

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

DVD transcript

Between a rock and a hard place

FIONA: at the moment, the rural industry does have quite a high number of fatalities, and severe injuries in relation to other industry sectors

FIONA: when we're talking about severe injuries, we're not talking about you know, a couple of stiches, or a crushed finger, we're talking about amputations and people maybe never returning to their work again so it is very serious.

FIONA: It's very, very important that we work with industry to try and find solutions to some of those high risk activities and hopefully reduce those severe injury and those fatality rates.

GENERAL TITLE SLIDE... "Between a rock and hard place"

GARRY: I was farming. Most of my life I was on the farm. But I did have a tractor accident and that changed all

MARLENE: He was the type of person who had to be busy all the time.

GORDON: Everything had to be done today and not tomorrow and...

GARRY: I guess I was in the prime of my life, you know, I was 38 and I was pretty much bullet proof.

MARLENE: Life was great and then 'bang'.

3 second black out

MARLENE: (voice only over black dropout) But that's the way it can happen.

MARLENE: he mentioned to me that he was going to slash the paddock and I said well you be damn careful on that hill

GARRY: I was slashing some fairly high scrub and you couldn't really see too far in front of you. But at the actual time of rolling it, I was looking up the hill and thinking well I've only got another hour and a half'.

MARLENE:He had remembered some rocks in the paddock but he couldn't remember where they were.

GARRY: when I hit the rock, it was certainly a combination of the slope of the hill, there was a washout on the bottom side of the rock as well, and the height of the rock.

GARRY: Basically the impact of hitting the rock was just... I had no control at all....Just flipped over 360 sideways and catapulted me out down the bottom side.

GARRY: I hit the ground, and I rolled and rolled and then when I stopped, I looked up and here was this tractor wheel coming down on top of me and I just screamed ...

GARRY: I knew I was in strife, my body was flat, the tractor had actually got me across the groin and the pelvis and there was blood everywhere

GARRY: my fear was that I had a broken back.... and when I wriggled the toes on the left one, it worked, the right one eventually stopped.

GARRY: I then hauled myself around. And...that was the most excruciating thing I've ever done....I had white lights just flashing before my eyes and it just felt like I was leaving the bottom half of my body behind. It was as if it was hanging by...just by a nerve, it was extremely painful.

3 second black out

GARRY: I strongly believe if that to get through something you need to focus on something that is really dear to you ... I had to live for my family. We had a three year old girl..... so that was my focus.

GARRY: It was a long wait.

GARRY: I saw my wife going to town. I saw the dust and I thought well there goes one avenue. Because I was thinking she'll come looking for me.

GARRY: And then I heard a neighbour's tractor coming down the hill and that's when I yelled and somehow, somehow, he heard me.

GORDON: my neighbour rang me and said that Garry had an accident, could you come over straight away?

GORDON: I stood beside him on the stretcher and tried to keep him calm and talk him through it and... 'cause he was in a bad way, he was losing a lot of blood and I could see his leg was pretty bad

CRYSTAL(with baby): I do remember coming around the corner of the hill, coming home from shopping with mum, and I saw the whole cattle paddock full with lights and helicopters and ambulances.

MARLENE: I thought strewth, there's been a horrific accident at either of these farm houses

GARRY: And Marlene came on site and threatened to kill me if I died... so ... you're not leaving me with this child on my own ...

MARLENE: I think it was anger, shock, dismay. Our future, all our plans were down the tubes because he did something stupid you know and I was, I was angry.

GARRY: they stabilised me then they choppered out to Cairns Base Hospital.

GORDON: my thoughts at the time that he wasn't going to make it.

GORDON: It was a fairly, fairly, yeah, disturbing, disturbing thing to witness.

1.5 second black out

GARRY: the specialists said they had never seen anyone come in with those injuries, survive.

MARLENE: well we had an idea that he was going to lose his leg because it was cold... He couldn't feel me touching it

GARRY: I cried buckets of tears that's for sure. Particularly when they...they said we're going to amputate.

GARRY: Even though in the paddock, I'd known that I was going to lose it, the reality was a different thing, it was when they said they were going to cut it off.

GARRY: after they shaved my whickers off, Crystal didn't recognise me and that was ... that was ...huge...that...

CRYSTAL: it was just the initial shock of seeing him that sick and not well... it probably scared me a bit.

GARRY: Yeah, I found that very hard to cope with, lying in hospital, you know, on the deathbed I suppose because they didn't think I would survive.

Pause

GARRY: It took a long time for me to get images of the rollover out of my mind, that haunted me for... a long time. And certainly the noise of the, when the tractor actually flattened me and squashed me.

MARLENE: For the first 12 months after the accident, it was horrific for both of us I think.

GARRY: I think my wife went through a lot more pain than I did. Certainly I was getting physical pain but she had mental pain. Mental strain, she had to try and keep the farm going, deal with me...

MARLENE: He tried to brush me off in the hospital. Umm...said well you can pee off now.

MARLENE: I was shocked, you know....And I just said hey, we made some vows a while back... In sickness and in health and I meant what I said...

GARRY: I didn't have insurance for me. ... looking back I guess I was bullet proof, it wasn't going to happen to me and yet when you look at it now it's so stupid because I was the main cog, without me, the farm didn't exist.

GORDON: they were struggling at the time, trying to make the farm work and Garry's in, you know, development stage with his bananas and...

CRYSTAL: Mum had to stay on the farm and try and run the farm when Dad went out to sell fertiliser I think it was and he was gone for one or two weeks at a time and I think that was hard on Mum

MARLENE: and I just said to Garry... I know it's going to break your heart to leave it go, but the dream is now a nightmare for me. I can't handle much more stress; I've just about had all I can take.

CRYSTAL: And I think that's why the farm ended up getting sold in the beginning, ...I think that's one of the reasons and because of course Dad couldn't do all the things he used to.

GARRY: With the fact that I couldn't ride a horse, I gave up my dream of cattle....ever owning a cattle block.

GARRY: it was just like slamming a book you know, the final chapter and I knew I'd never go back to it. So yeah it was difficultbut... life goes on (V EMOTIONAL)....

Pause

FIONA: in Garry's situation, the incident could well have been prevented.

FIONA: He was under a lot of pressure to do the job. He was a man that pushed himself.

MARLENE: it's not that he was careless; I guess that he was overconfident in his ability and always racing against time.

GARRY: look, the accident could have been prevented, there's no doubt about that...

GARRY: being on the farm all my life and complacency certainly did play a part

GARRY: there's a couple of things I did wrong. Apart from certainly not having the roll frame on.

GARRY: the rollover frame would have stopped the tractor from rolling, but I was slashing country where I couldn't see and I was using a 60 horsepower tractor where I should have been using a dozer. It's as simple as that... right machinery, right job. I didn't have the right machinery.

FIONA: So with any incident, there's always a lot of factors – there's always factors surrounding the person, the piece of equipment they're using and the environment they're using it in.

FIONA: and it's being able to recognise those, those risk factors and doing what we call a risk assessment.

GARRY: Sometimes you put yourself into a situation where you know you shouldn't be,

GARRY: I did some foolish things. I was fortunate enough that I got through it. Unfortunately, a lot of people out there won't make it.

FIONA: from this story, I hope people take home the fact that incidents can happen to anybody. You can be a competent person, you may have been brought up on the land and you may have done that same job over and over again but the more risks you take, the more you increase the likelihood of having a severe injury or a fatality.

FIONA: I'd really like people to hopefully watch this and just sit back and take a bit of time and absorb it. Think about what can go wrong and if you're doing something at home that you know is wrong, please pull up, take some time to fix it....

MARLENE: the best advice I can give farmers is think about your family

CRYSTAL: keep a safe workplace because you've got your family to go home to and if you don't go home to your family, your family is going to be heartbroken.... Because your family is what matters.

FIONA: Workplace Health and Safety should be an integral part of all of our business, it should never be isolated, we need to include safety in everything that we do to change people's behaviour...and everyone has the right to go to work put in a good day's work and come home a little dirty at the end of the day, but be home... and be home with your family.

GORDON: at the end of the day, if you're alive, well you're going to be coming home, to your wife and children and grandchildren... I guess that's the ultimate prize, isn't it? To be able to live a long and healthy life on the land and enjoy it because it's an enjoyable life on the land, there's no two ways about it.

FIONA: I've seen a lot of people go through incidents have come out with injuries similar to Garry's and some worse, that their marriages have broken down, they've lost their properties, they're isolated from their families, their whole life has been turned upside down

MARLENE: life without each other, I shudder to think what it would be.

GORDON: he's a really tough man, he's a fighter, and I'm very impressed with the way he's pulled through the whole thing.

CRYSTAL: when I was three, it didn't really occur to me that he, you know, he could die. But now that I'm older ... I kind of think wow, how lucky I really am to still have him around?

GARRY: We now have an irrigation shop. I think we're just about back to where we were pre the accident and that, that's taken 17 years.

GARRY: We nearly lost everything in the process, financially, but the strength was still there, you know, my wife stuck by me, the family stuck by me and I think that was the greatest asset I could have had.

GARRY: and I'm just so fortunate that I'm here to enjoy it, I wanted to see my daughter grow up and I saw it and that was wonderful and now she's produced a wonderful little granddaughter and that's even better still so yeah, look, life's good. Couldn't be better.

SLIDE : Work Safe. Home safe. Farm safe.
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Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

Case study, *Between a rock and a hard place*
PN10826 Version 1 Last updated August 2010