

M a r k M c L a n e

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Dear Oprah,

I want to tell you my story, as it relates to the nursing crisis our country is facing and I think it would make a great topic for your show.

On January 30th, 2005, while cycling with a group on Hwy 1 near Pt. Reyes, California, I was hit by an oncoming car. My back was broken in two places and my skull was severely crushed on the left side. The doctors didn't expect me to survive the medi-vac helicopter trip to the ER in Santa Rosa, much less the brain surgery I would need once I arrived. My ten-year-old daughter overheard their conversation and exploded into tears. She had no idea her dad was mortal.

Surviving was a miracle, even though I lost the vision in my right eye, and the hearing in my left ear. The doctors doubted I would ever walk again. Two weeks later I had a blood clot from my leg lodge in my lung (pulmonary embolism), which should have killed me after brain surgery.

The trauma of the accident was minor compared to the blessings I received as a result of this near-death event. For the first couple weeks I was unable, cognitively, to conceive of the future or the past. As my friends and family came to visit, I just held their hands, looked into their eyes, and truly listened to what they said. For the first time in my life, at age 46, I was fully present. Living in the now would be the most important gift to treasure from my injuries.

The doctors encouraged me not to go back to my career as a commercial photographer. Research has clearly shown a higher success rate for recovery when brain injury patients learn new skills. I had always wanted to be a nurse and it seemed to resonate at a very deep level. Inspired by my own incredible nurses, I could think of no greater way to give back than to become involved in other peoples healing as an RN.

The doctors' prognosis, with the severity of my injuries, was that I would not work or go to school for 4-5 years. They encouraged me not to entertain depression, anxiety, and anger at all costs as it would slow my healing four-fold. I learned not to judge anything on what kind of day I had, good or bad, but to make sure I did something every day to advance my healing. I went step by step, being present and responding to what I could do each moment physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally.

At 10 months out I started taking pre-nursing classes at the Community College. I found science amazing and empowering. The doctors confirmed that I would be able to function well as a nurse. This qualified me for a scholarship with the California Department of Rehabilitation that helps people with disabilities to get back to work.

At 18 months out I began work as an administrative assistant for a cardiac electrophysiology practice in Marin County. In addition to the enormous trauma I suffered from the accident, I had to deal with the challenges of a painful divorce from a 17-year marriage with 2 children.

I applied for the Nursing Program at the University of San Francisco (one of the best nursing schools in the country) and was accepted for Fall 2008. With over 500 applicants for 32 openings in the Nursing Program, I feel it is a privilege beyond words to have been selected.

Now I am working on getting funding to cover the tuition of \$32k per year plus living expenses as I have 50% custody of the kids. Tuition is due by August 1st, and I am determined to find enough money to attend school this fall. Step by step. My mother has always said, "Eat your elephant one bite at a time!"

I've come a long way, as have many other students wanting to be nurses across the country. The state governments (as I'm sure you're aware) keep cutting funding for education. Students are not being accepted into nursing programs for two to three years because the programs are so impacted. The nursing programs are not able to increase the number of professors to teach, thus decreasing the numbers of nurses that will be coming out of school to serve society. Many nurses don't want to teach when they can make significantly more income in the field. It's a mess and a crisis for the health care industry and ultimately the people of this nation.

My financial struggle to become a nurse one day is very personal and deeply rooted in my life-changing priorities. I believe there are many more who could directly change our society in a positive way by becoming nurses. Investing financially in the education of new nurses is a crucial movement that must begin at the foundations of our government and society. With all the disasters and crisis, present and future, we must build an infrastructure of care and healing for Americans and the world at large...and the generations to come.

A show on the nursing crisis in our country is long overdue. It would be inspiring and meaningful. We need pressure on society to move in a new direction. We need to respond to what is happening right now in this moment. Being present, fully present, is responding to the world around us and you are one of the greatest examples of that in our times.

All the best, Mark

