

# *Sketch*

---

*Volume 73, Number 1*

2008

*Article 11*

---

## The Horror That Saved My Life

David Wise\*

\*Iowa State University

Copyright ©2008 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).  
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

# The Horror That Saved My Life

David Wise

The clouds hung from the sky in a dark shade of gray. Wind beat against the side of the house while screaming the highest of tones and reflecting the gloom that appeared in the path to the dirty factory I called a job. All this oozed through my mind as my throat stung in pain and cried with dryness. I thought about calling into work while I lay in bed. I didn't. That was a mistake.

There I stood at my machine, thinking about how my life was consumed by hard work, a drug addiction, and a paycheck that didn't even cover my bills. As I drilled and drilled, I was wondering where I went wrong. Pallets never stopped coming, so I drilled them some more. Then came more, so I drilled some more. I drilled and drilled. I wished upon our 2:30 break for a slight jump into humanity and a well-deserved cigarette; it was like some sort of dime store trinket that we all worked towards in a moronic state of stupidity. Boy, life was great.

My boss's screams flew through the air, delivering forceful demands to produce more pallets. My machine decided to quit. I turned it off and blew the plugged saw dust out with a hose. It quit several times, and I fixed it several times. Finally, I was so backed up that when it quit again, I went against company policy and didn't turn it off that time. That was a mistake.

Have you ever seen raw, red, shredded, jelly-looking meat dipped in dark red goop, overlying twisted, ripped Caucasian flesh? Well that's what I saw when I looked down at my arm after it encountered three sharp spinning blades. There was lots of blood--dark, thick, runny blood. The hole in my arm was almost a least a half inch deep. Everything in my field of vision changed as if I were in a world of a red-tinted atmosphere. My legs turned to Jell-O, and I fell down towards hell in a one person elevator. Just then, hands from a fellow employee pulled me back up. The ambulance then took me away. That was a good thing.

As I lay there in the back of the ambulance, the pain started to really settle in. And I'm not talking about the pain you get from a deep paper cut under your fingernail; I'm talking about the pain that puts you in a state of mind called "STUCK," a term that I personally came up with in the hospital. STUCK is when you experience so much pain, that you can't get it to go away, you can't pass out, and you just can't die no matter how much you pray. You're just stuck having to deal with it while your mind takes you straight to the depths of hell.

I arrived at the hospital only to be told that they were going to saw my

arm off at the elbow. Panic swept throughout my body, sinking me deeper and deeper into the sterol-smelling sheets of the rickety bed. Now, me being a Hard House deejay at the time, I saw my future performances melt into a black state of nothing with no hopes of returning.

My dad, being the genius he is, saw I could move my middle finger and asked the doctor to call down to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. The doctor came back and said that they were planning to ship me down so they could attach my arm to my stomach for awhile to transfer the skin. I felt hope lay upon me as a blanket of heavenly comfort.

As I rode in the ambulance down to Iowa City, they injected an amazing substance into my veins. It's called Morphine and it danced the pain away for a short-term while. I asked for more. They said they couldn't, because they had already given me the maximum dose. I heard one of them say that the Iowa City exit was next.

When I got into the second hospital, they took me right into surgery. The first three surgeries lasted about three hours each and were strung out over a three-day period. These were clean-up surgeries; they simply opened up the wound and cleaned it out. On the fourth day, it was time for the real shit--an eight-hour surgery. Not just an eight-hour surgery, but a surgery that consisted of cutting a "U" shape, or a flap as the doctor called it, into my stomach and stretching it around my arm. But not only did they stretch it, they sewed it at the bottom connecting my arm to my stomach.

When I got out of surgery, the pain that I thought was bad was a joke compared to this. I was STUCK again and stuck even further in another dimension of hell that would make the devil cry like a baby. Now, I don't believe I've ever cried over a woman or anything else I can really remember, but I cried this time. And let me tell you something, when the body goes through this much agony, your mind doesn't just play tricks on you, it plans a series of evil attacks that torment and torture you until insanity tries to become part of you. You just keep fighting and fighting, remembering if you lose, you're screwed.

My parents took me home where I laid in a LazyBoy chair for about six weeks. My dad, being the hero he is, was basically my nurse. He would help me change the bandages over the red, blood-and-puss-dripping slop that leaked out of the holes on both sides of the flap. But here is where it gets really good. To prevent infection, he had to take a long wire and attach an antiseptic pad to the end and shove it into my stomach from the holes on the sides of my wound. Later he would have to pull it out and stick a new one in there. We did this probably six times a day. He made me a bite tool out of a corn cob that I bit on when this procedure took place to eliminate my screams and harness some of the pain. It muffled my screams, but I still

screamed and screamed. The pain was never harnessed.

Six weeks later, I was back in Iowa City for another horrific torture session. This time they were going to cut the flap on the top and leave the sewed part on the bottom attached. Again, I got out of surgery and headed home to lie around for another six weeks. This time, preventing infection was a little different, and I could do it by myself. I simply laid a 6 x 6 inch antiseptic pad over the jelly looking, red, bubbly underflesh. It looked like brick-red cottage cheese gone bad. It didn't sting as bad, but still dripped a lot of slimy body fluid everywhere.

Well, six weeks came quickly, and I headed once again to the hospital so they could completely disattach my arm from my stomach. To cover up the spot where the skin was taken, they took skin from my left thigh and used thick metal staples to attach it to my lower abdominal. All in all, the worst parts were over and I had an arm.

I remember lying there in that old hospital bed before my surgeries, looking out of the window and realizing something. Even though I had quite a few friends come visit me, life goes on. No matter how much your friends show concern, their life goes on. Everybody's life goes on. You eventually become old news and a speck of dust in the universe of life. The important thing is what you make of a bad situation. Before this accident, I was a drug addict working in a factory living paycheck to paycheck. Now I am a journalist writing for the Iowa State Daily with a 3.0 G.P.A. Thank God this happened to me. It saved my life.