

The Silent Epidemic

All Tom remembers is hitting the pavement and landing in bushes. Later, he was reminded of his accident. He flew from the top of a moving van, his head hit cement, then he woke up from a coma about seven to eleven days later. Even his priest thought his life was over as he prepared to give him his Last Rights. When Tom regained consciousness, the doctors predicted he'd be incapacitated for the rest of his life.

On July 25, 1988, Tom and his college buddies from Penn State were on a mission. They wanted to get drunk. They partied hard, too hard. But, Tom didn't expect these consequences while he was riding on the top of the van. The accident left him with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Every eight minutes a head injury occurs in Florida. TBI has been referred to as the "Silent Epidemic" because of the staggering number of people injured and the lack of



"If a person really wants to make it to the top, they can."

public awareness. The Allstate Foundation has partnered with the National Head Injury Foundation to increase awareness through preventative education programs.

During his stay at the rehabilitation center, Tom couldn't talk or understand anyone. He didn't know how to feel or interact with people. He basically had to learn to live all over again, but he rebelled against the center. "I just wanted to leave. I didn't know why I was there," Tom said. Both of his attempts to escape failed. On the second one, he rigged his room door so that no one could enter and jumped out the window leading to the woods. He was restrained, confined, and placed in a padded room.

It has been over five years since Tom has been in that padded room. He finished school at Penn State, and shares his experiences with disabled people teaching daily living skills and job coaching. Tom feels that if it weren't for God, his good physical shape and medicine, he may not be here today. He offers advice to all of us, "Think first before taking risks."