

# Huntsville Man Writes Book About Surviving 'Internal Decapitation'

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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"I'm lying face up in a hospital bed," reads part of the first chapter of Huntsville trucker Mike Sanderson's book about surviving the almost unsurvivable -- a [spinal cord injury](#) involving a complete severing of his head from his neck.

"Metal is inserted into my head and both sides of my neck to keep my head intact. There's a tube in my mouth that's connected to a machine that keeps forcing air in and out of my lungs. The metal from the halo has dug so deep into my lower back that flesh is exposed. There's an awful pain in my head and I'm bandaged up like a mummy."

The term for the injury Sanderson survived is "internal decapitation." His head had been completely separated from his spine. The only thing that kept his head on his body was flesh and ligaments.

"They said if I was a skinny guy, my head would have been rolling around in the truck," Sanderson said in a recent article in the Huntsville Times.

Miraculously, after 28 days of partially induced coma, two surgeries, and nearly two months of rehabilitation, Sanderson not only survived but recovered without being paralyzed. Today, 36-year-old Sanderson can walk and is hindered mostly by his inability to move his head from side to side.

"When everybody's telling me that 97 percent of the people in the whole world don't make it through and three percent are paralyzed, and I didn't go through any of that, why not tell the world about it?" he says.

## **Sanderson's Catastrophic Truck Accident Resulted in an Injury Even Most Neurosurgeons Never See**

The truck accident occurred in September 2007. A driver for Alabama Concrete on Stringfield Road since 2003 and a commercial driver for more than ten years, Sanderson was experienced driving everything from linen trucks and dump trucks to 18-wheelers and concrete haulers.

That day, Sanderson was hauling a full load of more than 34,000 pounds of concrete to a new subdivision on Winchester Road. It was between 6:30 and 7:30 a.m. when he approached the corner of Winchester and Blue Spring roads.

No one may ever really know what happened next. Witnesses have told Sanderson that he swerved to avoid an accident that had just occurred in front of him. Police say that he was about to run a light and swerved to avoid oncoming traffic.

Whatever the reason for his sudden, braking turn, the momentum of the heavily laden truck caused it to fall on its side, slamming to the ground on the passenger's side. Sanderson was hurled head-first into the side of the truck, which tore the top vertebra from the base of his skull.

Huntsville neurosurgeon John Johnson knew that most doctors in his field would never see a case like this one.

"Was he salvageable?" Johnson said. "That was really the question."

He was. It took intensive medical treatment, but on October 17, 2007, Sanderson opened his eyes after 28 days in a coma.

"Was anybody else hurt?" he asked upon being informed of the [truck accident](#). His doctors and family told him no.

"That," he said, "was a lot of pressure off."

Sanderson believes that his against-all-odds recovery shows that something greater was at work. His book about his experience, "On the 28th Day, My Eyes Opened," is scheduled to be released in November by BaHar Publishing of Waterloo, Iowa.

Related Resource:

["Huntsville trucker Mike Sanderson writes book about surviving decapitation"](#) (The Huntsville Times, August 19, 2010)