

The Journey

The Downing family of Terrebonne, Ore., was overwhelmed and humbled by the love and support from Hereford friends after Scott's tragic accident.

by **Angie Stump Denton**

It's amazing how fast life can change. One minute you are doing what you love; the next minute you are in the hospital fighting for your life.

March 29, 2010, started out as a normal day for the Downing family. Scott, Tracy, Brandt and Lane said their morning goodbyes and set out for what they expected to be a typical day. The boys were off to school, and Scott was planning to work a set of cows with the crew at Traynham Ranches.

It never crossed Tracy's mind that when Scott left home that day he wouldn't be able to return to the family's home until Dec. 22. "Take

time to cherish every moment and appreciate the things in life you take for granted," Tracy says. "Things can change in a split second."

While working cattle that day, Scott suffered a traumatic brain injury. Doctors had to open his skull to relieve pressure from his swelling brain. A monitor was placed in the skull to track the ICP (intracranial pressure). Luckily, he didn't have any other injuries.

Tracy recalls, "We were taking it one hour and one day at a time."

A long road

Scott was in an induced coma for seven weeks at Providence Medical Center in Medford, Ore., while he healed and the pressure in his brain stabilized. To keep family and friends updated, Tracy, with the help of Sherry and Katie Colyer of Colyer Herefords, Bruneau, Idaho, started a CaringBridge website and a Facebook page.

Hundreds of visitors logged on to track Scott's progress.

"The CaringBridge comments, phone calls and visitors helped me get through the days," Tracy says. "A friend once told me, 'You don't measure wealth in dollars, you measure wealth in friends,' and after this we feel like the wealthiest people in the world."

With the help of friends, Tracy was able to stay at the hospital, and the boys remained in school and went to the hospital on weekends while Scott was in ICU.

Once Scott's ICP stabilized, the doctors started to wake Scott up, which Tracy says was not an immediate process. When Scott woke up, he was down to 155 lb. Originally about 200



Herefords are a passion shared by the entire Downing family. They all enjoy driving the 30 miles to Englands', where they currently keep their cow herd. Pictured (l to r) are: Tracy, Scott, Brandt and Lane.



Tracy says after Scott awoke from the induced coma it was such a relief to see that he still had his personality. He can still make jokes and keeps us laughing and smiling, she says.

lb., he had lost a lot of muscle and was not able to sit up on his own. "He had to learn everything again," Tracy says.

Scott then started the next phase of this journey which began with in-house rehab at Providence Medical Center. Scott's long-term memory seemed intact. The injury had most affected his short-term memory. "He was able to tell stories, and the 'old Scott' personality started to return," Tracy says.

In July he was transferred to Portland and began treatment at the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Center (BIRC).

At this time Tracy also made the decision to move from Butte Falls to Terrebonne, where they had lived while Scott managed Holiday Ranch. This would allow her and the boys to be closer to Scott in Portland. She found a place to rent that had a small acreage for the boys' show calves but needed to find a place for the cow herd. Fortunately, Hereford friends the Englands, from Prineville, Ore., had the resources available to allow the family to

keep their cattle at the England ranch while Scott recuperates.

While Scott was at BIRC, a team of physical therapists, psychologists and vision therapists worked with him. He also had the chance to participate in hippotherapy at Forward Stride, Oregon's largest therapeutic riding center.

Hippotherapy is the practice of using the movement of a horse as a treatment tool in physical, occupational or speech therapy. Maintaining the posture and balance needed to stay atop a moving horse without a saddle while performing verbal or physical tasks has benefited patients with autism, stroke, brain injury or other disabilities.

An article about Scott participating in the program at Forward Stride said he was the first "professional cowboy" to undergo hippotherapy at the facility.

Scott says he liked the opportunity to get back on a horse, but it wasn't typical riding. "I had to ride on the horse backwards with my eyes closed," he says with a smile. Photos of Scott on the horse backward led to harassment from

fellow cowboys who teased him asking if he had forgotten how to ride a horse, Tracy says.

After months of rehab, Scott was allowed to spend the weekend of Nov. 6 with his family. He attended the boys' first wrestling tournament, ate at his favorite Mexican restaurant and had a chance to go see the family's cow herd for the first time in more than seven months.

Scott also was released to attend the Western Nugget National Hereford Show in Reno. There he was able to see Brandt win champion bred-and-owned female honors along with champion showman honors.

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Scott says the support and love the family received from fellow Hereford friends was amazing.



The boys

Scott and Tracy Downing were blessed with two boys. Brandt, 12, who starts the seventh grade this fall, and Lane, 9, who will be a fourth grader.

Both boys have their own calving books and can talk cows like they are 50-year-old astute cattlemen. They know pedigrees, expected progeny differences and how to score udders.

Along with showing cattle, the boys also participate in peewee rodeo and wrestling. As Tracy says, "They are both all boy."

When asked about the accident, both boys agreed, "We are so thankful to still have our dad."

"It was very scary," Brandt says. "But it was so nice to be part of a group who helped us and stood by us as Dad was in the hospital. In the Hereford business, everybody helps one another, whether in the showing or not." HW

Finally, after 17 weeks at BIRC, he was allowed to return home to his family fulltime on Dec. 22.

The next step

While Scott was in rehab, Tracy contemplated the next step for her family.

"I had always worked with Scott first helping on the road clipping and washing cattle, then helping on the ranches we worked at and also

taking care of the boys," Tracy says. "Not knowing if Scott would ever be able to return to work, I knew I needed to find a career to support our family. I had always thought about going to cosmetology school, but it was never the 'right time.'"

So, in January 2011 Tracy started classes. Enrolled in a 15-month program, she will graduate in April 2012.

"Going back to school to learn a trade, keeping the boys focused on school and helping Scott through his rehabilitation is nothing short of a huge task," Sherry Colyer says. "Tracy has rose to the challenge and sets a great example for all of us on how to deal with life's curve balls.

"Tracy has been an amazing partner for Scott in this journey. She has been so strong for Scott and the boys. There have been moments when she has let down but always kept it together in front of them. Their entire lives have been turned upside down and inside out but she still had a smile and a cheerful attitude to keep their spirits up."

Since returning home, Scott is participating in a work trial at Teixeira Cattle Co., a registered Angus and club calf ranch in Terrebonne. Teixeira is the former Holiday Ranch, where Scott and Tracy worked for three years.

Knowing the ranch helps Scott in the rehab process.

Although he's not 100% "back to normal," Scott says he thinks he gets better every day.

Tracy adds, "We're not going to settle until he has a full recovery. We will continue to work at getting him the therapy and rehab he needs to help him try to return to the life he had before the accident."

Outpouring of support

The Hereford family has joined together to support the Downings as they work to get their lives "back to normal."

"I didn't realize how lucky we were to be part of such a great industry until all of this happened," Tracy says holding back tears. "We are so thankful and blessed to have so many people who rallied around us. It's so hard to put how appreciative we are in words. The support and love we received from fellow Hereford friends was so amazing."

Cattle friends organized two fund-raising events to help the Downing family. On April 27 Cara Ayres and Beth Schreiber did a "SUDS 'n SUDS" show in Terrebonne. An online benefit auction was also planned to raise funds for the Downing family.

Katie Colyer says it was decided that an online auction would allow



At the 2009 Western Nugget National Hereford Show, Brandt was named premier junior breeder.

friends of the Downing family from across the country to participate. And they did. A little over \$75,000 was raised from the auction. The auction included 78 lots from embryos to semen to popcorn and advertising packages.

The highest selling lot was a New Mexico Trophy Bull Elk Hunt donated by Daric and Patty Knight of White Mountain Herefords and Knight Guiding and Outfitting, Springerville, Ariz. The hunt was purchased for \$7,500 by Louie Molt and Larry Imbach from Burns, Ore.

“The neat thing about that donation is that Patty and Daric did not know Scott,” Katie says. “It just shows how great the people in the Hereford business are and how we support each other when facing difficult times.”

Sherry agrees adding, “It was amazing to be a small part of the auction. The ‘Hereford family’ and actually the ‘cattle industry family’

was amazing. People called in and said I can donate this or that.... I don’t think there was one thing in the auction that was solicited.

“Same with the night of the auction, the energy that was created when everyone was signed on was nothing short of a phenomenal. It was like everyone from coast to coast was in one room with a common goal — to help the Downing family. The chat room was active with heartfelt comments and prayers for Scott, Tracy, Brandt and Lane.”

Although the Downings have hit some roadblocks and taken a few wild and crazy turns in their journey, they are stronger as a family and can feel assured that their Hereford family is always there to help when the need arises. **HW**



Scott continues to help the boys with their show calves and can still run a pair of clippers.



Cattle in his blood

Growing up in California, Scott Downing was first exposed to cattle at age 11. Since then cattle have played an important role in his life and career.

In 1979 Scott moved to Texas and went to work for Lone Star Herefords. He then moved to Rocking Chair Ranch in 1984. While working for Rocking Chair, Scott was named Hereford Herdsman of the Year in 1987.

“I really enjoyed the Hereford business,” Scott says. “I liked showing cattle and what a great group of people to be around.” While at Rocking Chair, Scott started a clipping/fitting business, traveling throughout the U.S. preparing sale cattle.

In 1989 Scott moved to California to help his dad, whose health was failing. Scott married Tracy in 1996. “When we got married, he told me he would take me to ‘wild’ and ‘exotic’ places,” Tracy says.

In response, Scott says, “I did, I took her to work at a Charolais bull sale.”

Tracy and Scott traveled thousands of miles clipping and washing sale cattle, touching the lives of Hereford families as well as other cattlemen across the country.

Some of their Hereford clients included Holdens, Coopers and Harrells. Scott continued his business for 16 years. During this time, the couple’s sons, Brandt and Lane, were born.

In 2004, realizing being on the road for two sale seasons totaling nine months out of the year was hard on his family, Scott went to work for Holiday Ranch, Terrebonne, Ore., as manager.

Leaving Holiday Ranch in 2007, the family spent a year in Canada at Hirsche Herefords near High River, Alberta.

In 2009 the family moved to southern Oregon, and Scott went to work for Traynham Ranches, where he continued to work until his accident.

The family currently has 20 cow-calf pairs, five yearling heifers, three yearling bulls and one herd bull. **HW**