

Shaped by circumstance



portrait by ERICA MILLER

The
Beehners
wrote
new
chapters
into their
life story
following
a tragic
accident



story by ANN MARIE FRENCH

Hitting an 18-wheeler head-on has all the makings of a tragedy. For Dr. Michael Beehner and his wife, Horrylyn, the accident was life-changing.

Living in Ticonderoga and working together in a family medical practice, the couple had just purchased property in Schroon Lake to establish a new satellite office for the practice. They signed the paperwork, hopped in the car and headed to Lake Placid for a celebratory dinner. It was a dreary, rainy night. On a downhill grade, Michael found himself staring down a tractor trailer.

“Lucky for us, the truck was empty and coming uphill,” Michael said. Horrylyn was paralyzed from the waist down as a result of the accident. Now, 22 years later, the couple talks only about the good fortune that has come their way as a direct result of the decisions made in the accident’s aftermath. ►

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Prior to the 1986 calamity, the Beehners operated a successful medical practice in Ticonderoga. Michael was delivering babies and taking care of the local townspeople, while Harrilyn managed the day-to-day details of scheduling and billing.

In addition to the family practice, Michael was dabbling in hair restoration. The specialty, still in its infancy, held some personal appeal for Michael. He'd had a hair transplant 10 years earlier, and seriously considered pursuing it.

Following the accident, Beehner opted to dedicate more time to the specialty, opening a transplant center in 1989, which was followed by a move to Saratoga Springs in 1992.

As Harrilyn recuperated from her injuries, Michael worried about her.

"I just wanted her to get involved and feel good about herself," Michael said of his initial suggestion to her to "run" with him. Run? She was paralyzed.

Michael began running in 1981, on a whim. Harrilyn admits she was not very athletic before the accident.

"I didn't like running. It was unpleasant," Harrilyn said. But Michael persevered, and his wife became a "wheeler" — a wheelchair racer. The couple competed locally in short, fun events. They gradually increased their mileage, eventually competing in marathons together.

"It exposes you to other people who are, well, like me — handicapped," Harrilyn said, still struggling for an accurate description. She does not like the word handicapped, calling it a negative term that serves only to separate people. Harrilyn said whatever word is used should not be derogatory. "I don't need a term," she said. "You deal with the world as normally as possible."

Harrilyn said much of the drive to compete came from wanting to meet the other wheelers, who inspired her as she and Michael progressed in the sport.

She competed in her first marathon in 1994. She has since competed in seven grueling marathons, including three Boston Marathons.

Her first few races were done in a racing wheelchair, requiring her to be in a bent down position, all bunched up with her knees under her chin. The positioning allowed her to powerfully whip the wheel but it would leave her with neck pain.

The hand cycle, a bike powered by the synchronized pedaling motion of her hands, was much more comfortable. She was able to sit upright, using mostly the same muscles. It also came with gears, making the push up hills easier.

Michael has finished the Boston Marathon 14 times and has completed 41 marathons. Together, they have traveled to Chicago, meeting up with family members, to compete in that city's marathon.

Michael also has competed in marathons in Prague and Montreal. They have contested races in Schroom Lake, Burlington and the Twin Cities, where Harrilyn won.

Emphasizing she was not an athlete before the accident, Harrilyn even picked up tennis, from her wheelchair. "Any sport is fun when you're able to get out and do something with the rest of the crowd."

Now, at 61, Harrilyn talks about tennis elbow and they both speak of the demands on their time and bodies to train for marathons. Both say they may be done tackling the marathon distance and running competitive races.

"We do it more for fun and to keep in shape," Michael said. "You realize you have to do it for your own reasons." He said the days of training early in the morning before work or running between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. — because that is when he could fit it in — are over. The couple kayak together and have found other less athletic ways to enjoy each other's company.

They have traveled all over the world, something Harrilyn said is a direct result of Michael's decision to leave the family medical practice and dedicate himself to the hair transplantation specialty. The traveling comes when Michael attends professional events, often as one of the speakers.

Having gotten involved in such a new field, Michael is a leader in hair transplant surgery, winning awards for his research. He is responsible for developing the classification system all doctors in the field use to name the landmarks and zones of the scalp.

Michael's work has been included in a number of textbooks. There are only about 50 doctors in the United States dedicated full time to hair transplant surgery; an estimated 150 engage in the

work on a part-time basis.

His success has allowed him to take on an associate surgeon and cut back his time in the office to four days each week. "I would never retire," he said. "As long as my eyes, my head and my brain work, I will keep working."

Harrilyn, on the other hand, is leaving her duties as office manager and looks forward to forging a new path in her retirement.

She hopes to be an advocate for people like herself — people, she says, who may feel separated from society.

Harrilyn wants to work with new

paraplegics and hopes to assist in "planting that independent idea" in them. Already, she has established a relationship with the Wesley Community, serving as a companion for people confined to wheelchairs, taking them on local trips via public transportation.

"This was a big, big change in our lives," said Harrilyn of the accident and the subsequent decision for Michael to transition to the field of hair transplantation.

"Normally, it would be an ending, not a beginning." **S**

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Saratoga Health Center for Endocrinology and Diabetes, headed up by William J. Malone, MD, Endocrinologist, offers specialty care for diabetes and other aspects of the endocrine system. The center is located on the 10th floor, adjacent to the Medical Arts.

Dr. Malone is fellowship trained in Endocrinology and board certified in Internal Medicine. His areas of interest include: Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes, gestational diabetes, pituitary disease, hypoparathyroidism, osteoporosis, pituitary disorders and adrenal disorders.

Dr. Malone earned his medical degree from New York University School of Medicine. He completed his internship, residency and fellowship at Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center.

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