

## **ACCIDENT, COMA, AND RECOVERY-From the Inside Out**

*(We, my and my wife are happy to publish this remarkable verbatim story from Mr. Matthias Turtenwald. His wonderful story includes his own inner and outer coma "realities", and together with the report (see below) of his friend, Theresa Koon, gives hope to those worried about comatose states.)*

by MATTHIAS TURTENWALD, email: [MTurtenwal@aol.com](mailto:MTurtenwal@aol.com).

Accident at the 14. January. 1996

At the 14. January. 1996 I was alone at home with my three kids. In the afternoon we decided to go to a tower not far from us to see the sunset.

I drove up there with my kids and we climbed the tower. The sunset was very beautiful. When we went down again, my two older kids Stefan (11 years old) and Felix (9 years old) went first and I went with the smallest son Franklin (5 years old).

Approximately at the second level from top Franklin told me that he was scared about going on. Just to soothe him I lifted him into my arms. At this moment I slipped with my shoes and we toppled over the banister.

We both fell 28 feet and I hit my head on concrete. My son fell on my body. I was immediately in coma and I was brought in a university hospital at the same day. A neurosurgeon made the operation. The neurosurgeons thought that there is no chance for me to survive, and if, then only as a vegetable.

It took 6 months until I went back into live. I know, that I felt strongly the love I received in my coma. So from my wife and special from a nurse who cared a lot about me.

In May, Theresa, a friend of mine came from USA and I know that I recognized her pretty intensive and I reacted strongly to her English and the way she did breathe with me. The way of reception and thinking in the coma is very different from the normal way of thinking.

I can remember some feelings I had during the coma. I know, that I remembered a special scene from the film "sleepless in Seattle" and I thought it might have something to say about my chances.

After my coma I started at a level of a small kid. My whole thinking was a confusion. My writing was illegible. Even so I was probably aware that I understood English too. I didn't know that I have three kids and I didn't know anything about the reasons why I was in hospital. It was just normal.

Then my friend Theresa did send me the book "Traumkörper und Meditation" by Arnold Mindell. When I read this book I very slowly started to understand that something happened with me. It took me one year more to really understand everything and to really start my life for the second time.

*by Matthias Turtenwald*

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The following text is from his friend Theresa (*THERESA KOON*)

On Jan. 14, 1996, I had a dream about Matthias. In the dream, his feet were strapped to the wing of a plane, and he was flying that way, standing out of the wing. Here was a sense that he might never land, that he might die, trying to fly like that.

I first heard about Matthias' accident when I called the theatre sound studio in Rudolfstadt the next day, wanting reassurance that my dream had no significance. Instead I was told about Matthias and Franklin falling from the tower, and that the doctors were skeptical about Matthias' chance of recovery. His wife confirmed this, although she remained hopeful throughout his long

coma, surgeries, and a bout of pneumonia. As he moved into a Level 3 "half-coma", she asked me to come and see what I could do to help him back to full consciousness. I believe the doctors still did not think that this was possible.

At the advice of a friend, I got some books about working with coma patients, and phoned the Progress Work Center in Portland, which was founded by Arnold Mindell, a leader in coma work. I studied up on techniques for connecting with coma and "half-coma" patients.

Then I headed over to Germany at the end of April, shortly before Matthias' birthday. His wife met my train in Pulsnitz and brought me to the rehabilitation clinic where her husband was staying. What I saw when I went into his room was not a familiar person. Matthias had been muscular, vibrant and warm. This person looked limp, miserable and lost. His head was crushed on one side, and although his eyes were open, no one was looking out of them. His mouth was slightly open, his lips curving sharply down in a frown. He would reach up with one fist and rub at the hurt part of his head, then roll over to one side, then back, then rub, then roll. There was no sense whatever that he recognized me, nor even that he knew that anyone had entered the room. His wife spoke bravely to him in her same kidding voice, letting him know what delightful surprise she had brought him. I did not believe my arrival registered with him, at all.

I went over to him and brought my face down close to his ear on the uncrushed side, and put my hand on his arm. I told him who I was, that my hand was squeezing his arm. I inhaled when he did and spoke while we exhaled, telling him what I noticed, or mimicking the sound of his breath. There was a dissolving of boundaries, like being an infant. It was a state that was easier and far more familiar than I'd expected, but it was also disorienting. I don't know how long that first session was, and I don't remember what sign there might have been that gave me a sense of hope. Perhaps it wasn't anything tangible, at first, but I had the vague feeling that I'd connected with him in there, and that on some level he knew someone was with him.

The next day we worked some more, and it seemed to me that his movements had some slight variation to them. When I would speak at his ear, I thought he "took it in" more. His breathing would change, and when I registered the change, he would change it more, so we had a little breathing dialogue, punctuated by "wows" from me. He spent much of his time rolling back and forth, and since he couldn't talk and we had no clear form of communication, I probably tried too hard to find meaning in his action. I thought I saw a struggle going on in him, some effort to work something out.

I told him I imagined that everything must seem pretty strange to him, and that I would try to keep him company where he was. Since I didn't know what he wanted for sure, I told him that whatever he wanted was all right, that I wouldn't try to make him do anything. Some things I said seemed to make him agitated, though that may only have been my desperate attempt at interpretation. His eyes were changing, though, and it was much easier to get his attention than I had experienced on the first day. He seemed to look directly at me, as if he saw and heard me. Soon it was clear that he understood what was said. The aides who had been working with him were amazed at the changes, and they stopped in frequently to watch the latest of his accomplishments. One afternoon we had him propped-up in a wheel chair with a tray. Someone absently rolled a small ball across the tray while walking to me, and Matthias stopped it with his hand. He had seen it, registered its speed, and caught it. We all gasped, had him do it again, then again. Then we gave him a magazine and a pen. He took the pen and wrote what looked like words, though we couldn't read them those first days. He was clearly reacting to things that were happening around him, apparently for the first time in over four months.

One day I was trying to play a tape on the cassette player, and though I pushed the "play" button, no sound came out. I explained my difficulty to Matthias, and he reached over and nudged the volume knob, which made me laugh, since his diagnosis of the problem was correct. And after his brother brought him a present one day, he helped open it himself, and turned the pages of the beautiful book, looking at the pictures. This was all done by a person who, only days before had not really appeared to be conscious.

I remember the biggest turning point, in my mind, at least. The rehab aides had put braces on Matthias' legs and, with two of them to support his shoulders and two more to move his feet, they wanted to remind his body how to walk. He didn't have any muscle strength, but they were working with his brain by moving his legs. I was stationed at his ear, staying connected. It was so clear to all of us the moment his will joined with his body and took up the task of walking. He was actually kicking his legs forward for each step, supported by the aides but definitely leading the way himself. As the six of us moved out into the hallway, a cheer went up from all the staff at the sight of this supposedly hopeless case, more-or-less walking down the hall. And at that moment, his mother showed up with Matthias' brother Gunter. While they were there, I think he swallowed food for the first time. It was a joyful day.

I remember one other special moment, when Matthias' father Poldi came. It was already clear to me how accepting and supportive this family was, and Poldi completed the picture. While it is difficult to point to all the factors that helped cause this amazing recovery, I think that Matthias always had a strong will, born of a strong loving family.

Several months later, his wife Anett called me in Oregon with the phone number for the rehab hospital and asked me to phone them. When I did, I heard Matthias' voice on the other end, talking to me from his bed, in English! He knew who I was and talked non-stop in a stream-of-consciousness way that was both magical and surprising. He had lost most of his memory. At first, he didn't know about the accident, his job, his family, or his own childhood. In conversation, it was difficult for him to stay on any one topic or remember what was said. The fact that his English came back basically intact was astonishing.

Over the next two years much of his memory returned, and he was able to describe his coma to me, somewhat. In it, he said he had been at a point where he could have lived or died, that he had had the choice. Death looked like an appealing choice, but he wanted to live in order to take care of his children. He tried to choose life, but he couldn't find the way back to it. He couldn't take charge of his body. Then something happened to help him find his way.

Though my visit has been mentioned, I think his will was strong enough for it to have happened anyway. Anett never lost faith.

by *Theresa Koon*