

Scars will follow stabbing victim through his life

VICTIM, from Page 1

his brother's house next door and to call 911.

"I was bleeding really bad," he said. "I noticed when I stood up, it just went 'splash.' I was really dizzy."

He said the friend called 911 on a cell phone and he followed her, stumbling into his brother's yard.

Darrick Leiker, Rustin's older brother and owner and operator of High Plains Office Supply, said he remembers Rustin saying he was going to die before falling over in the yard.

"I'm gonna die," Leiker said he told Darrick. "I've been shot."

After he fell in the yard, Leiker remembers everything going a bit fuzzy and cold, and then Ryan Weis, a Goodland Police officer, yelling at him and waving a flashlight in his face.

"He held pressure on my wound until the ambulance arrived," Leiker said, "possibly saving my life. I would like to give him a special thanks."

"Thanks also to the ambulance crew, and the emergency room staff - including Dr. Austin - for all they have done for me."

He said he was put on a back board and taken by ambulance to the Goodland Regional Medical Center.

While being loaded into the ambulance, Leiker remembers wondering, "Am I actually dead? Did I die?"

During the trip, he said, the crews worked to keep him from losing more blood. At the hospital, workers sent out a call to Citizens Medical Center in Colby for blood.

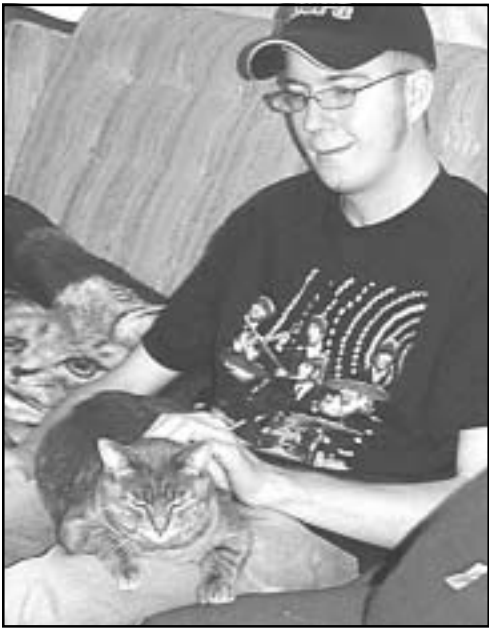
Leiker said the shock kept him from feeling anything.

"It really didn't hurt so bad," he said.

Leiker took his first flight that night on an air ambulance to Denver. He said he remembers most of the trip, though he blacked out several times.

"I almost died two or three times on the ride out there," he said.

He said his mother, Vicki, who



In his off time Rustin Leiker enjoys playing with his cat Chippy. Leiker said he feeds her everything, and with his help, Chippy may become the world's largest cat. Photo by Kathryn Burke/The Goodland Star-News

lives in Wallace, rode with him while Darrick and other relatives drove to the hospital.

From the airplane, they put Leiker directly on a helicopter that went straight to St. Anthony Central Hospital.

Leiker said he remembered being taken in for surgery and hearing a doctor say, "I hope that we aren't trying to win a beauty contest."

The aftermath

The next thing Leiker remembers is waking up in a Surgical Intensive Care Unit.

"I woke up in ICU in extreme pain," he said, adding that he was given strong pain medication and that he knew he was going to be OK as soon as he was awake.

"I had just figured I was going to die," he said.

Leiker was hooked up to a ventilator, which meant he couldn't talk, eat or drink because of a tube in his airway.

"There were a lot of tubes," he said. "I couldn't move."

Before he woke up, he said, doctors had told his family that he probably would have brain damage.

Doctors also advised the family that Leiker would need at least a 30-day stay, but he was released in just 10.

The stab wounds were most severe in Leiker's neck. He said doctors had to open up his chest to repair one of the large veins carrying blood from the brain back to the heart.

The wounds on his face and head, he said, were fairly minor. He had several stab marks on his arm, including one especially bad wound that he had to clean and pack with gauze.

"That was really painful," he said.

Today, Leiker said, he doesn't take any medication and he shouldn't have any lasting

medical concerns. He plans to head back to Denver soon for doctors to check the work on his blood vessels.

His right hand still tingles occasionally and feels cold from nerve damage, he said. Sometimes, he added, his chest feels sore from the extensive surgery.

As for the visible scars, Leiker said he rubs them with Mederma, a topical gel that helps to heal them. He said the doctors told him they should fade with age.

The emotional scars, however, continue to linger.

"I was hoping I would come out different," Leiker said. "It really hasn't totally set in yet."

Leiker said he used to play guitar, listen to music, work on cars and draw. Since he came home, he has gone back to work at Taco John's, but hasn't picked up some of his favorite hobbies yet.

"I just don't feel much like doing them," he said.

Only a few days after the stabbing, he said, Limb and her daughter moved out of his home and caught a ride back to Utah. He said

friends told him that she didn't seem very concerned about the stabbing and seemed more interested in finding a way to work the next day.

He said he wasn't ready to be responsible for a child, either.

"That kid was about driving me nuts," he said. "I'm glad it's over." Since he's been back, Limb has called a few times, but, he said, he told her to leave him alone.

Although he escaped death and permanent brain damage, Leiker is still upset about the attack and has trouble with the idea of being lucky to be alive.

"The whole thing kind of does (make me feel lucky)," he said, "and it doesn't at that same time."

The attacker

Reports from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, the Goodland Police Department and court records show that after the stabbing, Whitaker fled.

He was found at 706 W. Eighth after a resident called 911 and said someone was on his roof. The first officers at the scene said the man on the roof was stabbing himself repeatedly with a knife.

When officers arrived, they talked Whitaker down, but court reports say that he threatened Mike Hopper, a Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks game warden, with a knife. The report from KBI agent Kyle Smith said Hopper drew his pistol and fired, hitting Whitaker

in the arm and left ribcage. After he was shot, Whitaker continued to struggle, and it took several officers to subdue him.

Whitaker was taken to the hospital and then flown to St. Anthony Central. While Leiker was in the air, he remembers hearing another call for a flight from Goodland to Denver, and he had a feeling it was Whitaker was headed for the same hospital.

"I don't know why they chose to do that," he said.

Because he had not yet been arrested, Leiker says, Whitaker was left unguarded at the hospital. The two were kept in the same intensive care unit. He said a nurse told Darrick that they found Whitaker one day outside of his brother's room, muttering his name.

"I was defenseless," Leiker said. "He could have just pulled out one of my cords and I would have died."

For the alleged stabbing, Whitaker is charged with attempted second-degree murder, a level 3 person felony, and aggravated battery, a level 4 person felony. He was charged with aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer, a level 6 person felony, for threatening Hopper.

After his release from the Denver hospital on Nov. 12, he is being held in the Sherman County Bastille on \$500,000 bond. He has been brought in to hear the charges

against him and Goodland lawyer Scott Showalter has been appointed to represent him.

Although he didn't know Whitaker well, Leiker said he is angry about the attack.

"I don't know why he stabbed me in the throat if he didn't want to kill me," he said.

Leiker said he plans to testify against Whitaker, but he isn't looking forward to coming face to face with his attacker anytime soon.

"I don't want to see him again if I don't have to," he said.

The future

Originally from Wallace, Leiker said he moved to Goodland to attend Northwest Kansas Technical College. He said he liked the fact that he was near his father, Junior, who lives in Akron, Colo., and his mother.

Leiker went into the auto program and graduated last May. He said he has looked into jobs in other towns, but says he isn't sure he wants to work on cars.

Instead of working on cars, Leiker said, has been thinking about working in a pharmacy. He said because all the medication he has been around since the stabbing has given him an interest in pharmaceuticals. He wants to take a test to become a Certified Pharmacy Technician.

"I've got a second chance now," he said, "and I've got to find something to do with it."

Agriculture year has ups, downs

FARMING, from Page 1

The agent is optimistic, though, saying that many farmers got to plant wheat in a moist, ground giving the seed a good start.

Townsend remains optimistic, too, adding that farmers have faced some tough years lately.

"Since '02, the ag economy as a whole has sustained substantial losses," he said. "If it ever gets as good as it has been bad, it's gonna

be pretty good."

For the entire year, Townsend said, he nearly broke even, with the corn harvest helping to add some black in his operation's books.

Belshe warned that the area will need good rains this spring to produce a strong wheat yield.

He said the wheat crop is especially important to Sherman County, as almost one-third of the land is planted for wheat.

"It's what most everybody relies

on," he said, adding that wheat crop and corn makes up 60 percent of the value of production of everything grown in the county. "They're both really important to our community."

Townsend said he will wait until spring to decide what to plant.

Belshe said most farmers will wait to see how the wheat fares before deciding on anything.

"There's a good vein of hope," he said. "We'll have a good chance of a good wheat crop."

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Wurlitzer Spinet Piano, Oak corner lighted mirrored hutch, TV entertainment center, Entertainment Center, Computer Desk, 5 drawer metal desk, Oak three sided lighted hutch, White oak cabinet, Floral & burgundy sofa, Whirlpool washer dryer set (Almond), GE electric range

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1950's GE Muraphonic stereo phonograph & 8-track player, 2 - 1950s cast iron street lights w/plastic globes, Claw foot bathtub, 1915 ladies drop leaf desk, 1900's parlor table cut down, 1920's metal English Eagle hose #2 Fire emblem, Ladies 1950's chaises lounge, Coal bucket & shovel, Roseville, Hull & Hall Pottery, 1950's 3pc corner pine bookcase, German field desk

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