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URGENT

Father of two fights for life after head-on crash on U.S. 30

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Mary Freda
Dec 28, 2019



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Miguel Morquecho always calls his wife, Julie, before he leaves from work.

On Dec. 10, the El Salto cook called Julie at 11:13 p.m. She was giving their two children baths and getting them ready for bed at their home in Dyer.

She had made chicken noodle soup for dinner because Miguel was coming down with a cold.

"I'll be home soon," he told her after asking about dinner.

"Hurry up because I'm hungry," Julie said — the pair always eat dinner together.

Three minutes into the conversation, Miguel stopped responding to her.

"Hello? Hello?" Julie remembers asking.

In the distance, she heard Miguel try to cough, or maybe moan in pain. He still hadn't responded.

"Sir, are you still in there? Are you still alive?" a police officer asked Miguel while Julie was still on the other line. **Father of two fights for life after head-on crash on U.S. 30** SHARE THIS

She dropped to her knees and started screaming.

"I felt like I couldn't breathe. My body was cold," Julie said.

"Hello? Hello? What is happening? Hello? Can you hear me? Hello?" she remembers screaming into the phone.

After a few moments had passed, Julie wondered how she could hear someone else if Miguel was alone in his car.

"That's really when it hit me that something really bad had to have happened for his windows to break," she said. "Obviously when you hear somebody like, 'Hello, are you alive?' your mind goes a million different directions."

Leaving from work

Miguel, who has worked at the El Salto in Merrillville for nearly three years, was struck by a woman who was driving in the wrong direction with her headlights off, police said.

Both of his legs were broken, his right knee was cut, and his left thigh was severely injured from hitting the car door while his vehicle flipped three times. Miguel was wearing his seat belt, which caused a broken pelvis and hips. His left ribs are broken, and he has spinal fractures and bruised lungs.

The 34-year-old father was flown to Loyola University Medical Center, where he said he couldn't breathe and then he flat-lined. He was taken to emergency surgery to stop internal bleeding, Julie said.

Five days later, he was put on breathing support since his lungs were still bruised. On Thursday, Miguel was taken off breathing support, Julie said.

"He is doing all right, right now. He was able to get off of his breathing tube (Thursday), but he's still kind of having a rough time breathing, so they're doing some breathing treatments," she said.

It will be "quite a bit" before Miguel leaves the hospital, she said. He has four more weeks of healing from his pelvic surgery, and doctors have yet to figure out his spinal fractures.

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"He's still hanging in there," Julie said. "He's fighting quite a bit."

She said she hopes the accident will be a cautionary tale for people who drive under the influence.

"It really sickens me knowing that this person that literally ruined our lives and could have caused a lot of damage to my children and me ... if things would have gone 10 times worse," Julie said.

Police found drug paraphernalia at the scene, and an investigation is underway to determine whether drugs or alcohol were a factor. Hobart police Detective Sgt. Nicholas Wardrip said it has not been confirmed whether or not the driver was impaired.

Wardrip said charges are pending toxicology results and review by the Lake County prosecutor's office.

A helping hand

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The couple, who have been married for two years, started dating six years ago.

"He's a beautiful person. He has a beautiful soul," she said.

The couple have two children, Liam, 6 months, and Angelo, who will turn 2 in March.

"I always say, 'Thank you, God.' That they're so small, and they will not remember this horrible, horrible (thing), but at the same time, (Angelo) is aware of what is happening around him," she said.

Since the accident, Julie hasn't been able to drive. Her parents take her to Loyola to visit Miguel, but even the drive causes her anxiety.

She has spent most days at the hospital with Miguel, except for two or three days, she said. While she sits at Miguel's side, her parents watch Liam and Angelo.

Miguel's job was the sole source of income, and the bills have started to pile up, Julie said. She's watched their savings dwindle — something Miguel worked hard to build so he could continue his citizenship process and they could buy a house of their own. She's unsure of how much Miguel's medical bills will be.

After hearing about the accident from one of Miguel's co-workers, Erika Martin, El Salto patrons Michelle and Matt Abner decided to start gathering donations and raising money for the family.

"I didn't think it was going to get as big as it is," Julie said. "The very first day that I started seeing comments and pictures and really beautiful things of people. I was really overwhelmed, and honestly just shocked, that there's so many people in this world that don't even know us, don't know our situation ... but willingly and with full hearts, stepped up, donated — even just a prayer. It's just something really beautiful."

The Abners, who said they eat at El Salto in Merrillville once or twice a week, felt the need to do something to help.

"He was their only income with two babies both under 2 years old. We knew that if we could do anything for them, we should," Michelle said. "My mom was a single mom and his mom was; it's hard to only have one income."

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So far, the Abners have raised more than \$1,000 for the family, including toys, cleaning supplies, diapers, wipes and formula. The couple are accepting donations for the family on PayPal, Apple Pay and Facebook Messenger pay.

El Salto also is raising money at its locations in Merrillville, Schererville, Valparaiso, Munster, Portage and Chesterton.

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