

# Wrong Time To Nap

Contributed by Sammy04

The morning of the accident I woke up in time to get dressed in my gi and hakama and walk across campus from the dorms to the gym for the 9:30 am class. Two of the three primary instructors split the final 90-minute class, and then the third instructor organized everyone loading the training mats onto pallets till about noon. Everyone then went off to lunch, to change into street clothes, to pack, and to say goodbye.

I, along with my daughter Kerry and friends Tom and Jesus, took a short drive over the coast, then spent another hour at the beach in the afternoon sun, for a bit more hanging out and saying goodbye. They then made a brief stop in San Francisco's Japan town.

Everyone in the car had been up late the night before, and it had been a long week of intensive training and late nights. Compounding this, the Acura Legend was a comfortable car with a smooth ride. One by one the passengers nodded off. Jesus remembers me drumming my fingers on the steering wheel trying to stay alert. He eventually nodded off himself. Just south of Bunker Hill road, about 20 minutes from home I apparently fell asleep. My daughter woke me screaming that I was going off of the road!

At this point the car was already in gravel, and immediately afterward on the grass of the center divide. There was too much traffic to try to get back on the road so I just tried to slow down. The Acura was not on level ground. Or smooth ground. A rock or tree stump - something low but strong enough to stay put when hit by a speeding car - launched the car up and over the driver side front corner in a graceful roll. Graceful that is, until it hit the ground again, crushing the driver's side front corner roof down to the dashboard, the headrest, and the windowsill.

There was another flip end over end, another compacting blow to the driver's side roof, and then one barrel roll for good measure. The entire world went from bright sunlight to shadow and grass, to sunlight, to shadow and grass, to sunlight, and finally to shadow and grass. The car came to a stop upside down. There was glass - from the crushed sunroof, from the windshield, and from one of the side windows - everywhere.

The passenger cabin, with the exception of the roof above the driver, was basically not compromised. So too were the passengers - each of them hanging upside down by their safety belts. My daughter was mildly bumped and bruised. She undid her belt and crawled back, releasing the others who were completely uninjured. They all crawled out of the broken window on the front passenger's side.

I was pinned between the crushed roof, my seat, and the steering wheel. My seat stayed straight and the headrest in once piece which kept the roof from crushing me. There wasn't enough room for anyone bigger than 5'5" luckily I'm 5'3"!

My head was trapped against my left shoulder, and enough of my body weight was pressing down on the right side of my head that it was difficult to breathe. The first impact - that crushed the roof to the headrest and the windowsill - had broken my neck so I doubt I would have been able to move my head anyway. If I would have been in another position with the dashboard I would have suffocated nearly immediately so I was very lucky.

What had been the windshield lay flat upon the dashboard, punctured by the top of the steering wheel, which had clumps of grass clinging to it from dragging along the ground. Kerry's bicycle, which had been strapped to a trunk rack, had flown across all four lanes of the freeway and come to rest down the hill on the other side.

My hands had been on the steering wheel, and my foot on the brake, at impact, and the shock traveled predictably through my arms to the shoulders and ribcage and up the leg to my hip. I had been thrown sideways into the door during the first roll, and had slammed into the steering wheel with my chest. The seatbelt strap line left a bruise so dark it turned green before it finally disappeared. The impact of the sunroof - striking the top my head above the left eye - left bruising and implanted glass shards that kept coming out for the next few years. There were scratches all down the left side of my face, and dirt and weeds in my hair.

Everything hurt. I was upside down. And it was hard to breathe.

I'm sure the other motorists thought I was stupidly changing lanes and cursing under their breaths. Kerry found a phone in the grass and dialed her father and was speaking very fast and incoherently. Jesus spoke to him then and soon the EMTs arrived. Jaws of life later and much rehab I'm nearly back to normal.

The moral here is to sleep. Always rest and never, ever drive when you're that tired.