

In just ten minutes

Silvio Mesaglio knows it's a miracle that he didn't die. When everything went black, and all he could think about was his wife, he was pretty sure he wouldn't make it. The doctors thought the same thing when he arrived at the hospital.

"I suffered a head injury, popped the drum in my right ear, broke my collar bone, broke my right shoulder and arm, broke 13 ribs, had two collapsed lungs, shattered bones in both legs, broke my right hip, and cracked vertebrae in my back. I was in a coma for five weeks while on life support. The doctors induced the coma because the pain from my injuries was too severe. I was in the hospital for about two months in total," said Silvio.

Silvio was an independent roof inspector in southwestern Ontario until he fell off a roof last year. Unfortunately, it's common for people to go up on roofs without fall protection when they think they'll be up there for only 10 or 15 minutes. That's exactly what Silvio did the day he fell.

He was investigating a roof leak. It was fairly routine. "The roof was still under warranty," said Silvio, "so I contacted the roofing contractor. I met him and his crew at the jobsite. The crew went up first to open up the roof, and then the supervisor and I went up to check out the situation."

Silvio found the problem and discussed it with the crew supervisor while they were both still on the roof. Once they came to agreement, the supervisor climbed back down the ladder, but Silvio went over to take one last look at the problem. "When I was done, I started to turn to make my way back down—and then I was gone," he said.

"Everything went black. I remember thinking that I was going to die and

then I thought that I couldn't die because I had to look after my wife. The next thing I remember is seeing a bright light, hearing the ambulance, and approaching the entrance to the hospital. After that, I don't remember anything until I woke up in the hospital bed about five weeks later," said Silvio.

Despite the odds, Silvio made it through alive, and he's very thankful for that. He knows how close he came to having a different outcome.

Although he's extremely grateful to have his life, he doesn't deny that things are difficult now. Almost everything has changed for him because of a split-second decision he made to go up on that roof without tying off. He doesn't know if he'll ever be able to work again. He still has his business, but he can't do much right now. "I don't know what I'm going to do about the business," he said.

"My wife and I really have no entertainment anymore because I can't go out and do anything. I really only go out for physiotherapy. I can't do the things I normally used to do," he said. "Now I have pain at all times somewhere on my body."

"It's been very difficult on my wife and kids. Even though I was unconscious for all those weeks, they weren't. I didn't know what was happening, but they had to live through it."

Advice to Roofers

When asked what he would tell young roofers, his answer was emphatic: "Wear a harness and tie off all the time. Even if you're going on the roof for only five minutes."

"The second thing I would tell them is that there should always be two people when setting up a ladder.



One person should hold the ladder while the other one goes up and ties it off at the top. This should be done before anyone goes on the roof. Then one of the workers—an experienced worker—should go up and install safety hooks in the centre of the roof for lifelines."

"The last thing I would tell new roofers is that it doesn't matter how far they fall. All that matters is how they land. Workers can be severely injured or killed after falling a short distance, depending on how and where they land. So, my advice is to use fall protection, even if they're going only a few feet up."

Silvio is a living example of what can happen when you fall. He's also proof that you can severely injure yourself even if you're on the roof for only a minute. He hopes other roofers pay attention and learn from what he's going through. ●