



Mark Kalina - Invincible

An engineering student at Ohio State University in Columbus, Mark Kalina, Jr., lived pretty far from campus and frequently took shortcuts to shave off some of the commute time. One night, walking home from a night out with friends, he came upon a parked train. Rather than backtracking, he walked alongside it, planning to cross the tracks once he reached the end. Mark lost his footing on the steep rocky terrain alongside the tracks. His heavy flannel long-sleeved shirt caught on something sticking out from the rail car. The car began moving, slowly pulling him backwards by his sleeve. But then the train began picking up speed. Mark couldn't tear himself free.

He started running to avoid being dragged by the train but found it impossible to keep up. He pulled himself up and gained a foothold on the side of the moving car. Then he slipped, landing on the connection knuckle. As Mark tried to right himself, the wheel caught his left leg and pulled his body like a rag doll under the car. Both of his legs were instantly severed.

Mark flattened himself as best he could between the rails, covered his head and waited until the last of the cars passed over him. When he rolled over and felt for his left leg, he realized his pinky finger had been stripped of most of its flesh. He also realized his leg was gone, cut off just below the front pocket of his pants.

Mark retrieved his cell phone from his pants pocket and called 9-1-1. He explained to the operator what

had happened and provided his name and number. She hung up. He remained conscious, lying on the tracks in the cold, dark quiet. Seven minutes later, a different operator called him back. They were having trouble finding him. He helped direct the helicopter that had been dispatched to his location. It shined a spotlight on him just as police arrived. One officer lifted him off the tracks. Another officer retrieved Mark's legs. Three more officers arrived, one carrying a deep vein tourniquet.

Mark woke up in a Columbus hospital the next morning. When he looked down at himself in his hospital bed, the sheets seemed oddly flat. His left leg had been amputated just below his hip, his right leg just below his knee. He thought about his bandaged pinky. When the doctor entered Mark's room later that morning to check on him and unwrapped the finger, he clipped it off right at his bedside. It was beyond saving. Nurses asked Mark to write down his emergency contact information. He gave them phone numbers for his mother and his father. He also scribbled a note asking the nurse to remove the tubes from his throat so that he could speak. He called his mom.

The first thing Mark said to his dad when he arrived at the hospital: "I think the train is okay."

Mark, 26, has spent the past three years focusing on his recovery. Initially, he used a wheelchair. He then learned to use his prosthetic legs. At MetroHealth, he worked with a physical therapist twice a week for a year. The sessions helped Mark improve walking with his prosthetics. He learned to drive using hand controls. He adjusted his weightlifting style at the gym to accommodate the loss of his pinky. Using modified prosthetics, he recently began running therapy.

Mark doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about limitations. Rather, he's thoughtful about how he'll

need to adapt to certain situations. He prepares and then, he just does.

It had been a personal goal of Mark's to participate in the Tough Mudder, a 12-mile, military-style obstacle course. Two years after his accident, Mark completed the course. A year later, he conquered it a second time.

Mark also has spent a great deal of time volunteering over the past three years. He is an active member of the MetroHealth's Trauma Survivors Network. Operation Lifesaver, Inc., a nonprofit public safety education and awareness organization based in Virginia, drafted Mark as a spokesperson for its national safety campaign.

He's taking classes again and began working for CMM, Inc., an engineering firm.

And he's in love, with Natalie, his girlfriend. They met online a few months after the accident and have been together ever since.

The Mark Kalina Jr. Foundation, which Mark started in 2013, addresses the financial concerns that come with a lifetime of equipment needs. In addition to raising money to help with equipment costs, the organization is working on plans to provide transitional housing for recent amputees.

There is no "how-to" book for redefining one's life after trauma. If there were, Mark would be the one to write it.

