



PHOTO BY JOHN SLADEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
 New Bedford resident Ray Tetreault is 10 years and 26 surgeries removed from the day he nearly died when 15,000 volts of electricity shot through his body after an accident at work.

SECOND CHANCE

10 years after 15,000 volts changed his life forever, husband and dad relishes time spent with family

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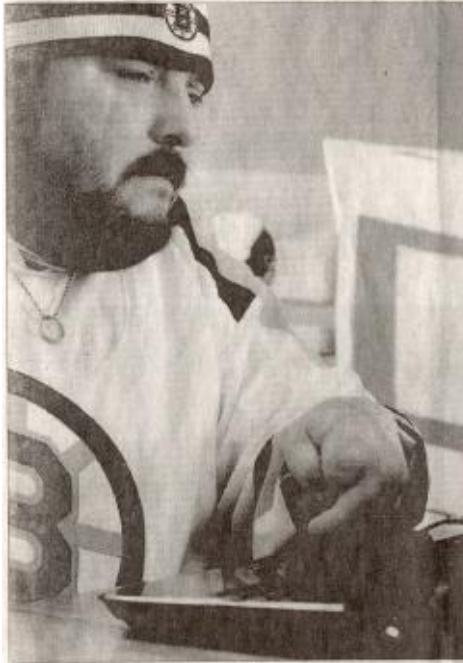
NEW BEDFORD — Ray Tetreault has two lives. There is the life he led until March 8, 1999, a life in which he was a typical guy who loved his family, his job and the Boston Bruins. Then there's the life he's led since, a life that started when almost 15,000 volts of electricity shot through Tetreault and a co-worker as they were lowering an aluminum pole to the ground at the end of a dormitory roofing job at Woods Hole on the Cape. His friend was killed. Tetreault had 26 surgeries in the first few years after the accident.

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Ray Tetreault has retained only extremely limited use of his left hand, but 10 years after the accident that left him permanently disabled and killed his good friend, he can drive, change light bulbs, use the telephone, above, and even crack eggs (when he wants to).





JOHN SLAOTER/THE STANDARD-TIMES

Ray Tetreault checks out the results of the NHL trade deadline online. Hockey is Ray's favorite sport, and he follows it passionately.

Second chance: Man embraces time with family

from A1

Doctors amputated about eight inches of his right arm in the first week. Despite numerous surgeries, he has retained only extremely limited use of his left hand.

But now, 10 years after the accident, he can't work, but he can drive, change light bulbs and crack eggs (when he wants to).

He still has the family he loves and the Boston Bruins hockey team to root for.

"When you're born, you adapt to your surroundings and how to work things, how to use your hands, how to walk," Tetreault said. "It's almost like being born again."

Tetreault remembers the hours and minutes leading up to the accident, and he remembers walking up 10 or 15 minutes later.

He doesn't remember the moment the aluminum pole touched the power lines, and he doesn't remember being blown over a railing by the jolt of electricity that ran through his body.

The electricity entered his body through his hands and exited through his left foot. It left smoking holes in his palms and burned the

necklace he was wearing into his skin.

Tetreault was flown to Massachusetts General Hospital immediately after he was injured and was already in surgery by the time his then-fiancee Tracy reached the hospital.

He didn't know that Richard Collis of Fairhaven, his good friend, had been killed in the accident until he woke up after his first surgery and asked Tracy if anyone else had been injured.

"Til this day, that's still the hardest thing," Tetreault said.

Tetreault was in the hospital for seven weeks after he was hurt, six of which he spent bed-bound. He had a lot of time to think about the life he had had, a life that was going well: He was making good money doing a job he loved working for Universal Roofing and Sheet Metal of New Bedford; he and Tracy were planning to buy a house at some point; they were thinking about where they wanted to send their two-year-old daughter Carleigh to school.

"You know, just planning what everybody else does," Tetreault said. "That was one of the biggest reasons I was

feeling sorry for myself."

The first year after the accident was "pretty tough," Tracy said.

Tetreault relied on Tracy to help him with almost everything. She cut his food for him; she fed him.

She even had to help him walk, as losing a part of his right arm had thrown off his balance.

But they got through that year. Tracy made Tetreault do things — even when he railed against her for doing so — and he learned how to live his new life.

"We just didn't have any other choice," said Tracy.

"My phrase, my saying is, 'Sink or swim,'" Tetreault said.

Tetreault found a prosthetic arm that works for him. There is a casing that slides onto his amputated right arm, and there's a hook at the end that he uses in place of his hand.

He misses work, but he relishes the extra time he is able to spend with his daughter. Tetreault has been able to see her off on the first day of school every year, and he is able to go on field trips with her and see her in school shows.

Tetreault, who started

smoking when he was 16, also hasn't had a cigarette since the day of the accident.

"I wasn't going to hold them for him," said Tracy. "That would have went over like a lead balloon," Tetreault said.

Tetreault and Tracy even found a way to transform the anniversary of the accident into a happy occasion.

At the time of Tetreault's accident, the couple had been planning to get married Jan. 1, 2000, in Las Vegas, a plan that had to be abandoned given the extent of Tetreault's injuries.

Raymond and Tracy aimed for Feb. 14, 2000, but Tetreault ended up in the hospital the day before, so they were back to the drawing board once more.

Tracy called a local chapel and asked what the next available date was. The answer: March 10, just two days after the first anniversary of the accident.

So while today marks 10 years since Tetreault sustained the devastating injuries that changed his life, Tuesday will mark a different life-changing moment: the couple's ninth wedding anniversary.