

Excerpt from:

**ABOUT FACE**

By Lee MacDougall

One of the first things I was conscious of was the sound of snipping; scissors cutting cloth. I could hear people talking, quietly, and monitors beeping. It occurred me that I was in a hospital, and that someone, possibly a nurse, was cutting off my shirt. My first thought was, “Jesus. That was an expensive shirt.”

I was going to visit my parents. I brought Emma along for the trip. She was very good in cars and liked to sleep across the back seat. She was a two-year-old, mostly golden retriever. Someone at the scene thought I was calling out the name Amber. They thought there was a child in the car. Emma had been knocked out by the impact but was still there in the back seat. They took her to a vet and other than a few bruises, she was fine. Somehow they got a note to me at the hospital letting me know where she was.

I have no memory of three hours of that day; two hours before it happened, to an hour after. The only thing I remember during that time is stopping in Powassan for lunch. I pulled off highway Eleven just south of North Bay, went into a restaurant and got a bowl of soup to go. I took it outside and let Emma run around while I ate. Then we got back in the car and took off.

When I went to pick up the rental car I had reserved for the week’s trip, they apologized that they didn’t have any sub-compacts left. I told them I was driving all the way to Kirkland Lake and back, over seven hundred miles. I needed a car with unlimited mileage, and wanted their smallest model so it would be cheap on gas. All they had was a new mid-sized Dodge. I was not happy. I knew it would be a nicer car, but the gas was going to kill me. They assured me it still came with unlimited mileage. I took the car. That switch probably saved my life.

A cop came to ask me questions in the emergency ward. He had been to the scene. He was an older, no-nonsense kind of career officer, gruff but kind. He asked me my name, and I tried to articulate it through my bruised and swollen mouth. My first name is Brian, so I gave him that, thinking it was for his accident report. He asked if I had any next of kin nearby, and for a

minute I thought he knew something about my imminent death. My sister lived in Callander, just a few miles away, and after a few attempts, I was able to make him understand her phone number. When he returned, he said I must have given him the wrong number. The guy who answered said they didn't know any Brian MacDougall. I told him to try again; they knew me as Lee. My parents did that: we all go by our second names. My sister told me later that her husband had answered the phone both times. During the second call, he told her that it was a police officer calling again from the hospital, and that some guy named Brian MacDougall had been in an accident. She cried, "That's Lee!" and ran for her car.

The cop was trying to clarify how the accident had occurred. I told him I was driving along, sunny day, middle of the afternoon, and the next thing I knew I woke up in the hospital. He said that happens a lot. He told me it had been a head-on collision. The other guy was driving an old Cadillac, had barely dented his car, and had walked away. Try as I might, I couldn't come up with anything. He said, "Well, one of ya might've fallen asleep, or maybe had a seizure. Prob'ly never know."

A few years later I was driving by myself on a highway and a truck pulled past me with a load of sand and loose gravel. A small rock flew off the load and cracked against my windshield. It didn't leave a mark, but the sound and a shot of adrenalin opened up a flash of locked-away memory. *It was sunny, I was driving along, a truck passed me, and a rock hit my windshield. It left a six inch crack, high on the passenger side. I was so pissed off. It was a new rental car and there was no way I wanted to pay for the windshield. I wondered what the deductible was on the insurance.* It was just a few seconds of memory, but it was something that had been buried for years. Twenty years later, it is the only recovered moment of that afternoon.