

**Melissa wins the lottery**

**By Curtis Seltzer**

**BLUE GRASS, Va.**—It was, after all, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. And I was fishing for an idea for today's column.

A little after 9 a.m., I was wiping sweat off my chest after a workout when Melissa's secretary blew in. "She was in an accident...with her horse."

"Call the rescue squad," I shouted as I ran to my car.

When I got to her friend's indoor riding arena about eight miles away, I saw Melissa lying face down, not moving, on the crushed-stone-and-shredded-rubber surface.

I thought she was either dead or paralyzed.

Melissa had been trotting her horse, Spirit, when he went down without warning. This pitched her directly over his head. She landed dead-center on her chin. She was wearing a helmet.

Blood was leaking from her mouth. Both legs were trembling uncontrollably. About one-third of her lower lip was ripped off and hanging by a shred. She was conscious, but unable to move. Her jaw was broken. I suspected that she had a neck or back injury.

The friend had called the rescue squad. I dug out the stuff that was blocking her mouth so that she could breathe. I kept talking to her, to keep her conscious and with me.

She said she couldn't feel much. I was hoping for a stinger—an injury to her spine that causes burning and temporary paralysis, but spares her spinal cord.

Our mostly volunteer rescue squad came quickly, positioned her on the backboard, stabilized her head and neck and drove her to the hospital in Fishersville—75 minutes away over four mountains and two-lane, twisty roads. That ER decided to have her helicoptered to Emergency at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

That's where I found her about 1 p.m.

A plastic surgeon spent almost four hours picking bits of stone and rubber out of her nose, mouth and eyes. She reattached the hanging lip. As she worked, a medical student suctioned blood, saliva and mucus out of the front of Melissa's mouth where the surgeon was working. Both women were horse riders.

First-round X-rays showed hairline fractures to Melissa's jaw, ribs, two lower back vertebrae and two neck vertebrae.

Melissa was conscious the entire time and had full recall of the wreck, but by 4:30 or so and after 10 or 12 shots of novocaine and other painkillers, she was not her usual perky self.

As the surgeon was finishing, I left the room to do the billing paperwork. When I returned less than 10 minutes later, the surgeon and medical student were gone, Melissa's nurse was at the main desk filing a report and the respiratory tech was in an adjacent cubby. She was conscious and stable.

Melissa and I talked a bit and then she said, "I'm bored." I laughed.

And then she stopped breathing. The monitor flatlined. Bells rang. I saw her heart rate drop from the mid-70s to less than 20. It was falling faster than I could count. I ran to get the respiratory tech who was running toward her.

He placed an Ambu bag over her mouth and started squeezing air into her lungs. She came back, and her heart rate climbed. Then he inserted a tube down her throat and hooked her to a breathing machine.

Within 20 seconds of the alarm, 12 to 15 docs of one stripe or another, nurses and techs had surrounded her. The respiratory technician did the work. Lots of questions; shouted summaries; and instructions from the top of each of the represented hierarchies.

I stood in the back of the room watching. There was nothing I could do, except watch.

A social worker appeared at my side, asking "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," I said. A weird answer. Melissa would either die or not.

It seems that blood and gunk had wadded up in the back of Melissa's mouth where it had not been suctioned. The best guess is that it was "old" blood from the moment of impact. That, combined with

swelling in her throat, painkillers and jaw misalignment, had stopped her ability to take in air.

She spent two days in the surgical ICU and two more on a recovery floor. I drove us home on Tuesday afternoon. She walked into the house, slowly, and went to sleep.

She'll wear a collar for two months to keep her head and neck immobilized so that her vertebrae can heal and the sprained ligaments settle.

She will be on a liquid diet during that time. I'm experimenting with the food processor. Everything seems to go better with chocolate syrup, particularly protein powder and fiber.

Melissa will have plastic surgery on Tuesday to have her jaw realigned. I don't yet know what that will entail. This morning, she said her jaw had moved back a bit toward its normal position. Her lower lip will need some attention as well.

She has some burning pain and sensitivity in both hands and forearms, which is connected to the nerves around her C6 vertebra. I'm told that this pain should resolve itself in time.

No permanent damage. Everything works. She wants to dance, but isn't quite ready.

I am a terrible nurse, and she's not such a swell patient.

She doesn't like being dependent and restricted. She had been planning to enter a sprint triathlon this Saturday, so she's mopey-wopey about that. I'm working with her to learn: "Sit. Stay."

She's disappointed in both of her horses. The other one, Moose, had pitched her two weeks earlier. She's going to have to think hard about horses and riding.

And amid all the pain, inconvenience and expense, we realize how impossibly lucky she was. Had she landed just a thin hair differently, she would be either dead or paralyzed.

As her orthopedic surgeon punned, "She got a lucky break."

On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> no less.

And on top of everything, I got an easy column out of it.

It does make me wonder.

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant, columnist and author of **How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property**, available at [www.curtis-seltzer.com](http://www.curtis-seltzer.com) where his columns are posted. His latest books - **-Maple-leaf Rags, Snowy Mountain Breakdown, Blue Grass Notes** and **Land Matters** -- are available through his website. He writes for [www.RoelResouces.com](http://www.RoelResouces.com) and bimonthly for BackHome Magazine.

### Use and Payment:

This original column may be reprinted or posted on websites for one-time use under the following payment schedule and terms. It may not be resold. Payment per column:

News services and magazines.....	\$50
Print weeklies and nonprofits....	\$10
Print dailies, brokers, developers, online buy/sell sites, blogs, newsletters... ..	\$15

Author credit above should be included at the end of each column. Editing for length is permitted. Copyright remains with Curtis Seltzer and applies to the column's use.

Send checks to Curtis Seltzer, 1467 Wimer Mountain Road, Blue Grass, VA 24413.

All archived columns may be purchased for \$10 each, 60 days after the release date. They are posted at [www.curtis-seltzer.com](http://www.curtis-seltzer.com), click on Country Real Estate. Contact me for orders, and I will provide them by email.

Reporters and publications may obtain a complimentary review copy of my books by emailing a request to [curtisseltzer@htcnet.org](mailto:curtisseltzer@htcnet.org); include a physical address.

