



A Walk in the Park

In May of 1979 Irwin had just completed his training at the Ontario Police College and began to work for the Toronto Police Force, later moving to the O.P.P in Hornepayne, Ontario

1979 was not only the beginning of his life long career, but it also brought Mike and his wife Barbara's first born child, Michael Jr. to the world. The Irwin's at that time were a incredibly active family, taking part in such activities as bicycling, scuba-diving, sledding, swimming and even snowshoeing.

Irwin was a notable officer, excelling in most areas of the demanding job. He got to know his area well and the people in it respected him as a member of their society. "I knew all the people well, but I remember the names of the dogs on my beat better."

Irwin's father was a detective for the Toronto Police Force. On February 27, 1972 at the age of 38, after 12 years of active service, Irwin's father, Michael Irwin Sr., was killed by the hands of a duly noted criminal during an eviction. Irwin became the man of the house just before he turned 15 years-old.

Ten short years later, Irwin would experience his very own kind of tragedy while on duty.

At 9:00am on April 2, 1982, his 25 birthday, Irwin was chasing a perpetrator through deep snow after a car chase, only to fall and shatter both of his knee caps completely.

"The surgeons described it as if you took a hard boiled egg and smashed it on the counter"

"When they removed my knee caps it was also found that the circulation to them was non existent and the tibial platforms (top of the shin bones) sustained extensive damage."

Despite his injuries and his doctors orders, Irwin returned to full active duty two weeks after his surgery, for another two years.

Throughout his remaining time on duty, active and non, Irwin always had a sense of a poisoned workplace, being ostracized by fellow officers and those in command. "A lot of comments, innuendos, and whispers basically saying that I was faking it from those who chose to not understand or believe. To most I was seen as a burden."

When Irwin realized he may not be able to deliver himself fully into the job, he gave up active duty two years

after his accident. "Lots of pain, lots of pain meds, until facing reality that I could no longer perform active duties safely, especially not being able to back up or support my fellow officers."

In February 1985 Irwin's permanent disability pension was assessed at 20%, which including 8% each knee as well as 4% for dual injury. After this assessment Workers Compensation Board rules prohibited Irwin from being reassessed until 9 years later in December 1994, when they gave him 30%, 12% a knee, and 6% for dual injury. Finally in May 1995 Irwin was reassessed a third time at 53% getting 20% per knee plus 10% dual and 3% on left elbow with tendinitis.

While it may look all well and good on paper, these percentages are based off Irwin's 1982 salary when he was injured. Had Irwin removed his legs like they had suggested he would have only acquired max 25% per leg according to WCB body chart at the time.

Although Irwin doesn't let the past hinder his current life, he can't help but think back on what he's missed out on. "I couldn't teach my kids how to play ball, or ride bicycles, I lived for that sort of thing, but I had to watch my relatives do it for me."

Irwin and his wife Barbara now reside in a family cottage, turned household, in the Harcourt Forest near Wilberforce, Ontario. Retired and content with the life they now have. Money was tight throughout the years, and Irwin's transportation has always been a work in progress. They've developed a specialized system of scooter boxes being lifted with a crane on their 3500HD GMC Sierra so they can go to places such as malls that require more than ten minutes of walking. Their house is equipped with easily accessible benches so Irwin can grab a seat quickly if his legs get too sore, and also has specialized wide trim throughout the household so he can get around using the walls as braces. Among many other additions to the house to make his life easier, he also created a drawer that converts into a bench so he can get dressed in the morning.

Life may not be exactly what they had hoped, with little to no retirement funds, they budget accordingly and only spend money on things that are necessities, although Irwin says thats how they lived life before, it would have been nice to have a little extra to spoil the children and grandkids growing up.



"I could have taken things very differently, I could have crawled into a hole of despair and had never recovered as much as I did, but my family wouldn't allow it. Now I can walk. It may not be without difficulty and long processes, but I can get places now. I owe that to my family"