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# Ditch — deep disaster

BY JENNIFER McCLURE

**B**attling infection for two months with the fear of losing a leg, developing a stomach virus that limited his food choice to crackers, as well as experiencing a brush with death — it was a high price for a 12-year-old boy to pay for disobedience.

But through the tragedy and painful recovery process, Lucas McCloud learned a valuable lesson about God's grace and provision.

"When you're faced with things like this, God always brings you through," says his mother, Amy McCloud.

The first person to see Lucas after he crashed his ATV on Oct. 21, 2005, was his 8-year-old cousin, Abby McCloud. She

screamed. Lucas' flesh along with a self-made tourniquet hung like a loose tube sock down around his left ankle. Tears and sweat streaked his muddy face. As Lucas leaned on a stick, he tried to keep his left leg out of view from his three younger cousins who were now also at the door.

The scream sent Lori McCloud running to her daughter's side. She immediately ushered her nephew into the house.

Lying on the cold tile floor, Lucas trembled and cried as throbs of pain pushed him further into shock.

"Am I going to die?" he screamed. "Please don't let me die!"

"I'm not going to let you

die — not in my house," Lori responded.

Earlier that day, Lucas had set out on his four-wheel all-terrain vehicle wearing a T-shirt and gym shorts without a helmet or shoes. He intended to seize some final hours of warmth and sunshine before a forecasted storm sentenced him to stay inside for the next several days.

Like many boys who live in the country, his ATV had become his legs, transporting him to and from his aunt and uncle's house and grandma's house a half-mile down the dirt road. Lucas never dreamed he'd be counted among the more than 40,000 children under 16 in the United States who, according to the



Lucas McCloud, now 13, stands at the edge of the ditch where he lost control of his ATV.

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, had an ATV-related emergency room visit in 2005.

He wasn't thinking about risks; he had no idea Florida is ranked among the top 10 states with the most ATV-related deaths. After all, he had ridden one for three years and nothing serious had happened.

Passing his uncle and aunt's field and the polo horses his family raises, a dust cloud billowed behind his four-wheeler, hanging just above the dirt road that weaves around ranches and citrus orchards in Vero Beach, Fla.

Though Charlie and Amy McCloud had admonished their son not to ride his ATV in water runoff ditches, Lucas and a friend

had done so anyway.

"I know that it was the wrong thing to be doing, but I guess sometimes you have to learn the lesson the hard way," Lucas says.

Their favorite ditch to ride through was at least 10 feet deep, but recently, a mound of sandy dirt was dumped there in an effort to discourage the activity. Determined to restore the playground, Lucas parked his 2005 Honda Rancher 350, took the shovel he and his friend kept at the ditch for such repairs, and began leveling and smoothing down the new mound. Working alone, progress was slow. Lucas decided to put his four-wheeler to good use.

He carefully drove the vehicle

up and down the uneven mound, seeing the embankment take form with each pass. The growling machine seemed just the ticket to do the job right — until everything went wrong.

Nearing the top of the hill, the ATV reared back as its front wheels peeled away from the earth. In a split second Lucas considered the possible consequences: The 500-pound vehicle could crush him; the 10-foot drop could cripple him. If knocked unconscious, he could drown in water at the base of the ditch.

At the last possible instant, he jumped off.

Lucas hit the muddy embankment then tumbled backward. He and the ATV fell in tandem to the bottom of the ditch. There Lucas' helmetless head smacked the ground. Water surged in around him, covering his body but not his face. Lying on his back, Lucas raised his head to survey the damage.

The top front portion of the ATV had landed on his left leg. Had he landed a little farther in one direction, he could have drowned, pinned under the ATV in knee-deep water.

Adrenaline pumping through his body, Lucas maneuvered his leg out from under the ATV.

A bone-deep gash snaked around most of his leg from his kneecap to just above his ankle. A chunk of flesh just below his knee was completely cut away. Lucas tried to stand up, but excruciating pain sent him back into the water. X-rays would later show both his left leg and ankle were broken. His head throbbed from a concussion. And just as bad, no one knew he was hurt, let

alone at the bottom of a ditch.

Holding his leg flesh in his hand, he waded through the ditchwater and crawled up the embankment, using his good leg to propel himself. As he made his way out, he recalled a documentary of a shark attack he had seen on TV a couple of weeks before. The victim in that story had bled to death. Lucas feared he would share this fate.

But God had other plans.

At the top of the ditch, Lucas

discovered the flesh that once covered his shinbone rested like a tattered rag atop his foot. Picking up the mostly detached skin and tissue, he tied his shirt around the top of the wound in an effort to stop the bleeding and to prevent the skin from dragging through the dirt.

With his tourniquet in place, he began to drag himself to the closest house, a quarter mile down the dirt road, which was owned by his aunt and uncle.

A broken stick became his cane when he realized crawling wouldn't get him to help in time.

"I was really in pain," Lucas recalls. "But I knew God was with me helping me get there, and I know God gave me the knowledge to wrap my leg."

What he didn't know was that his 4-year-old cousin Ethan had a soccer game that afternoon. However, though seemingly happenstance, Ethan had awakened that morning with a fever, keeping him from playing in the game and his family from leaving the house that afternoon. His aunt, Lori McCloud, believes her son's fever helped save her nephew's life.

"I don't believe in coincidence," Lori says. "I feel that every circumstance in our lives is in God's hands and that I was home for a reason that afternoon."

By the time Lucas' father, Charlie McCloud, arrived at his brother and sister-in-law's house, emergency vehicles filled the quaint, country landscape.

Earlier that day, Charlie had journeyed to the middle of the peninsula state to purchase a generator. He was nearly back to town when Amy called him and told of their son's accident.

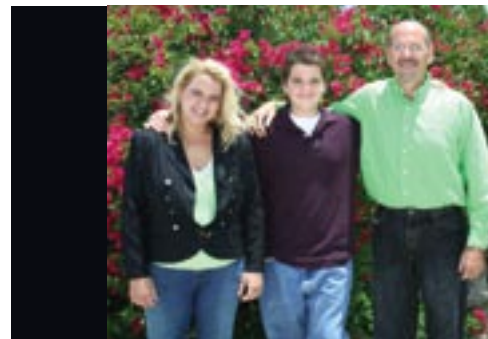
"You don't think of your children dying," Charlie says.

"You feel hopeless; you want to be able to take his place," Amy adds.

The paramedics transported Lucas via ambulance to Indian River Memorial Hospital in Vero Beach. They focused their efforts on saving his leg. Because the serpentine split on his leg had been completely submersed in ditchwater they feared serious infection.

The wound was cleaned and stitched. After five days in the

hospital, Lucas was released. Everything seemed to be going well. But the following week



Parents Charlie and Amy McCloud thank God for saving Lucas' life.

when he returned to have the leg placed in a cast, a new nightmare began.

Removing the bandage revealed a two-inch-wide infected black band outlining the wound. The

doctor rushed Lucas into surgery to cut out the infected areas. In the weeks to come, Lucas would undergo four more surgeries.

Two months after the accident, the week before Christmas, Lucas was released from the hospital.

Remarkably, a loss of sensation around the skin graft, a bone-deep indentation and scars are Lucas' only bodily reminders of this tragedy — reminders his father says will reassure Lucas of God's miracle-working power whenever he goes through times of questioning or doubting the Lord.

"When I see him running, I'm reminded this was all once impossible to us," Charlie says. "It makes me thank the Lord so much more for what He's done for me."

Since his recovery, Lucas has

learned to play the drums and does so in the band for children's church at Vero Beach Central Assembly of God. He is still able to ride horses, and he plays polo with his leg protected by a kneepad. He lifts weights with his dad. Though running is allowed, doctors warn an impact to his leg could reopen his wound.

"I'm thankful, and know it's a miracle, that I have a leg and that I can run and play and enjoy life," says Lucas, now 13. "It built up a lot more of my faith in God knowing He was with me the whole time." **tpe**

JENNIFER MCCLURE is assistant editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## How to overcome regret

**How do parents overcome regret that they might have been able to prevent what happened to their child?**

Parents carry a tremendous responsibility for the care of their children. Feeling regret or guilt is an expression of the powerlessness experienced around a traumatic incident with their child.

Parents should avoid the tendency to place blame on someone or something. Although we naturally react with blame, it is rarely helpful, as it does not change the fact the event took place. It is more important for parents to focus on what they did well — while not denying the helplessness they feel. These responses are a form of grieving and will diminish with time.

Parents should work toward forgiving themselves and acknowledging we are all limited creatures. They should review the development of what took place, looking for any serious oversights they could address in a similar situation. The balance between forgiving oneself and looking at what would be best in the future is delicate.

Parents should ask God to help them let His forgiveness sink in. Becoming comfortable with our limits as humans opens the way for increased reliance on the comfort and sovereignty of God.

Some parents may feel increased protectiveness of their children. That is normal. Facing and adjusting to trauma and a sense of powerlessness takes time. God has promised to be with us. He will not fail us.

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