

# VOLTS Newsletter

*VALUING OUR LIVES THROUGH SAFETY*

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Gina Henrie, Editor

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## Ladder Safety

The following story was written by Seth McPherson. His hope in sharing his story is to make each one of us more aware of how dangerous falls can be, and to teach us how to prevent falls at the workplace or at home.

“It was the 24th of July weekend in 2012. I was building a 40- by 30-foot shop in my backyard. Since it was a long weekend, I was hoping to get a lot done. We were in the process of putting the metal roof on the shop. I had some good help, but we didn’t quite finish. The next morning, I decided that I would get up early and finish it myself. I was anxious to get it done and didn’t want to wait for help. I figured I could do it myself.

“I grabbed a 3- by 18-foot sheet of metal roofing and slid it up the rails of my Little Giant ladder onto the truss and into place. The ladder was almost fully extended and leaning against the side of the building. It was sticking up above the wall at least a foot. This gave me a lip to rest the metal against while I got a couple of



screws in it. The first sheet went up without a problem and it looked like I had a system that would work. I grabbed the second sheet and slid it up the ladder. I almost had it in place, when it popped off the rib of the first sheet. I thought I could shimmy it over to where it needed to be. When I was doing this, the ladder kicked out on me. Instantly, I knew I was in trouble. I let go of the panel and tried to grab onto something, but nothing could stop me. My body rotated parallel to the ground. When I hit, my lower back and hip landed on a railroad tie.

“I knew I was hurt; I just didn’t know how bad. I tried to get up a couple of times, but I couldn’t. I was trying to catch my breath, so I could yell for help, but I couldn’t. As I was lying there, I thought, ‘I’m helpless. I can’t get up. I can’t yell. I don’t have my cell phone. Did this just happen to me? Is my back broken?’ I couldn’t help but think about my family and everything I wanted to do and needed to do with them. If my back was broken, would I be able to? I tried to get up again and couldn’t. My legs were tingling like they were asleep. Using my upper body, I managed to drag myself to where I could be better seen from the

house. My wife was in the house getting ready for the day, when my one-year old boy started screaming, 'Dad!' and was pointing outside. My wife picked him up and opened the back door to take him outside to calm him down. She looked over toward the shop and could see me lying there on the ground. She freaked out and ran over to see what was wrong. I told her to calm down and that I had fallen off the roof and just needed to catch my breath. She asked, 'Why don't you just get up?' I tried to get up again and couldn't. By now my oldest daughter Brooke, who was 7-years old, ran over to us. My wife insisted that she call 911. Brooke said that she learned in school about emergencies and we needed to call 911. I argued with them, but they called anyway.

"The whole time I was thinking of the worst-case scenario. Questions were going through my mind, 'Will I be able to walk again? Is my back broken?' The ambulance arrived. They cut my tool bag off me and rolled me to my back and onto the stretcher. I looked over to see the ladder. It was suspended about four feet above me in the swing set. The chains from the swings were wrapped around it. The 18-foot sheet of metal roofing was several feet above me. I guess someone was watching over me. After a couple of x-rays and an MRI, I was glad to hear that my back wasn't broken. I was lucky. I only ended up with a broken hip, some broken ribs, and a broken wrist. It could have been a lot worse. I was very fortunate to make a full recovery and get back to doing all the things that I love to do.

"As I think back, could my accident have been prevented? Probably so. Did I get in too big of a hurry? Yes. Did I have my ladder tied off? No. Did I have fall protection on? No. Am I hard headed? Yes. Should I have waited for someone to come help me? Yes. I thought I could do the job by myself, but instead I learned a lesson.

"How often do we use ladders at home? Ladders are a handy tool that we all have and use quite regularly. Every time I use a ladder, I think about my accident and how fast it happened. I think about how fortunate I was and about the 'what ifs.'

"It wasn't long after my accident we started the

VOLTS program. At first I was skeptical. I thought this isn't going to work. We are just rattling each other out for being unsafe. But over time, I noticed that I was looking at jobs differently, both at work and at home. I had changed my state of mind. I found myself evaluating the job before the work was started. I would ask myself, 'Do I have the right tool for the job? Would it be safer if I had one more person to help? What is the best and safest way to get this job done?'

"With the VOLTS program, we are very fortunate that we can borrow whatever PPE or safety equipment we need to keep us safe when we are off the plant site. Would this have helped me prevent my accident from happening? Maybe, maybe not. However, having the right mindset can help prevent it from happening.

"Nobody plans on having an accident, but it can happen at any moment throughout the day, whether you're at work or at home. I hope that my story can help others to take the time to be safe at home as well as on the plant site. Let's all try to keep the safety state of mind so that we can all go do the things that we enjoy while spending time with our friends and families."

Thank you Seth for sharing your story. If you have a safety story you would be willing to share, contact

Gina Henrie.

Here are five ways to prevent workplace falls:

- ✦ If you're working at 6 feet or more, use fall protection.
- ✦ Before starting a job, make a fall prevention plan.
- ✦ Provide workers with the right equipment for the job.
- ✦ Train everyone to use the equipment properly.
- ✦ Inspect your harness, lanyard, and anchorage point before each use.

According to the Department of Labor, falls are the leading cause of construction deaths. In 2016, there were 370 fatal falls out of 991 construction fatalities. These deaths were preventable.

**STOP FALLS-SAVE LIVES.** Learn more about fall prevention at [OSHA.gov/stop falls](https://www.osha.gov/stop-falls).

