



One Shot

A blinded cattleman uses his story to impact others.

by *Raney Lovorn*, editorial intern

Gunpowder, 410 tiny lead balls and 0.246 seconds are all it takes to change a family's life. On Feb. 15, 2003, Tony Crow found out how one bullet can make a forever impact.

Tony was hit in the face with a blast from a 12-gauge shotgun during a quail hunt in Knox City, Texas. Unaware that his father was camouflaged in chest-high brush, Landon Crow pulled the trigger.

"In the blink of an eye, it was over," Tony says. "I just remember Landon, crashing through the brush, screaming, 'Oh my God, Daddy, what have I done?'"

Landon, then a junior in high school, supported his father the half-mile back to their truck and accompanied him as he was flown to the nearest hospital in Abilene, Texas.

"I knew I could not see, but I thought I might be OK later," Tony Crow says. "I could feel my eyes watering, and it was not until later that I found out it was blood."

After the initial phone call from the

hospital, no one knew how badly Tony had been injured, recalls Cheryl Crow, Tony's wife. "I really don't remember much about the time Tony was in the hospital. I think I was in shock and running on adrenaline."

Tony says loved ones surrounded both him and Landon during a round of surgeries attempting to restore his vision. The local FFA chapter brought a bus of students to offer support and comfort for Landon.

"All that I can remember is asking my doctor if I would be able to see again," Tony says. "The only thing he said in return was no."

Safety is key

Every day for 26 years Tony wore safety glasses while working for Texas Utilities Energy.

"I asked the doctor if safety glasses would have saved his vision," Cheryl says. "Tony would still have his eyesight if he had been wearing them."

Tony says many safety factors were the



► Tony Crow is an avid New York Yankees baseball fan and is rarely without his favorite Yankees cap. His leader dog, Rudy, passed away in 2012 due to cancer. Rudy enabled Tony to get back to ranch life, and to this day Tony completes ranch tasks like feeding, weaning and even some of his own artificial insemination work.

cause of the accident. He moved locations after telling his son where he would be standing, and he wore a khaki vest and hat among the dead brush, he says.

"On our way out to Knox City, we passed a truck loaded up with camping gear and bird dogs in the back," Tony recalls. "What caught my eye was the driver's neon vest and hat. I remember calling him a 'city slicker bird hunter' and having a good laugh."

Man's best friend

During his hospital stay, Tony's work

associates began the process to get Tony a leader dog, he says. Fourteen months after the accident, Tony flew to Rochester, Mich., and spent 26 days at Leader Dogs for the Blind to receive his dog, Rudy.

The dogs are referred to as leader dogs rather than service dogs because they are safety leaders, Tony explains, adding that they are truly the most elite dogs of their kind.

“When they brought him into my room the first time, he just licked me on my face,” Tony says. “I knew in that moment I could throw my cane away and get through my life with some independence.”

The first day out in a strange city made Tony a little nervous, he says. However, after a few short walks, he knew Rudy would take good care of him.

“It takes a lot of trust to rely on a dog and know everything is going to be okay,” Tony says. “I had Rudy for eight years before he died, and he never failed me.”

Rudy was trained to walk on sidewalks and help his owner catch a subway, Tony explains. The dog learned a new set of skills upon his arrival at Tony’s 125-acre ranch in Winnsboro, Texas.

“On our way to bring Rudy home, I kept telling him that everything is bigger in Texas,” Tony says. “The first time that we took him for a walk in the pasture we encountered my son’s big Angus show heifer. Rudy jumped up and bit her right on the nose, and I couldn’t help but laugh, because I just know that dog was thinking ‘Everything really is bigger in Texas.’”

After a little training, Rudy could lead him to the latch side of the gate, rather than the hinges, and take him to water and feed the livestock, Tony says. However, there were some of the farm tasks Rudy and Tony could not accomplish.

“Tony wanted to keep the cows and work with them as much as he could with his capabilities, so I had to learn to take care of the cows,” Cheryl shares. “I had never driven a tractor before. There were so many things I had to learn.”

Tony says he was thankful for Rudy, because his family could begin to move on and not worry about leaving him alone at the ranch. It was a huge learning experience getting accustomed to being blind.

“Landon’s senior year came around, and I had Rudy,” Tony says. “We all just kind of adjusted. That’s when life just started over again. What happened will never go away, and sometimes I wish it would.”

Finding his voice

After the accident, neither Tony nor Landon told the details of the day to anyone, Tony says. Even Cheryl did not know what had happened that day.



► A special laser scope on Tony’s gun allows him to hunt again with verbal guidance by friends and family. Tony shot seven different exotic African animals while on a safari in South Africa provided for him after an international hunter safety seminar.

“At the time, I thought telling the story would be too personal,” Tony says. “I didn’t want to hurt Landon or deal with it emotionally.”

During a meeting to settle insurance claims, his work associate asked him to give a presentation about Rudy to the employees.

“She said, ‘Tony, you’ll be a speaker someday,’” he remembers. “I said, ‘Judy, you have lost your mind. I have never spoken to people in my life.’”

Deciding to try just one time, he took Rudy to TXU and spoke in front of his colleagues.

“I was so nervous my knees were hitting together,” Tony says. “I was just terrified. After experiencing it, I decided speaking is not what I want to do.”

However, when they called him back and asked him to give another talk on safety, he decided to give it another shot. He still did not include the story of his accident.

“I decided if I could not settle down I would not do it anymore,” Tony says. “I threw some more humor in it so that I could relax.”

After the first talk on safety, he was asked to make a professional video of his presentation at a studio in Dallas. The studio asked him to tell about his accident, but he still was not ready.

“I asked him if he could tell the story, and if it saved just one family the pain that we had been through would it be worth it,” Cheryl says. “He said he would try.”

Surrounded by friends, family and their pastor, Tony told the story for the first time

during a return trip to the studio. Landon was not in attendance, he says.

“I really didn’t want to know the details for so long,” Cheryl recalls. “I just knew our lives were changed forever and would never be the same again.”

Many accidents in the workforce are life-changing and involve multiple workers, Cheryl notes. Her hope was for the presentations to help them understand the importance of safety in the workplace.

“In the last seven years, I have spoken in 44 out of 50 states in the United States, and Canada,” Tony says. “I speak at about 125 to 155 engagements a year, and we travel about 300 days a year.”

One important person has never heard Tony speak, Cheryl notes. Landon has never heard the story as told by his father and has never given his own side.

“Our concern after the accident was not me dealing with the blindness,” Tony says. “It was Landon dealing with what was going on in his mind.”

The tie that binds

Tony says Landon, now a manager at a game preserve, has turned to work to stay busy and keep his mind off of the accident. The tie that binds their relationship together has always been hunting, and today that continues, Tony says.

“The first year after the accident, no one hunted,” Tony says. “The second year, a family friend took my rifle without my knowing and fitted it with a laser scope. Now, my favorite

CONTINUED ON PAGE 307

joke is that you can steal a blind man's gun right out from under his nose and he would never miss it."

With the laser scope and a spotter beside him, Tony could hunt again. Landon verbally guided him to hunting a buck only two years after the accident, he says.

"I was a speaker at an international hunter safety conference in San Antonio," Tony says. "The conference gave me a two-week safari in South Africa to hunt exotic animals. I just recently received the seven different exotic animals that I shot during that trip."

Although life has begun again for Tony, he says he wishes he could go back and change the day of the accident, primarily for his family.

"February 15 comes around every year," Tony says. "I wish we could all forget it, but sometimes God has a purpose for things that we just cannot understand."

Tony's daughter, Candace, says before the accident Tony was an independent man, who was very smart and capable at doing most things on his own. That independence is what helped Tony to push past the pain and rebuild his life, she adds.

"He has had to learn how to allow others to help him, and as hard as that might be, he

has done a great job," Candace says. "I think now all of my family's relationships are closer, and I am thankful for that. Instead of giving up, my dad sought the Lord's purpose, and he is a better man today because of that."

Tony says he is trusting God knows better than he does concerning his blindness. Candace, he adds, gave him the best perspective.

"Dad has had the opportunity to touch more people all over the world mentally and spiritually since he has been blind," she offers. "He never would have had the chance to help as many people in 20 lifetimes at the power plant."



Editor's Note: *Tony Crow raises registered-Angus cattle at his Winnsboro ranch and has for more than 40 years. He manages his own herd and does some of his own artificial insemination work even after losing his sight. Tony is a safety speaker and runs a nonprofit corporation, It's Not Just About Me, focused on providing scholarships to students who have overcome disabilities. The book Blinded But Now I See by Jane E. Morin is a more in-depth account of his story. For more information contact Tony Crow at 903-767-2886 or Cheryl Crow at 903-767-3436. They can also be reached via email at tony@injam1.com or on their website at www.injam1.com.*



► "When they brought him into my room the first time, he just licked me on my face," Tony says. "I knew in that moment I could throw my cane away and get through my life with some independence."