



“

I went to work that day as usual, but I didn't get home for six months.

The Fall From Height That **Changed Robert Bradshaw's Life.**

HSA

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority



On the morning of 16 September 2014, Robert Bradshaw left his home in Cullen, Co Tipperary, as he had done for nearly 30 years. A self-employed steel erector and part-time farmer, he was used to early mornings, long days, and the responsibility of being the breadwinner for his wife Mary and their three teenage sons.

That day's job was demolition on an old farm building in Castlemartyr, Co Cork.

"I went to work that day as usual, but I didn't get home for six months,"

Robert recalls.

THE FALL

"I was up on the roof, using a ladder, taking off old corrugated sheets. I stepped down on an interior wall for a breather. For some reason I stumbled and fell about eight or nine feet. I didn't feel any pain at the time – but my legs and lower body were welded to the ground.

I thought I was moving my toes, but I wasn't. That's when I knew something was badly wrong."

The farmer and Robert's employee called for help. A doctor arrived first, followed by an ambulance. Scans in Cork showed two broken vertebrae and spinal cord damage, and Robert was transferred to the Mater Hospital in Dublin for emergency surgery.

WAKING UP TO A NEW REALITY

"I remember waking up after five hours of surgery. My wife and sisters were there. I still couldn't move. That's when it hit me – I was in real trouble."

Within days, physiotherapists tried to get him out of bed.

"They sat me in a wheelchair for the first time. Then I knew it wasn't good. I was mentally broken."

A week later, Mary brought their three boys, then aged 14 and 15, to see him.

"The hospital laid on a room for us. That was the first time they saw me in a wheelchair. It was very hard on them – and on Mary, having to bring them."

SIX MONTHS IN HOSPITAL

The impact went far beyond his physical injuries.

“I was the breadwinner. Suddenly that was gone. I had a wife, three kids, bills, and a mortgage, all flashing through my head.”

Robert also had to face the mental toll.

“I didn’t know anything about mental health until it landed at my doorstep. In the early days I had uncontrollable waves of anxiety and bouts of crying. Counselling helped me to cope. I wouldn’t be a person who talks about his feelings too much, but I’m not a bit ashamed to say it – I needed help to talk things through and get me through the hard times.”

Even with that support, the reality of living with life-changing injuries is always present.

“I do think back to what I had before my accident, and then I look at where I am now. It’s just so different – and it’s hard to handle. It’s a challenge nearly every day.”

LIFE AFTER THE ACCIDENT

The impact went far beyond his physical injuries.

“I was the breadwinner. Suddenly that was gone. I had a wife, three kids, bills, and a mortgage, all flashing through my head.”

Robert also had to face the mental toll.

“The hospital laid on a room for us. That was the first time they saw me in a wheelchair. It was very hard on them – and on Mary, having to bring them.”

Even with that support, the reality of living with life-changing injuries is always present.

“I do think back to what I had before my accident, and then I look at where I am now. It’s just so different – and it’s hard to handle. It’s a challenge nearly every day.”



THE MESSAGE TO OTHERS

Today, Robert tells his story at construction and farm safety events across Ireland. His message is clear:

“The day I fell, the job didn’t stop. Someone else came in, filled my boots, and finished the job. Life goes on without you. That’s the harsh reality.

No matter how much time pressure you’re under, don’t cut corners. You can’t be taking chances with your health and your life. The most important thing is that you come home to your wife and children, safe and sound each evening.

The onus is on you to mind yourself.”



ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW

This case study was captured as part of a podcast conversation between Joan Flynn, Senior Inspector at the Health and Safety Authority, and Robert Bradshaw. It forms part of the HSA: Work at Height podcast series, which shares real stories of how falls at height change lives in an instant:

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/your_industry/construction/

“Robert’s story serves as a powerful reminder as to why Work at Height is so important. Construction workers are under pressure to get the job done, particularly if you’re self-employed, however, Robert’s story highlights the implications of not taking the time to do the job safely. Falls from height are preventable – plan your work to ensure you have controls in place to prevent a fall from height.”

– Joan Flynn, Senior Inspector at the Health and Safety Authority