



FEATURE STORY

Boy, Did She Do It

A story of survival against the odds — one woman, one fall, one desperate idea that saved her life.

Story by Debbie Ables

Phone: 931-214-4179
Email: dables@bardstown.com

It was suggested by many friends that I detail the fall I had and how I did not give in to a bad situation. I was not sure you all would want to hear all of that, but they encouraged me to go through the details to teach resilience, patience, and that desire to not give up when bad things happen to good people. I read that book over 30 years ago; it is worth reading. So, stick with me as I tell the tale of what Debbie did.

As you read earlier, I fell in my home alone at 7:15 p.m. I tripped backward over my stick vacuum cleaner that I was too lazy to put up when I left the house that morning — first mistake. My left foot tripped over the main head on the floor. I remember flying and being able to see my right foot in the air as I came down hard on my left side in my office doorway.

I thought I had broken a rib because I had the wind knocked out of me. I reached back with my right arm to see if it hurt; it did not, but my left arm had gone flying along with my leg and landed behind my head, straight out. I was hurting bad at the elbow. I remember saying to myself, "Well, this isn't good." And it wasn't.

My elbow felt like there was gravel inside; I knew then I had shattered that elbow. I could not move that arm and got nervous, as I had taken my glasses off when I came in and did not have my phone anywhere that I could remember. I tried to start scooting out of the doorway on my back and was not able to move my leg. I believed I had torn ligaments or tendons in my left knee.

However, I had to get help somehow, so I started scooting, using my right foot against the drywall and my right hand grabbing the door trim — one pulled while the other pushed. I made it 4 inches before I had to stop, calm down, and breathe, then another 4-inch scoot, then wait a while to let the pain subside a little and catch my breath. Then another and another around on my hardwood floor on my back for over 3 hours to go only 20 feet. I had to roll up the edge of a thick wool Persian rug so I could try and get to my front door.

INSIDE

Companion Guide: Tips Sheet — Safety advice you should consider and share with others if you live alone.

Use the guide on the final page as a practical reminder to stay safe, stay prepared, and stay connected.

THIS ISSUE

debbiedidstuff

THE GOLF CLUB AND THE COFFEE TABLE

When I came in that evening, I had put my cell phone down somewhere in my living room. I did not see it on the sofa, so I figured I had laid it on the coffee table. How would I get that coffee table over to me with my whole left side down for the count? My left arm I could not use to try and pull that coffee table with legs over this rug. I spied my son's mini golf club we had made for him when he was 4 years old. It was so cute; I used it as a decorative item under my bar table with other artifacts as décor. If I could get to that putter with the metal head, maybe I could get that head around a leg of that table and drag it with my right arm over close enough that I could get my phone to call 911.

It worked! I got it close enough to see the edge of my silver laptop. I could send an email to my son. He was always on his computer. Without my glasses and only one finger, I looked at the clock and it was now 10:30 p.m. I used the only email I could remember he had (he has four — two for work and two personal); it was his old Gmail account. With texts at 6 font, I could barely read what I was typing, and it had taken me 10 minutes to type "Call 911 — I have fallen!" I lay there waiting for a reply that never came. That was a lost cause; seems that email account goes to his junk folder.

THE PHONE GOES DEAD

What now? I decided to try and topple that coffee table on top of myself with hopes my phone was up there. With a few tugs it fell on top of me, and the phone landed clearly in my lap! Amen — I could text 911. Holding the phone propped under my chin, I started typing 9, and then the phone went dead. I had meant to put it on the charger located clear across the room when I got home... the battery was already low. Well, now, after 4 hours had gone by, that was it. I was out of ideas.



ALONE ON THE FLOOR

I lay there on my back, broken and unable to call for help. It was a late Thursday night. I had no plans for Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. No one would be expecting me. My car was in my driveway. Nobody would think anything was wrong. I considered trying to unlock the front door and crawl outside, hoping someone driving by would notice me stretched across the doorway. But the putter was too short to move the deadbolt. I felt I had done all I could do. As I lay there, two thoughts crossed my mind. First, I was thankful I had gone to the potty when I came home. Second, I honestly didn't think I was going to make it.

Oddly enough, I felt at peace.

.

debbiedidstuff

THE WARRIOR SHOWS UP

Now, I am the person you would slap if an airplane was going down. I hate roller coasters. I hate speeding. I have a friend who drives way too fast for me, and I just shut my eyes instead of screaming. But lying on the floor, I was thinking: I just turned 73 yesterday. I don't take any medications. I have never been hospitalized. I have only had stitches twice in my life. My parents lived to be 85, along with my favorite aunt. I have had a good life. I was ready to drift away.

Then something changed, and the warrior in me showed up. I thought, "There has to be one more thing I can do." And there it was.

My car keys were sitting in a bowl on my bar table beneath the TV. Using only my right hand, I reached and fished them out of the bowl. Once I had the key fob, I hit the alarm button for the car, and it started blaring. I held it down for ten minutes. Nobody came. It reminded me of those car alarms that go off endlessly in a parking lot while everyone ignores them.

Then another idea hit me. What if I used a pattern? I pressed the alarm three times, stopped, then pressed it again, and after the seventh time, my next-door neighbors came running.

SAVED

Charlie looked out the window, saw my car lights flashing, and yelled, "It's Debbie!" Bruce flew over with Charlie right behind. He shouted, "Debbie, it's Bruce — I am coming in!" I yelled back, "Don't open the door all the way — my head is in the doorframe!" He slid it open just enough and said, "I'm picking you up." "No!" I yelled back. "Don't touch me — I am shattered!" Charlie found my phone, plugged it in, and called for help. EMS arrived in minutes. I looked at the clock above my head; it was after 11:30. I was saved.

SPREAD THE WORD

Since then, my story and my improvised SOS car-alarm signal have been shared many times. What amazes me is how many people have said they would have never thought to use their car alarm in an SOS pattern to alert anyone.

I have even heard nursing staff and others telling each other in the halls outside my door at the hospital and at the rehab facility. So, remember that and spread the word! And, if you fall, don't let anyone pick you up. Wait for trained medical help. Well-meaning people can unintentionally cause more injury.

THE DAMAGE

I had broken the bones from my wrist to my elbow, fractured my upper arm, and fractured the knee in three places and broken my femur above the knee. I now have a rod from my hip to my knee, plates and screws holding that knee and femur in place, and plates and screws holding my arm bones and elbow back together.

THE GOOD NEWS

But here is the good news: I am making a faster-than-expected recovery. And one more thing — find the warrior in yourself. All through therapy I have heard, "You can do this!" and I am proud of myself because I have done it. "debbiedidstuff" — she sure did!

IF YOU LIVE ALONE

TIPS SHEET YOU SHOULD CONSIDER AND SHARE WITH OTHERS

After falling alone at home and lying on the floor for hours, I learned things the hard way that nobody should have to discover by accident. The tips below are simple, practical, and could save your life — or at least save you from a situation no one should face unprepared. Read them, share them, and check them off one by one.

STAY CONNECTED

- [] Let a family member or friend call every other day to check on your well-being.
- [] Provide a neighbor you trust with a key to your house.
- [] Wear a smart watch or an emergency responder around your neck if you live alone and are elderly or infirm.

LIGHTING & VISIBILITY

- [] Light the rooms you visit day or night; be sure you can see your footing and items that may be in your way clearly.
- [] Use nightlights or sensor-detector lighting in halls, bathrooms, and by your bed as you step down off your mattress; they will help you gather your balance with that first step.

FOOTING & FOOTWEAR

- [] If barefoot and going down stairs covered in carpet, be sure to wear a pair of socks with the rubber polka dots on the underside; they will keep your foot from sliding better.
- [] Non-slip soles on shoes are a good idea.
- [] Avoid robes, pants, or pajamas that are too long at your feet; stepping on a hem, whether walking or getting up from a seated position, can cause a fall easily.

CLEAR THE WAY

- [] Clear walkways of any items you could hit or trip over.
- [] Put all cleaning items away when you are through with them — or not. Don't leave those items out against a wall or on the floor, even if you intend to go back to cleaning later in the day.
- [] Secure any rugs on floors; do not place rugs over carpet — that ridge can be tripped over easily.

MOVEMENT & BALANCE

- [] Get up slowly from a seated position; take a few seconds standing to get your blood flowing and gather your balance.
- [] Do not rush; you may get dizzy. Being flustered can lead to an unexpected fall.
- [] Grab bars are great by toilets, within a shower, or beside your bathtub. They will help you if your feet become wet or slippery.
- [] Avoid step stools; move heavy bowls, skillets, etc. to lower shelving so you do not reach above your head to grab those items. Be sure your daily-use items are easy to reach as well.