

When milling's in your blood

1989 was just one of those years. The Tiananmen Square Massacre focused the world's gaze on China. Decades of oppression and political isolation ended when the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. 1989 was surely a year to remember. Thousands of miles away from the tension in China, and an ocean away from a now-united Germany, a different story unfolded.



Richard Jewell was a logger, a sawyer, and an avid outdoorsman. He knew the woods of Spartansburg, Pennsylvania, like the back of his hands. His friends always joked with him about getting around to washing the sawdust out of his hair. Away from the woods, Jewell had a wife and two young sons. All seemed to be picture perfect, until a cold day in 1989 changed Jewell's life forever.

It was a cold February day. Jewell and some other guys were hard at work in the forest, trying to get some trees down before the spring thaw and the anticipated rains. They had just about completed a day's work, when they went to fell the last tree of the day before heading home. Jewell casually walked to a stump to retrieve his ax. Then it happened. An old and weak tree, hidden in the brush, came crashing down with mighty force. "I never saw it coming. It hit me from behind," recalls Jewell. "When the tree hit me, it knocked me down flat." Instead of driving home, Jewell's comrades drove him to the hospital.

Jewell says he doesn't remember a whole lot about the hospital, but one moment does jump out in his mind. Jewell says as the doctors worked to save him, "I can remember one of them saying 'I don't know if we can keep this man alive.'"

The tree had crushed some of Jewell's bones. "It broke all but one of my ribs, and broke my back in four places." The tree broke his right leg so severely that the bone was sticking out of his shin. The nerves to his right arm were ripped out of his neck. Those injuries kept Jewell in the hospital from February until the end of May. He would not walk out of the hospital.

When the reality of life in a wheelchair set in, Jewell knew he had to get back to the business of making a living. Logging was out of the question. How could you be a logger or a sawyer without being able to walk? The insurance company gave Jewell a test, to determine where else he'd be a good fit in the workforce. Every answer seemed to point to logging. Again, out of the question. His friends and family urged him to go to college, get a degree, and get an office job. But his wife Chris knew that idea just wouldn't fly. "He can't stay indoors. It would drive him crazy!" Jewell echoes his wife's sentiments. "I couldn't just sit by the window and drive myself crazy!"

Sawing was in his blood, but there seemed

to be nothing out there for a paraplegic sawyer. After ten years of recovering, the answer stared him right in the face. "I got farm magazines, and that's where I saw the Wood-Mizer." Despite the odds he faced, Jewell enthusiastically embraced the idea of buying a sawmill. He told everyone, "To heck with it, I'm going to at least find out."

Jewell traveled to Warren, Pennsylvania, to see a Wood-Mizer in action. "The mill had a remote box and simple



networks — all hydraulic. I knew I could run this as many hours as my body would allow me." Jewell bought an LT-40 Hydraulic sawmill. All the controls were located in one central console, and the hydraulic system took care of the heavy-lifting part of the operation. Richard was sold on the idea.

Since that purchase, Jewell is again making a good living sawing grade lumber, framing lumber, and doing some custom cutting. His Wood-Mizer has proven to be a versatile tool. "I have no regrets with the mill. It's worked out real good."

Jewell is a bit slower these days, but is happy just to be working. He does have complications he has to face every day. He has a benign tumor in his brain, which doctors believe was a direct result of his accident. Now, doctors are trying to come up with a course of action. But no matter what obstacle is thrown his way, Jewell has kept his chin up, and always has a strong support network around him. "I had two young boys, my wife Chris of course, my mother, six sisters, and in-laws, and my brother-in-law. They were real valuable. I couldn't have done it without them. Friends have even come through, completing building projects around the house. It's super the way people come together."

For Jewell, 1989 was indeed a year to remember, not just because the world seemed to change so much, but because Jewell's life took so many sudden and dramatic turns. Now in the year 2002, Jewell is posting profits, and happy to see the sawdust flying again!