

STUDY 3: EMMA'S STORY – "IT SHOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED"

Matilda is a 4 year old girl who was in the front seat of her Dad's car when it crashed into a tree. Her little brother Max, aged 2 years, was asleep in the back seat. Her mother, Emma, was out doing the weekly shop when the crash happened. This is Emma's story.

Matilda's dad Martin is a self-employed project manager. He had been really busy lately, not sleeping well and was working late into the night to meet his deadlines. Martin hadn't spent much time with the kids and decided to take Matilda and Max to visit their grandparents. On the way back home they had a car crash. Martin fell asleep and ran off the road into a tree.

"When I heard about the crash I felt sick", Emma said. I jumped in the car and drove straight to the hospital. I arrived at the same time as the ambulance. Martin had a broken arm, Max had a few bruises and was crying, but Matilda couldn't move her legs".

From the brain and spinal injuries Matilda got in the car crash, she is now a paraplegic and has a brain injury. She can't move from the waist down and is never expected to walk again. Emma says *"I haven't really left her side for four and a half months, but I've decided I need to start going home on weekends to get a bit of a break from the hospital"*.

Once Martin's arm was healed they took it in turns to either stay at the hospital with Matilda or look after Max at home. *"It's really expensive living at the hospital", Emma says. "It ends up racking up over the time because you've got to pay for all your own parking and food, and your bits and pieces just to stay here, and you can't work"*.

On top of this, they have to find the money to pay for the modifications Matilda will need when she gets home – *"We have to do modifications to the house, beds, modifications to cars. We have to get another car and wheelchairs"*.

Matilda doesn't really understand what happened and keeps asking her mum when she can ride her trike again. Max misses his sister and has been waking up at night crying and talking about the "big boom" from the crash. He is very clingy with Emma, but she is too tired sometimes to give him the attention he needs. The crash has put a strain on everyone in the family, and this strain has been unrelenting.

Martin feels extremely guilty about falling asleep at the wheel. Emma understands why he wanted to take the kids out for the day, but the crash has affected their relationship. She doesn't want to blame him for what's happened, but finds it hard not to. *"If only he hadn't been so tired. If only he hadn't fallen asleep with the kids in the car"*. Emma says *"I can't help feeling resentful that my active, outgoing daughter will never walk again"*. She says, *"Matilda shouldn't be in here. This shouldn't have happened to her, it's all so hard to deal with. But, you know, I've just got to"*.
