After Countless Surgeries, Still-Hospitalized Boston Bomb Victim Upbeat

Bob Salsberg, Associated Press

Marc Fucarile lost his right leg above the knee in the Boston Marathon bombing, and doctors are still fighting to save his shattered left one. He has second- and third-degree burns and a piece of shrapnel lodged in his heart. He's lost track of how many surgeries he's had, with more still ahead.

But he won't allow the pain or the uncertainty of his future shake his spirit or destroy his faith in humanity.

"There are so many more good people than bad," Fucarile says during an interview with The Associated Press in his room at Massachusetts General Hospital.

A 34-year-old roofer, Fucarile is the last bombing victim remaining at that hospital and among a few of the most seriously injured in the April 15 attack not yet released from other hospitals or transferred to rehabilitation facilities.

His spirits remain high because there are "a lot of loving people supporting me," he says. He reaches for the hand of one of those people — his fiancee, Jennifer Regan.

"Marc is keeping me strong when I should be keeping him strong," Regan says. "He's so positive about the whole thing."

Also in the room are his mother, Maureen, father Edward Sr., and older siblings Stephanie and Edward Jr. They wear "Boston Strong" T-shirts and distribute "Marc Strong" wristbands with the address of a fundraising website, www.marcfucarile.com.

The future holds daunting challenges for Fucarile, but he has much to look forward to. In addition to planning his wedding, he hopes to stand as the best man at his brother's wedding, originally scheduled for June 1 but now postponed indefinitely.

And perhaps best of all, there are happy times ahead with Gavin, his son with Regan. A gift the boy brought on one of his first visits to the hospital — a stuffed bear in the uniform of his dad's favorite team, the Boston Bruins — sits at Fucarile's side.

Fucarile was among several friends from his hometown of Stoneham who were injured, including Paul and J.P. Norden, brothers who each lost a leg. They had gone to the Boylston Street finish line to cheer on another buddy in the race.

"The first bomb went off and we all looked at each other and said, 'That's not good,'" Fucarile recalls. As the friends tried to scramble to safety, the second bomb

— maybe 5 or 6 feet from where Fucarile stood — exploded.

When he came to, he was lying on the ground surrounded by thick smoke. A firefighter was kneeling on him, tightening a tourniquet.

"I don't want to die," Fucarile told the man. "I have a little boy. I've got a fiancee."

"Just keep thinking about them," the firefighter replied.

Fucarile knew immediately his right leg had been blown off. He was holding the unattached limb in his arms.

Fearing a third bomb was about to explode, the rescuer dragged Fucarile into the street. But if he was going to survive he needed to get to a hospital — quickly — and there were no more ambulances. All were filled with other victims.

Fearing he would slip away, Fucarile followed the firefighter's advice and thought hard about his son and fiancee. Then another hero emerged.

It was a police officer who did not have an ambulance but did have a wagon, normally used to transport prisoners. Fucarile and another badly injured woman were loaded into the wagon for a harrowing ride to the hospital. The strangers comforted each other along the way.

His cellphone rang at the hospital. It was Regan. Another firefighter answered and told her that Fucarile had been badly hurt and that she needed to get there quickly.

Later, the family was told just how close it had been.

"The surgeon said if he didn't get here for two, three, four minutes longer, he wouldn't have been with us," says Fucarile's father, crediting the first responders. "They were like angels; they were the ones who saved him."

Fucarile and the family are equally effusive in praising the care he has received during his stay at the hospital, which has included "surgery after surgery after surgery," he says, 10 by the family's latest count.

Much of the focus has been on saving Fucarile's left leg, which sustained multiple fractures. Doctors are optimistic but realistic.

"There is still a possibility it could be amputated below the knee," he says.

Shrapnel from the bomb, including nails, paper clips and BB pellets, still litters his body. Doctors are closely monitoring the piece of metal lodged in his heart.

Fucarile wouldn't share much of his thoughts about the bombing suspects, though he does say he'd prefer that the surviving suspect not receive the death penalty so he can provide authorities with information that might help prevent future attacks.

Fucarile's upbeat attitude helps other family members cope.

"He's not going to give up. He's just going to keep on going and being Marc," his mother says.

One Fund Boston, established by Boston and state officials after the bombings, has raised nearly $30 million to help victims, but the family, understanding the magnitude of the long-term expenses, created their own fundraising website, which had collected more than $90,000 in pledges as of Friday.

President Barack Obama visited Fucarile in the hospital, as did members of the Boston Red Sox and New England Patriots. But clearly it's the visits from little Gavin that lift his spirits the highest.

"We've pretty much been honest with him," Fucarile says of his son. "(We) told him the bad guys did a bad thing, the police officers caught them and they got into trouble."

"He understands that I'm going to get a fake leg," he continues before flashing a sense of humor not lost through the ordeal.

"He's looking forward to them maybe putting a video game in my leg, so he can play it," Fucarile says.

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