



## Victim describes surviving 'really freaky' bus wreck



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MISSOULA — Doug Taylor remembers somebody saying a heartfelt "Oh Jesus" just as the Rimrock Stages bus careened into the median on Interstate 90 early Sunday morning.

As the bus slid out of control, bounced onto its side, turned upright again and rolled onto its side for a second time, the 51-year-old Texan remembers two odd sensations: There was hair-splitting screaming and a deep, underwater-like silence.

"At times like this, you hear everything seems like it goes in slow motion, but there was no slow motion," said Taylor, who is recovering at St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula.

"I'm a NASCAR fan, and if you have seen a crash, it was kind of like that. You hear that crunching and horrifying grinding sound, and at the same time it seems like dead silence.

"You can hear all the individual sounds coming out of a veil of silence; you could hear them all — distinguishable and separate, but all together," he said. "It was really freaky."

Taylor had just awakened shortly after 7 a.m. as the bus neared Missoula. He began his journey in Williston, N.D., where he dropped off a big rig for a customer and boarded the bus for Olympia, Wash., to pick up a truck to drive to Arizona for another customer before heading home to Austin.

Sitting in the fourth seat behind the driver, Taylor had a sense that all the other 33 passengers were asleep.

"It was real nice and quiet," Taylor said. "And the driver seemed to be doing a good job."

Around mile marker 120 near Clinton, the interstate had become an ice-skating rink. Hitting black ice, the bus went flying.

"It felt like the bus started sliding on the front right wheel," Taylor said, "and then you got a feeling that the bus driver is not in control anymore. You could feel the bus tip and bounce back up and then it fell back down and it felt like it was going to tip over onto the roof, but it never made it that far."

Inside, bodies slammed into one another as people cried and screamed. Taylor had one hand

jammed between the seats ahead of him and the other hand gripping the overhead compartment.

The desperate grab for security prevented Taylor from being thrown out the window and from possibly being pinned under the bus. Some weren't so lucky — two passengers died. Everyone on board was injured.

"There was a lot of crying and I remember a lady in the back behind me — I don't know who she was — but she was hollering for someone and that person wasn't answering," Taylor said.

Someone's foot caromed off Taylor's head, as another person bounced off him and scrambled out of the bus through a safety hatch in the roof.

Taylor took the same exit out, despite severe, bloody cuts to his left arm. Only at the hospital would he know the full extent of his injuries: five broken ribs, a puncture to his lung, a partially collapsed lung and a series of ugly gashes to his left arm that would need staples and stitches.

When he climbed down from the bus and took in the scene around him, it looked like a war zone.

"That's when things got kind of surreal. It looked like something you would see on TV from a Baghdad scene. People were knocked down everywhere, people's baggage was everywhere and pieces of the bus were up on the road," he said.

During the wreck, Taylor was knocked out of his shoes. Standing in the cold and icy morning, he found a blanket to wrap around his bleeding arm. A fellow passenger — a stranger — found him a sweatshirt to wrap around his uncovered feet.

Passengers tried to help one another as they waited for help.

"If you ride the bus line a lot like I do, you hear general discontent of people," he said. "To have something like this, those differences get put aside and everyone is like 'What can we do to help you.'"

Twenty-one of the injured were loaded onto a Clinton School bus and were taken to Community Medical Center. The most seriously hurt, including Taylor, were taken by ambulance and helicopter to St. Patrick Hospital.

On Monday, Taylor was grateful to be alive. He had already convinced one nurse to buy him his favorite snack, Zingers, and a six-pack of Coca-Cola. Another hospital employee was working to find him a pair of reading glasses with the right prescription.

"This is not exactly how I was planning my bus change in Missoula," Taylor said. "But everyone at the hospital has been outstanding — even those who have to inflict pain."

In the chaos of the accident he's lost his clothes, his laptop computer, his phone and his backpack, which essentially serves as his office for his truck delivery business. Nobody seems to know what happened to all the luggage and personal belongings on the bus.

"I haven't heard from the bus company — not a word. To be honest with you, that's one of the things that is irritating me. You would have thought in the 36 or 48 hours (since the wreck happened) they would have come by and seen those of us still in the hospital. But I haven't

heard from them — not a peep."

Taylor is concerned about how long it will take for him to heal and be back at his job. He hopes Rimrock Stages will step forward and make everything all right again, and pay for the damages.

Just getting back to his home in Austin to recuperate will be a challenge.

"It will be rough getting back on a bus," Taylor said. "Whether Rimrock pays for it or not, I know it's going to be an airplane ticket home. I'll fight with Rimrock about it later as to who will pay for it."



[Top of Page](#)   [Home](#)   [Full Site](#)

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