

When Life Bites a Top Performer

Bruce **Malmberg**, Canada

Bruce Malmberg is a high performance archer. He has been a member of the Canadian National Archery Team for 8 years, ranked #1 in Canada 8 years in a row, 7 time National Champion, 9 time Provincial Champion, National and Provincial record holder, and the only Canadian Archer to Win the Atlantic City Archery Classic, which he won twice. Bruce and his brother manage Malmberg Specialty Printing, a family business centered on high quality printing services.

Email: brucem@magma.ca

Abstract

Bruce Malmberg is an international archer who suffered a potentially career threatening setback while pursuing his dreams. In this article he shares how his life was instantly turned around by this setback, and his courageous journey to recovery.

Background Information

In December 1994, I had just qualified for my first National Team. I thought I was ready for the World Championships. I had been shooting well and all of my equipment was in perfect shape. I thought I was ready, but I was NOT.

A telephone call from my friend and former Olympic Champion, Linda Thom, was an awakening that I had missed the most important thing of all, "the mental game". She explained that the best guy around for it was Terry Orlick. I said "so where do I find him". Linda said he in Ottawa, so as soon as I got my hands on a number, I called Terry and we set up our first meeting.

I now realize that leaving for Worlds with no mental prep was like putting rims on a car without the tires, pointless!

When I first met Terry we talked for about 2 hours. I was amazed at the number of athletes he had helped and really hoped that I could be one of those too. He asked me about the things that went through my mind when I shoot. He asked what I visualized while shooting. We discussed "feeling the ten" and I told Terry that I went into a super relaxed zone while I was shooting my best. My focus on the target was so intense I could hear my heart beating. I explained that this allowed me to shoot in between heart beats. I explained to Terry that while aiming the sight I had a movement pattern and it was consistent from shot to shot.

I guess that my expectations were uncertain. I thought that Terry might say, wow you have a lot of work to do, but he surprised me, and I guess I surprised myself when he said that my imagery was incredibly clear, and that I had great control over my visualization.

I think what Terry did was help me take a wasps nest of activity in my head and get everything flying in formation. He taught me that I could shoot in my head and never pick up the bow. I was shocked to hear that at first, and I laughed at the idea. But I tried doing nothing but mental imagery 2 weeks prior to the Provincial Championships and won. I had not touched my bow for the entire time. Not shooting had allowed me to rest physically and do imagery of nothing but perfect form and perfect shots, feeling the ten, one arrow at a time. I called Terry and he laughed when I said "ok, so now I believe you"!

We can all focus in our sport but it is usually fogged by anxiety, fear, or nerves. Terry's input helped me clarify that focus and pinpoint it. He taught me that I could slow down the process and make each arrow a one arrow tournament.

Terry and I have met and kept in touch on a regular basis. The biggest thing I have learned is that there is always something else you learn about yourself, especially through sport. Terry helps make sense of it all.

Life Bites

Wouldn't you know it, things were going perfectly, I was now fully sponsored and I seemed to be at the top of my game. A span of 5 minutes on the afternoon of July 25, 1999, changed my life from the #1 ranked archer in the country to needing help to feed myself.

I had arrived home after a training session and had sat down to have some lunch when I heard screaming coming from the back yard. It was my wife and our cat being attacked by a vicious pit bull terrier (dog). As I went to the patio door to see what was happening,

my wife opened the door and ran inside closing the screen door behind her. Suddenly the dog came crashing through the screen and into our house. The dog charged at my wife who was holding our cat. I jumped in between them pushing the dog to the floor. The dog broke free and came at us again. This time I grabbed the dog and threw it towards the door where I thought I could get it out of the house.

The dog jumped up again and attacked one of our cats. It clenched our cat in its jaws and ran back out the door. I ran through the door and tackled the dog on the lawn at which point it turned and attacked me. I can remember the pain of the pit bull's teeth biting through my hand and feeling the crushing pain of it. After that it was a flurry of punching, biting and wrestling to keep the 80 pound (40kg) pit bull off of me.

I yelled at one of my neighbours, who, was watching, to call 911 (emergency services) and having to tell her to "GO NOW"! That 5 minutes of unexpected terror seemed like an eternity. Everything seemed to move in slow motion and yet was happening too fast to recall. When it was over, our cat was dead, and both the dog and I were bleeding from everywhere. The pit bull didn't stop his aggressive attack until my wife ran out of our house with a kitchen knife and stabbed the dog.

The last thing I remember was handing our lifeless cat to my wife and saying, "Get him to the vet". The next thing I knew I was lying in the yard with the Paramedics working on me to stop the bleeding and one of them telling me I was badly hurt. One hundred and eight stitches and 3 days in the hospital later, my shooting career was done and my life had done a complete 180-degree turn.

The deep bites and gashes in my hands, arms, chest and legs had been heavily bandaged and I now had no use of my hands at all. I had a great deal of tendon damage in both arms and for a National Archery Team Member that spelled “FINISHED”

I spent 2 weeks in a daze, and had not even really thought about shooting until a good friend of mine said, “How’s this going to affect your shooting”? WHAM, reality check!

The trauma of the event and the ongoing barrage of reporters calling the house had me so focused on the event that I never really thought about consequences of what had happened. I guess I had just assumed that I would always be able to do what I loved, shoot my bow.

After a week of depression, I literally thought, “If Terry were here he would kick my butt right now” and I made a decision that day that no matter how long it took I was going to regain the use of my hands. The first thing I did was to set small and achievable goals for myself. The next thing was to keep track of them. It was not going to help me to set goals if I did not keep track of them. The physiotherapist said it would probably take 12 to 18 months to regain full use of my hands, maybe longer. It was then mid August and I wanted to make it to Indoor Provincials and National in March.

As I began to shoot again, I actually set a goal to not kill anyone when I went to the range for the first time. I achieved that goal. The entire first month was the most frustrating of all. My hands and arms were healing and the pain was considerable. If you have ever had tendonitis you would have some idea of what I mean.

Prior to this attack, I used a hand-held release to shoot the bow, but that was not possible now. One of my sponsors sent me a release that I could strap to my arm. I modified it to my own needs and it worked very well. I asked another sponsor to send me a lighter version of his equipment and in a short period of time I was shooting again.

I continued to set and work on achieving my short-term goals. If I was not reaching my short-term goals I was not trying hard enough. The biggest thing that spurred me on was the fact that a number of other archers (competitors) had written me off. They even joked about it. Talk about incentive!

After 7 months of diligent rehab and training, I shot and won the Provincial Indoor Championships and placed 2nd by 1 point at the National Championships. I “REFUSED” to let the dog attack slow me down and stop me from doing what I loved.

Now (4 years later), I am once again using my hands to shoot. Sometimes there is pain but I think of how far I have come in 4 years. I think about the 4 Provincial Titles, 4 National Championships and 2 Athlete of the Year Awards I have won since that dog attack. It shows me that something good can come out of everything. It shows me that what Terry taught me is true – that anything is possible if your mind and heart are in the right place.

In all that time that I was working to get back to top form, I never lost sight of what I saw myself as, and now I am that! I just keep achieving and resetting every day. I am happy in my sport and my life.