

# The Luckiest Unlucky Girl in the World

February 4, 2018 By [Brian Cabell](#)



THIRTY-FOUR YEAR old Anna Dravland woke up feeling ill on Thursday, November 16th. A headache and neck pain hadn't subsided for the last week. But calling in sick was out of the question.

It was to be a big day for Travel Marquette, where she worked. Ladies Night—the shopping extravaganza—was that evening, and Travel Marquette was part of it, with a welcome station and food. There was also an important board meeting that afternoon because the executive director of the agency had just resigned.

So Anna would just have to muscle through it.

She put on her heavy coat, hat and gloves, said goodbye to her pit bull Karma, and took to the snowy streets of Marquette. It would be a brisk 20 minute walk to work.

She arrived at the corner of Sixth Street and Ridge.



“The vision went out in my left eye,” she remembers, “and my body collapsed under me. I tried to yell out but I couldn't make any sounds. My voice was gone. I was just lying on the ground trying to figure out what was happening.”

She managed to pull herself up almost to a standing position but her vision was blurry, she couldn't walk, and there was nobody around to help.

“A blue SUV came toward me and I literally tried to throw myself at the car to get their attention,” she says, “but it passed me by and I collapsed

again and realized I wouldn't be able to get up again. I looked at the car and thought it wasn't going to come back. I was all alone."

Alone in the snow, on the street. No cars, no pedestrians. She had a cell phone but didn't have presence of mind to call 911.

She glanced again at the SUV. It had stopped a block ahead and a woman had gotten out.

"She was running back toward me," Anna says. "I could hear she was talking to EMS and calling for an ambulance. I tried to tell her anything I could think of but apparently my words didn't make sense. She just crouched down on the ground with me and held me in her lap in the snow. I was afraid to go to sleep because I was afraid I was going to die..."

Turns out, the woman who had run back to save her was Nancy Maas, an NMU nursing instructor. Good fortune? Fate? Divine intervention? Whatever it was, Anna, on the verge of death, was in good hands. But then there was a new concern.

"As I was lying there," Anna says, "we could hear the siren and Nancy said, 'Do you hear that? The ambulance! They're coming to help you!' And at that moment I burst into tears and said 'I don't have insurance!'"

She had bills, debts, and no medical insurance. Ambulances are expensive. Emergency Rooms, even more so.

Didn't matter, of course. That would be sorted out later.

She arrived at the Emergency Room.

"I had doctors and nurses swarming around me," Anna recalls, though the memories are hazy. "There were people pulling off my boots and my clothes and putting needles in my arms. At one point, I heard someone say 'She's having a stroke! It's a hemorrhage! We need a clot buster! We need it now!' And I was just screaming in my head, 'I can't die! This isn't done yet! My mom's not here yet! I'm all alone!'"



The noise in the ER was excruciating. The pain in her head and neck were far worse. The morphine and other drugs they pumped into her could do only so much.

But she survived. She spent nineteen days at the hospital—in intensive care, critical care, and rehab.

And then she came home. To a new life, with lowered expectations, constant anxiety, and utter confusion. How, she wondered, could a 34-year-old woman have suffered a debilitating stroke?

A little bit about her background. Anna's a Yooper gal, born in Marquette, raised and schooled in Negaunee and Gwinn.

Eight kids in the family, six boys and two girls. She played hockey for 13 years. Indulged her wanderlust over the last decade, living in North Carolina and Arizona, as well as downstate, but eventually settled back in Marquette. Loves it here, loves her job at Travel Marquette.

But now, two months later, as she sits at home in a dimly lit room (bright lights and loud noises still bother her), she doesn't quite know what will happen next. Her head and her neck still hurt, she walks but very slowly, she talks but sometimes struggles to get the words out (aphasia), her right hand occasionally goes numb, her left eye sometimes blacks out for a moment or two.

She can't drive. She can't put Karma on a leash and take her for a walk. She can't take part in a four-way conversation because she gets confused. She's had to return to the ER five times with complications since the initial stroke.

But she is getting better, a little bit, it seems, almost every day. Therapy is helping. Surgery at the University of Michigan is a possibility.

"I'm a fairly optimistic person by nature," she explains, "but now I feel lost. I'm suffering from depression because my life is no longer under my control. All the goals and dreams I had are on hold, and maybe not possible anymore..." She chokes on her words and pauses. "I just have to accept that and give myself time to heal. But I feel so isolated."

That's not quite true. Her mother and father, who live in Little Lake, visit frequently, and help whenever they can.

And she's got other support. Friends, lots of them, who check on her often to offer help. They've set up a [gofundme](#) site for her because she's got living expenses—a small house, food and utilities—but no money coming in. She's not sure when or if she'll be able to return to work. Fortunately, Medicaid is taking care of most of her medical bills.



Now, about those "goals and dreams" she said she had to put on hold: this is the remarkable part of the story.

Seven years ago, Anna and an ex-boyfriend talked about doing some good in the world. A cause. A campaign. They've since split up but Anna never relinquished the idea, and last March announced on social media that this coming March 9th would be "Spread Goodness Day."

It would be a day when everybody would be called on to do just one, extra good thing that day. It could be a project of some sort or something as seemingly insignificant as smiling at a stranger, opening a door for someone, or picking up litter. Something...anything...to make the world a little bit better.

"If we can get as many people as possible to do just one thing," she says, "we can show the impact of our actions. Just multiply each of those actions by a hundred, a thousand, a million."

Cynics might consider it naive—a lovely thought that will likely go nowhere.

But Anna, even in her weakened state, is determined to make it happen. In a big way.

She's set up a [Spread Goodness Day website](#) and just signed up her first sponsor—realtor Steve Peltó—for the website. She'll be making T shirts and sunglasses for the event. Bennett Media and the YMCA have also signed on to help.

She's got five weeks to make it happen. All this while going to therapy sessions, consulting with doctors, fighting off pain, maybe preparing for surgery...and struggling to walk, talk, and work again.

Depressed? Yes, sometimes. But even in the somber darkness of her living room, she keeps her hopes up.



She's still got a lot of be thankful for, she says—a woman who likely saved her life, her family and friends who've nursed her through some bad times, a community that's rising up to support her, and a cause that she truly believes will make the world a better place to live.

"I'm the luckiest unlucky girl in the world," she says. She smiles, settles back in her chair, and gently strokes Karma's head. The dog nuzzles up next to her.