

Role reversal

When tragedy strikes, a surgeon sees the other side of the scalpel

On a Saturday in July 2005, 36-year-old Armonk orthopaedic surgeon Andrew Haas, M.D., was riding his bicycle in Greenwich, Connecticut, preparing for the Ironman World Championship. He was newly married and in the best shape of his life.

"That's when everything came to a screeching halt," he says. An elderly driver crashed into him, cracking his bike in half and nearly killing him.

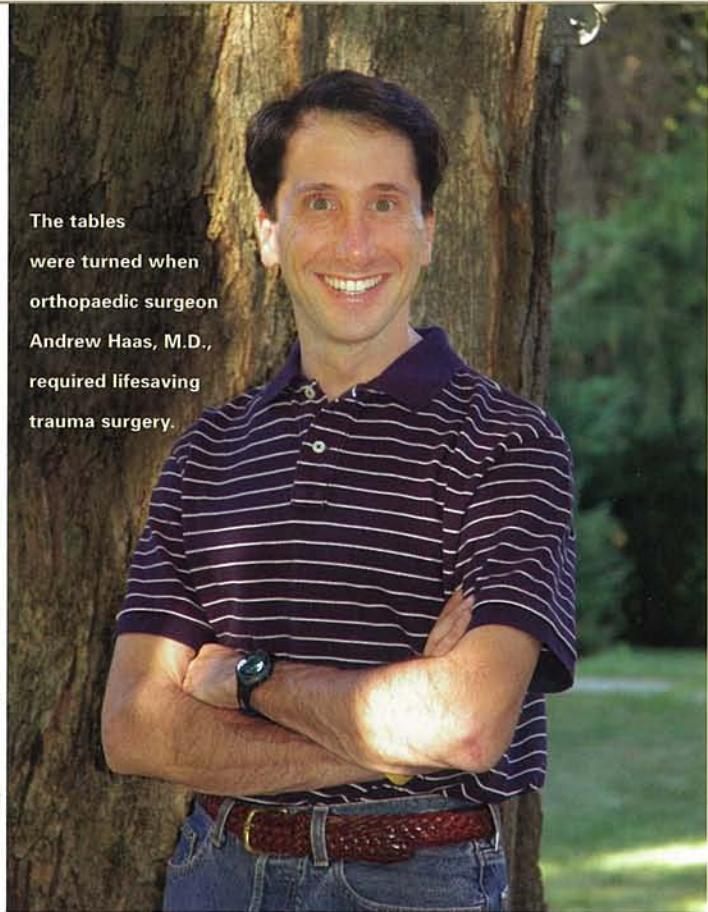
The story of Dr. Haas' accident and its aftermath is a tale of a doctor saved by his own specialty. But to David E. Asprinio, M.D., Director of Orthopaedics at Westchester Medical Center and one of a team of caregivers who treated Dr. Haas, it also shows what happens when a regional trauma care system works as it should. "Trauma cases are unpredictable," says Dr. Asprinio, who specializes in orthopaedic trauma surgery. "Each case is different, and they are often beyond the capabilities of a community hospital."

As the Level I Trauma Center for the Hudson Valley and parts of Connecticut and New Jersey, WMC treats 2,000 trauma patients each year, drawing upon a team of specialized surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses and the latest life-support equipment.

Right after his accident, Dr. Haas was rushed to nearby Stamford Hospital, where his own colleagues evaluated his grim condition. He had head and facial injuries, his left arm was torn open, his pelvis and a vertebra in his spine were fractured. He had already lost a great deal of blood. Doctors there repaired his arm and placed an external fixator on his pelvis to keep the bone in position. This required drilling pins through the skin and into the bone.

With Dr. Haas in a coma and clinging to life, his wife, Susan, an internist, conferred with his colleagues about the next step. It was clear

The tables were turned when orthopaedic surgeon Andrew Haas, M.D., required lifesaving trauma surgery.



that Dr. Haas needed advanced trauma surgery at a specialized facility. Recommendations from the couple's network of associates led to a unanimous choice: Dr. Asprinio's team at WMC.

On the third day after the accident, Dr. Haas was stable enough to be transferred to Westchester's Trauma Intensive Care Unit. There Dr. Asprinio evaluated multiple surgical procedures, including reconstructing Dr. Haas' pelvis using steel plates and screws, and directed his other operative care. WMC's medical team also included Francis Baccay, M.D., Surgical Critical Care Chief, who oversaw the care of the anesthesiologist, neurosurgeon, neurologist, interventional radiologist and other personnel assigned to the case.

With his surgeries behind him, Dr. Haas spent a month in WMC's Trauma Unit, where he was fitted with a spinal brace that he wore for four months while his spine and pelvis healed.

Having missed almost a year of work, Dr. Haas has had to strive to rebuild his orthopaedic surgery practice. He's still a long way from his next Ironman competition, but he's doing much better than most people expected. And it is with professional and personal knowledge that he pronounces Dr. Asprinio "a spectacular orthopaedic surgeon and a truly caring physician." ■



David E. Asprinio, M.D., Director of Orthopaedics at Westchester Medical Center, specializes in orthopaedic trauma surgery. To find out more about orthopaedic surgery at Westchester, call 914-789-2700.

