

By Danielle Ray

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The stories that emerged in the wake of the atrocious and fatal terrorist bombing at the 117th running of the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013 are not only filled with heartache and suffering but also heroism, bravery and generosity. The loss of life and limbs has been hard to fathom, especially on a day that is so celebrated in and around the capital city – three people died at the bombing, and one more in the days following, at the hands of the two terrorists; 264 people were injured, many of them losing legs and arms.

The Greg Hill Foundation's (GHF) connection to the Boston Marathon bombing victims is steadfast and unwavering, much like the heroes who rushed to the aid of the victims in the moments immediately after the two bombs exploded. To date, \$385,168.94 has been raised by the Greg Hill Foundation for the victims; \$358,500 of that has been allocated and donated to 64 individuals.

The GHF had a fundraising marathon party going on at The Capital Grille on Boylston Street that fateful day. WAAF DJ Greg Hill, who started the Foundation in June of 2010 with the mission of immediately aiding local families affected by tragedy, said when he heard the first explosion go off he thought it might have been a transformer that blew.

"Nobody knew what it was," Greg said, "until we saw everybody running away from the finish line and police officer after police officer running towards it."

When the second bomb exploded, Greg said social media was by then being bombarded with reports and he began to understand and grasp what had happened. Everybody at the GHF party stayed put until they were asked to evacuate by the police.

"Fortunately, we are not used to that kind of thing happening – where you think you might be in a panic, I wasn't in a panic," Greg said. "It was more about what we could do to help out. We all kept talking about it, how it was such a close thing and how tragic it was."

\$11,000 had been raised at The Capital Grille party; that was earmarked for the bombing victims. Within a couple hours of the bombs exploding, Foundation Management & Pro-Productions (FMP) President Erin Lynch, the company that works closely with the GHF to assist with fundraising, events, and funds allocation, posted on Facebook and tweeted that GHF would be fundraising for the bombing victims.

"People started to respond that they wanted to donate," Greg said. "We immediately started to get donations on the [Greg Hill Foundation] website; we talked about the fundraising on the radio station the next morning, and the pledge was to do something for the victims soon as possible - we would donate whatever we could raise."

The bombing occurred on a Monday, and by Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning the Greg Hill Foundation was already handing out money to the families that had lost somebody in the tragedy.

“We live in an amazing city and an amazing state where people just are dead set on helping others – the response to me was overwhelming,” Greg said. “We started to think ‘Can we raise \$100,000?’ That would be amazing.”

Just a week after the bombing, the donations total had reached \$200,000.

“I am so proud of the people who cared enough to give, and the people who gave more than once, and the corporate entities like Sam Adams – it is really, really amazing,” said Greg. “We are close to giving out everything that has been donated.”

A big part of the donations reaching that exorbitant amount is due to Boston brewery Sam Adams donating profits from their 26.2 brew (a draft beer that was created in 2012 as part of their sponsorship of the Boston Marathon) as well as donations accumulated from their brewery tours from the month of April to the Greg Hill Foundation. Their donation totaled \$79,187.

Sam Adams had dozens of employees working in the Back Bay the day of the marathon bombing, and several more running in it.

“Our first thought was for our own people; that's human nature,” said Boston Beer Company (who brews Sam Adams) Senior Director Michelle Sullivan. “Once all of our folks were safe and accounted for our first thought was, ‘what can we do to help?’ In the days after the bombing, everybody was feeling a little bit tentative.

The goal of terrorists is to terrorize, and we resisted the impulse to be terrorized. I think that's what's behind the whole Boston Strong emotion. We carried on as normally as possible except when Governor [Duval] Patrick asked us to ‘shelter in place’. We closed the Brewery that day; people stayed home.”

Sam Adams has worked closely with Greg Hill and his Foundation over the years, and wanted to help out in any way they could following the bombing.

“We like Greg, and we have enormous respect for the good work he does,” Sullivan said. “We knew that there would be some particularly urgent needs: people who needed money for funerals, medical costs, housing while they received medical treatment, etc. and they needed that money right away. We’re amazed that Greg started disbursing money to victims only days after the tragedy. We knew that he’d act quickly and effectively to help and we wanted to be part of that.”

When the Sam Adams Brewery Ambassadors told people on the brewery tours where the money was going, the visitors were more than happy to help - and increased their donations. Sullivan said everyone at the Boston Beer Company is “thrilled” that they were able to raise so much money so quickly, and also get it funneled to the victims immediately.

“Compared to the big brewers we are tiny, but we saw that we could make a pretty big impact very quickly; we had the ‘infrastructure’ to make it happen,” Sullivan said. “We had a special [26.2] Marathon beer already on tap, [and] we had been planning to give the donations from our brewery to our own

charity, Brewing the American Dream - we just had to change the charity to which we provided the profits.

We already had the relationship with Greg Hill, and we knew he would do the right thing. Our Samuel Adams Brewery is a major Boston tourist attraction and is especially busy in the days around the Marathon. It was easy for us to earmark the donations we collected on the tours to the more immediate needs of the victims of the bombing.”

Sullivan echoes the sentiments of so many who consider Boston their “hometown”, and she said the Boston Beer Company has always been proud to support their city.

“Samuel Adams is part of the community of Boston. It's a beer; it's social and welcoming. The [marathon] takes place on Patriots' Day, and Samuel Adams, the historical figure, was one of this country's great patriots. We feel inextricably linked to the Marathon, to the city [of Boston] and to the people who live and visit here.”

Ayer native Brittany Loring was on Boylston Street on Marathon Monday, also her 29th birthday, with a friend, cheering on a mutual friend who was running in the Boston Marathon. She was right near the first blast, and when it went off she thought her head had been blown off.

“In the beginning she was in shock,” said her father Dan Loring. “The injuries were pretty severe and we thought she might lose her left leg.”

Luckily Brittany was found within 10 minutes of the first bomb and began to receive medical attention on the spot. Her left leg was severely injured (she had a lot of shrapnel from the bomb lodged in it) as well as her right index finger; she suffered head injuries including a concussion, and she had BB gun pellets lodged in her neck area.

“She is just so lucky to be alive,” her dad said.

Dan was on vacation in Mexico the day of the bombing, enjoying a sunny day at the pool; he said something told him to go back to his hotel room.

“I had just sung happy birthday to her not long before I saw the news alerts,” he said.

Dan tried to text Brittany, as well as her fiancé and mother, to no avail. When he found out she was at Boston Medical Center he was on a plane home within 45 minutes, grabbing only his passport and wallet. He was by her side at the hospital by 9am the following morning.

“I went into this kind of manic mode of keeping the family all together,” Dan recalls. He worked sometimes 19 hours a day in the days and weeks following the bombing attending to Brittany’s personal needs including helping to plan her September wedding and getting her apartment ready for her to come home to.

Dan said he was bowled over by the amount of support that has been shown to the bombing victims, and he plans to join the Red Cross to help others who face disasters such as this. Boston College, where Brittany received her Master's degree, assisted with giving her round the clock care.

"A lot of good is going to come out of it," Dan said of the bombing. "Every time you talk about it, it is a healing moment. I didn't realize how this affected not only the local community, but also across the state, the United States as a whole and the world. The support has been fantastic."

Brittany is a fellow runner – she ran the Boston College MBA 5K on April 6 in Chestnut Hill. She was supposed to take the bar exam this July, but has decided to postpone it until February 2014. She is home now and goes to therapy three days a week at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, as well as counseling.

One thing she is not postponing is her wedding this September. "Her goal is to dance at it," said her dad.

Dan said he received a call two days after the bombing from FMP Marketing Coordinator Adam Benoit. A friend of Brittany's had called the Greg Hill Foundation and gave them her contact information; Benoit said he had a check for Brittany.

"I had never even heard of Greg Hill," Dan said. "That was a huge relief, getting help for the things she had to pay like her rent and bills. She was laid up for so long in the hospital, having surgery after surgery."

Dan said Brittany was stressed about paying her rent, and when the money from the GHF came in she was relieved and could instead focus on her physical therapy and recovery.

"That came at a great time," Dan said, adding they had to set up her apartment for disability. "Everybody wants to help; we have to take advantage of this to get through this and give back." Dan himself took off 5 weeks of work, which he says cost tens of thousands of dollars in lost income.

In addition to the financial help they received from the GHF, Dan said they set up a fundraising site for Brittany. Brittany has worked with underprivileged kids, and her dad says she has a "service heart". She is going to set up a 5013C non-profit with the funds she receives, and will continue to raise funds for those "who have not been as fortunate as her" and need financial assistance, said her dad.

Dan said he plans on getting involved with events such as the annual Greg Hill Foundation golf tournament, and plans on calling on friends to donate their time and money to the Foundation as well. He is also organizing a 5K walk/run on Sunday July 14 to benefit the Recovery for Brittany Fund.

"She is a great kid," Dan said. "She will do good things with the money. That will be her lifelong process, to give back to the people who gave to her. So many positive things have come out of this."

25-year-old Jacqui Webb was also on Boylston Street when the bombs went off. She was there with a group of six friends, including her boyfriend of six years Paul Norden and his brother JP Norden. They had all traveled from Stoneham to cheer on her boyfriend's friend who was running the marathon.

When she heard the first blast Jacqui said she was not sure what it was, only that it was "super loud".

"I was standing a few feet in front of our friends, and then our friend was yelling it was a bomb," Jacqui recalls. "I thought the building was going to collapse, and I remember thinking I am not going to get buried alive."

Jacqui remembers a friend yelling to them to run in to the street, and while they were running the second bomb went off – they were right beside it.

"We all got separated, but I remember my boyfriend was going to lift me over the barricade," Jacqui said. "He must have pushed me as the second bomb went off [because] I have a burn across my stomach that looks like the gate. We were inches apart – I was thrown forward, he was thrown backwards.

I remember the rings on my fingers were burning. A cop met me on Boylston, and he walked me across the street and sat me down. I had a large burn on my leg, and two large holes in it. You could see the muscle and down to the bone. My boyfriend was across the street."

Paul, JP and a friend of theirs all lost their right leg; Jacqui had many second and third degree burns, shrapnel gouged her leg, and she suffered partial hearing loss. She was on full bed rest for a week and a half following the bombing, and she could not put any weight on her leg for a while - down the road she was finally able to start physical therapy.

"It's a little painful now, and my ankle lost a lot of range of motion," Jacqui said of her physical therapy. She was not able to walk for a while, so she lost some muscle mass in her ankle. In addition to her physical therapy, she also receives skin therapy at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, which she likens to a massage "but not a good massage".

Jacqui had her final surgery to close the wound on her leg several weeks after the bombing, and is now in physical therapy – she received a skin graft for her burns.

Now that Jacqui is on the road to recovery physically, she said the emotional aspect of dealing with the fallout from the bombing is really just starting to set in.

"Before it was dressing changes, close up the wound. Now is a little worse," she said. "Back then you are just recovering."

Both Jacqui and her twin sister used to work at Irish pub McGreevy's on Boylston Street. A friend of her sister who also worked there with them now works at WAAF. She gave the Greg Hill Foundation their

names and contact information, and two days after the bombing Erin Lynch from FMP was handing Jacqui a check from the Foundation.

“She was at the hospital very quickly,” Jacqui said. “Going through this whole process, there was a ton of information we were given – some of the ways to get financial help. The Greg Hill Foundation came and found us and cut checks. All the other foundations and charities, they make you go through the ropes. That is [the Greg Hill Foundation’s] mission to get money out quickly, and they do it very well.”

Jacqui said the financial assistance from the GHF “helped immensely” with the “ton” of initial expenses - she had lost her driver’s license and credit cards the day of the bombing, had to get her car out of the lot it was parked in, as well as the \$25 a night it cost for her sister or mom to park at the hospital for the 15 days she was there.

“It all adds up,” Jacqui said. “I don’t think you can put into words the gratitude we feel for the Greg Hill Foundation. I was talking about that with my boyfriend - they really go above and beyond. They showed up and said here, and what else can we do. They make a huge impact on the people they donate to, and what they do and continue to do.”

As for Paul and JP, Jacqui said they are recovering slowly but surely. “They have good days and bad days,” she said. “Paul had to get another surgery on his ear – that set him back a little, and his brother is facing a couple more surgeries.”

Both Paul and JP also received financial assistance from the Greg Hill Foundation, a gesture that has not been lost on Jacqui and their entire circle of family and friends. She attended a fundraising event the Foundation held after the bombing, and said that will not be end of her involvement with the Greg Hill Foundation.

“I would do anything for the Greg Hill Foundation,” said Jacqui. “My whole family is hoping to get involved with the [GHF]. They are one of the best.”

30-year-old Malden resident James Costello echoes the sentiments of his fellow Greg Hill Foundation beneficiaries by saying he cannot begin to thank them enough for what they did for him – and in such a quick and timely manner.

“The One Fund Boston money will be there for victims, but [the Greg Hill Foundation] money was the lifesaving break between what had happened and the One Fund,” James said. “I don’t think they realize how much it means not only to the victims, but to our families. It was the first act of kindness, and they kept doing it.”

James was standing outside of Boylston Street restaurant Forum along with Jacqui and their group of friends. They were waiting for their friend to cross the finish line and then go out for drinks and food to celebrate.

When the first bomb went off, James said he immediately knew it was not related to the marathon as others had initially thought.

"I had been to the marathon before, so I knew it was not a canon; right away I knew it was a bomb," he said. James said it looked like the bomb came from a building, so he headed into the street. He remembers putting his hand on a barricade right before the second bomb went off.

"The second boom sent me flying over the barricades," James said. "It was pretty brutal. It hit me from my right side. I remember wandering down the street, hoping for the best – but I started to think that my friends were gone. It was pretty crazy."

James said he sat down on the curb, and then noticed that he was on fire.

"It did not dawn on me that people were going to be losing limbs," he said. "I knew I was in pretty good shape. I pulled a few nails out of my stomach; that's when I started thinking [my friends] were gone."

James suffered hearing loss and severe burns head to toe along the right side of his body. He was at Mass General Hospital for 15 days following the bombing, where he received several surgeries. He then spent 14 days at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital.

"I get ringing in both of my ears, and this kind of white noise," he said. "It's never really quiet anymore."

James' parents, who are from Somerville, were in Atlantic City when they got the call about the bombing. They drove eight hours back to him, not knowing what was really going on. His parents, brother and sister stayed with him every single night while he was in the hospital and at rehab, a total of one month straight, and James said that meant the world to him.

"One of the things the money from the Greg Hill Foundation let me do is get appreciation gifts for everyone in my family; they were there every night," he said. "My mom was so stressed out she broke out in shingles."

James said he has also been able to pay his mortgage with the funds, and not worry about having to rush back to work - enabling him to spend time with his recovering friends Paul, and JP, and others.

"It took a huge weight off," he said.

James said he is getting around "pretty good" these days and is mostly off his pain medications. He also has a knee injury, most likely from physical therapy he thinks, but has been trying to stay off his pain and sleep medication. "I feel like a zombie on pain meds," he said.

He said it is "day to day" when it comes to dealing with the the emotional scarring.

"I think for the most part I am ok, but just being part of larger group of friends and seeing the devastation that happened to them has been really tough.

The whole thing is pointless. Nobody ran away with 100 million dollars; it was a senseless act. It is kind of hard. Me personally, I am moving on and trying not to think about it, but it has affected my thoughts. It is involuntary. I catch myself thinking about it, but it was a once in a lifetime deal. But it does creep into your thoughts here and there."

James said he is not exactly sure of the “origin of the first step” with the Greg Hill Foundation getting in touch with him, only that they were there to help him very quickly.

“Adam [Benoit] called and my dad answered my phone,” he recalls. “Adam said they wanted to come and see us. I had no idea about the first donation – I still did not know until a week later when my family told me. I was in shock, and very appreciative. If I had known that I would have jumped out of my hospital bed.”

Not only did the Greg Hill Foundation immediately get in touch with a number of bombing victims, they also asked James and the others to pass along names to them if they heard of anyone else that need financial assistance.

“Once I was out of the hospital and walking around, I really wanted to be involved and see how I could help,” said James. He remembers walking the hallways at Spaulding, asking other bombing victims if they wanted the Greg Hill Foundation to contact them to become a beneficiary.

One month after James received the initial donation from the Greg Hill Foundation, they called him again to say they had another donation for him. He also attended the bombing victim’s fundraiser along with Jacqui, and it was there the GHF surprised them with a third donation.

James said he felt it was important to attend the fundraiser, as well as any future GHF events for the bombing victims, in honor of his friends, who may or may not be able to attend themselves depending on if “they are having a bad day”.

“I don’t know who does what but Erin [Lynch] and Adam [Benoit] and [FMP Marketing Director Kaitlyn Montagna] are getting all kinds of stuff done, running around the fundraiser with their heads cut off,” he said. “I want to recognize all the hard work they are putting in.”

Greg said there are talks of creating an annual fundraising event for the bombing victims.

“When you look at the sheer number of people who were affected by this, and you think about out how much they are getting from us or One Fund, we want to try and figure out ways we can do some targeted events to continue to raise more money in the future.”

James said he cannot get over how the people from the Greg Hill Foundation reached out to him and so many others, in person and with a smile on their face.

“They personally got in touch with people, and personally came and met you and wished you well,” James said. “The emphasis is on personal. You get a lot of donations from people you know, but they don’t want to bother you. But the Greg Hill Foundation people came to see me. They put a personal touch on it.

It was great, never mind that they are such nice people. Everyone is smiling, asking how everything is going, and saying hope you guys are getting better. Those kinds of things are over and above; they put a smile on your face.”

Greg Hill said the thing the bombing has impressed on him the most is that there is a “giant need” for foundations such as his to dispense money immediately to victims – with zero red tape.

“Erin, Kaitlyn and Adam, all day every day were trying to find people that needed to have that money immediately to cover funeral expenses and who can’t work. With the help of the hospitals were able to track down a lot.”

Greg said they don’t require any notarized paperwork in order for beneficiaries to receive financial assistance from the Greg Hill Foundation, which allows them to dispense funds very quickly in the wake of tragedies such as the Boston Marathon bombing.

“It is really important to us because that is our mission,” Greg said. “This is the kind of tragedy that shows the need for these foundations. I hope people follow this mission.”