

***Most of you reading this live in a state where wearing a helmet when riding is your choice.***

This is not intended to be an anti-helmet article so please hear me out. What I'd like to do is share my experience with injury from my helmet if you do choose to wear one – which by the way is a decision I support.

Riding back home to California from Arizona Bike Week 2005 I took the scenic route. We rode to Las Vegas spent the night and rode the next day to Reno. The ride up Hwy 395 was very windy and the wind would change directions frequently being that close to the mountains. I was wearing a Harley Davidson half helmet with a small visor. The wind would often get around the windshield and catch the helmet, enough to jerk my head.

When I got to Reno I had the worst headache of my life. Later that night I lost vision in my right eye completely. I rested the next day and things cleared although slowly. The following morning while packing to leave my left leg collapsed under me and I couldn't get up. The paramedics rushed me to the hospital where tests showed I had suffered a massive stroke.

I was airlifted to UC San Francisco where a battery of tests showed my right carotid artery had dissected. This is a major break in the internal lining of the artery, similar to what happens if you crush a plastic straw. Dissections of this type are caused by blunt trauma. There have been many cases documented of riders receiving an injury like this during an accident, but mine is the only one I can find that occurred without an accident. Or perhaps others have had the same thing happen where the stroke hit while riding and caused the accident. That would be impossible to tell if you were lucky enough to survive.

My purpose in writing and sharing my story is to hopefully educate other riders. As long as helmets are manufactured with the strap across the throat rather than the chin, wearing one does put you at risk for carotid artery damage. My life has been changed with limited use of my left side and I'd like to help others avoid the same fate. If you do choose to wear a helmet as long as you still have the choice please consider a full face model.

Please check out this website: [This website describes how a chin strap across your throat can crush and damage the carotid arteries.](#)

[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list\\_uids=15605698&dopt=Abstract](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=15605698&dopt=Abstract)

Steve Standefer