

SURVIVING A LONG FALL

911: Unhappy New Year's event

Deer hunter thanks responders for saving life

BY BRUNO MATARAZZO JR.

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

TORRINGTON

Deer hunting season in 2016 was successful for Joseph Molnar. The Ansonia resident shot a doe and an eight-point buck with his bow and arrow at the edge of a large field off Upper Churchill Road in Washington, Conn., where he has been hunting for 30 years.

But on Dec. 31, when the 48-year-old stopped by his favorite hunting spot on the last day of the season to take down his tree stand, everything changed.

The double-overhand knot he had tied attaching his lineman's belt to his safety harness came undone and he fell 24 feet to the ground. His feet-first landing shattered his left ankle, broke part of his right knee and dislocated his left elbow.

Despite excruciating pain and a temperature of 27 degrees, Molnar managed in one hour to drag himself out of the woods to his truck 200 feet away. That's where he reached his cellphone on the driver's seat and called 911.

At 11:10 a.m., he reached his lifeline, Nicolette Crowe *See 911 , Page 4A*
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ALL I HEARD WAS HIS SCREAMS.”

SARAH MOLNAR

WIFE OF FALL VICTIM



Dispatcher Nicolette Crowe, right, with bouquet, hugs Sarah Molnar of Ansonia as Sarah's husband, Joseph Molnar, looks on Tuesday at Litchfield County Dispatch in Torrington. Crowe helped save Joseph Molnar's life in a hunting-related accident.

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was pulling a fast one on her when he told her he “messed up” that day. But when she heard a first responder in the background, she knew he wasn't joking.

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of Litchfield County Dispatch, who helped first responders find Molnar with the directions he provided on the phone.

“It was only going to be 15 minutes, in and out,” Molnar recalled of his excursion that day. “It was the longest 15 minutes of my life.”

Five months after that 33minute call, Molnar and Crowe met for the first time on Tuesday at Litchfield County Dispatch offices in Torrington.

“I needed to thank the people that helped me that day,” Molnar said.

It was an emotional meeting after the phone call on New Year’s Eve morning. Molnar did his best to remain calm in between screams of agony as the pain became unbearable. He gave directions to Crowe, who took notes on her computer and relayed them to the first responders out looking for him.

Crowe, who has been an LCD dispatcher for two years, said she was trying to keep Molnar on the phone even though he desperately wanted to call his wife. She also tried to distract him from the crisis situation.

“I talked to him about hunting, I talked to him about my dog, I talked to him about anything I could possibly think of to just keep his mind off what was going on,” Crowe recalled.

Despite being in pain, Molnar managed to crack a few jokes.

“Happy new year to me,” he quipped to Crowe about 20 minutes into the call.

Molnar became emotional at the end of the call, when a Washington volunteer firefighter drove up in his truck after spotting him.

Crowe remembered having tears in her eyes at that point, too.

Molnar said he soon realized he had to calm down and start relaying the same information to the firefighter as he had to Crowe. Eventually, Molnar also called his wife.

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“I tried to stay calm,” Sarah recalled. “If I got all worked up, I would make him worse. I had to stay calm because all I heard was his screams (on the phone).”

Their plans to go out that night for New Year’s had to be canceled.

Instead, Sarah and her two daughters rushed to Saint Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury, where Molnar was flown by Life Star helicopter. They could hear his screams in the emergency room. Molnar underwent three surgeries and may need a fourth in the future. He was medically cleared to return to work last week.

Molnar said he’s not done deer hunting and he’s looking forward to returning this year, when bow hunting season starts in September.

Though it’s not certain he’ll use the tree stand again this year, if he does, he said he’ll use a more secure knot — the double fisherman’s knot — and the proper rope.

Contact Bruno Matarazzo Jr. at bmatarazzo@rep-am.com or on Twitter @RA_BrunoJr.



Joseph and Sarah Molnar of Ansonia meet with dispatcher Nicolette Crowe, right, at Litchfield County Dispatch in Torrington on Tuesday. Crowe helped save Joseph’s life.

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Sarah Molnar, who described her husband as a jokester, said she suspected he