



# NADER ELGUINDI AGAINST ALL ODDS

After a Terrible Accident,  
Nader Elguindi Fights For More Than His Life

**S**ubdued lights muddled his view. A steady beep, beep, beep synchronized with the clock's ticking. Nader Elguindi opened his eyes, blinking to clarify his vision. "Where am I?" he wondered. When he saw his parents standing at the end of his bed, he knew something bad must have happened since he hadn't seen his parents together in over 18 years.

"I remember revving up my motorcycle following my night shift aboard the USS Birmingham in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where I

was a submarine Lieutenant and nuclear engineer in the U.S. Navy," recalls Elguindi. "A cool breeze swept across my face as I cruised along the familiar freeway heading home. But what happened next? How did I end up in the hospital with family members hovering around me?"

Elguindi was born in 1971 in London to parents of Egyptian and Iranian descent. His parents went their separate ways when he was five years old. He lived with his mother who settled in Charlotte, North Carolina. Elguindi managed through high school, a bit of a trouble-

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maker, yet armed with strong work ethics.

His work ethics helped him graduate from Appalachian State University in three years with a triple major of Chemistry, Physics and Math. “A Navy recruiter in my sophomore year plotted my future, solving my financial struggles and steering me into a naval career once I earned my diploma,” explains Elguindi.

Elguindi trained in Rhode Island and was commissioned a navy officer in 1992 earning a masters equivalent in nuclear engineering.

“I was assigned to the USS Birmingham as a junior officer and advanced quickly to a lieutenant,” adds Elguindi. “I put in long hours, driven by the challenge and excitement of the assignments.”

It was during the early hours of Nov. 20, 1994, that his life was changed forever. “Somehow, my motorcycle collided with an exit sign tossing me over a hill—my motorcycle idled on the highway with the front light burning.”

Luckily a young couple saw the motorcycle and stopped. Climbing over a mound, they discovered a young man near death with both legs severed below the knee. The couple dialed 911 and when the ambulance arrived, the call

went out for a helicopter. At the trauma unit, Elguindi endured 18 hours of emergency surgery where both legs were reattached—however gangrene set in costing him one of his legs.

“I was assigned commander of the USS Birmingham five weeks prior to Elguindi’s accident,” says Rear Admiral Mark Kenny. “In that short period of time, Elguindi proved to me he was bright, energetic, up beat, hard working, and a top-notch officer. It was not unusual for him to stay late following his shift. When I got the call, I immediately went to the hospital. As the days passed, I noticed his inner strength and strong

TOP: Awarded Navy Achievement Medal by Admiral Bruce Engelhardt, March 1996.

MIDDLE: Shipmates at Officer Candidate School in Newport RI, August 1992.

BOTTOM: Awarded "Dolphins" by USS Birmingham Commanding Officer, Admiral Mark W. Kenny (left), and Commander Daniel Shinego (right), January 1996.

Christian faith. I had a personal need and obligation to be there for him. As a crewmember, he deserved my support. As captain of the ship, I took care of my men.”

Two days after the accident, reality hammered Elguindi’s world. Within ten days, he lost 70 pounds. He faced numerous surgeries before his reattached leg, which has a five-way fusion at the ankle, functioned. Four months later, he was fitted with a prosthetic followed by 100 hours of physical therapy as he learned how to maneuver his new leg.

Psychologically, Elguindi saw his career cut off below the knees. “I struggled early in life, applied myself and did well in college. My naval career was on a roll. As the days passed following my accident, I never gave up. Doctors told me to accept reality. Some uttered I was in a state of denial; others commented I’d be lucky to walk again. Mentally, I held onto my career. I believed if I could re-qualify and continue my career, I could do anything.”

Kenny comments, “Throughout the ordeal, Elguindi never came to me discouraged although I suspect he had his moments. With his strong faith and humble nature, he accepted what happened, charting his course for the future.”

Elguindi believes he was able to face the aftermath of the accident through self-determination and faith. “I tend to be thick headed so strength was the easy part,” he says. “My worry was direction. I spent hours in physical therapy and the gym strengthening my body, leg and soul. I tend to have an overpowering will and fierce determination. So I prayed, asking God what he wanted me to do. I yearned for direction. The ironic part is he never told me but somehow always put people in my path that I was destined to meet. Direction arrived only on a daily basis. Even today, I often feel like I am suspended in air, walking a tight rope, continuously searching for my purpose. But at that time, my burning desire was to return to the sub. Commander Kenny supported me wholeheartedly and never questioned whether I could attain this goal.”

Family and friends altered their lives rallying to Elguindi’s needs. His sister, Nellie Elguindi, put her college education on hold for a year, moved to Hawaii and cared for him. Naval personnel assisted with moral support and in legal and medical issues.

It took nine surgeries to fix his left leg and over two years to walk without a cane

but Elguindi had a relentless passion to make it work. And work it did. Although the normal procedure following such an injury is to be medically discharged, Elguindi appealed to stay in the Navy. As long as it was in the appeal stages he remained in active duty.

“I did everything in my power to encourage him to do what he wanted to do,” says Commander Kenny. “We applied for waivers, working around medical restrictions to get him back to sea. With the assistance of crutches and eventually a cane, Elguindi returned to the ship. He managed to climb ladders with over 25 steps and conquered numerous physically demanding challenges onboard the sub, pushing himself to the limit. He fought hard to return to the ship and earn his submarine qualifications, which are recognized with a set of dolphins.”

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“To my knowledge, I am the first naval officer to qualify for their dolphins with a prosthetic leg,” adds Elguindi.

Commander Kenny was impressed with Elguindi’s persistence. “To come back from an injury like that and earn his dolphins was phenomenal,” he says. “However, he had made his statement and now realized it was a lost cause to continue pursuing a naval career. Armed with his computer expertise, he was prepared to engage upon a new career in the business world.”

Having to change his career was bitter-sweet for Elguindi—while he was no longer in the military he managed to become a part of something he feels is more meaningful “The experience has deepened my relationship with God,” says Elguindi. “I believe everything happens for a reason. Attitude is

the key to success in all aspects of life. As long as one believes there is a purpose to things that happen and keeps a positive attitude, they will follow the right path.”

However Elguindi does admit that not everyday was positive. “There were days when things got so tough, I would question my own existence. I recall one afternoon where exhaustion and fatigue overwhelmed me to the point that I challenged God as to why he let me live. I was jarred back to reality when I began pushing the pedals of an exercise bike and the man next to me, who was recovering from knee surgery, commented that I was an inspiration to him. Noticing my daily routine, he realized I must have been through a lot. His reaction was, ‘If you can do it, so can I.’ At that moment, I realized God was using me as a tool to help others.”

In 1997, Elguindi moved to Charlotte and started Cydecor, a professional web strategy firm that assists clients in maintaining and marketing effective, cutting-edge web sites. He launched the business with only \$1,000 savings and in six years, has acquired clients such as Hendrick Automotive Group, Duke Energy, BSN Medical, Parkdale Mills, Wachovia, CSX Lines and many more.

Today, only a handful of people know the adversities that have altered his life. He is a successful entrepreneur, a member of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and on the boards of the Young Entrepreneur Organization and the Charlotte Repertory Theatre. He plays tennis, basketball and cycles twenty to thirty miles a week.

“I’m defined by who I am inside,” he adds. “I was supposed to die that day but I didn’t. God made the decision to let me live. My own personal fire continues to guide me. Family and friends support me. I believe each of us has a purpose. Many people spend their entire lives searching for that purpose only to discover that the journey itself is the purpose.”

Elguindi is just beginning to share his experience. Although pain is a part of his life, he shrugs referring to it as “the thorn in my side.” His positive attitude is captivating.

“Knowing I have overcome something so adverse gives me a lot of confidence and peace of mind,” he adds. “My spiritual faith, strength, personal resolve, and support of family and friends convince me that if one focuses on a goal, regardless of the obstacles, they can rise to the occasion.” ❖