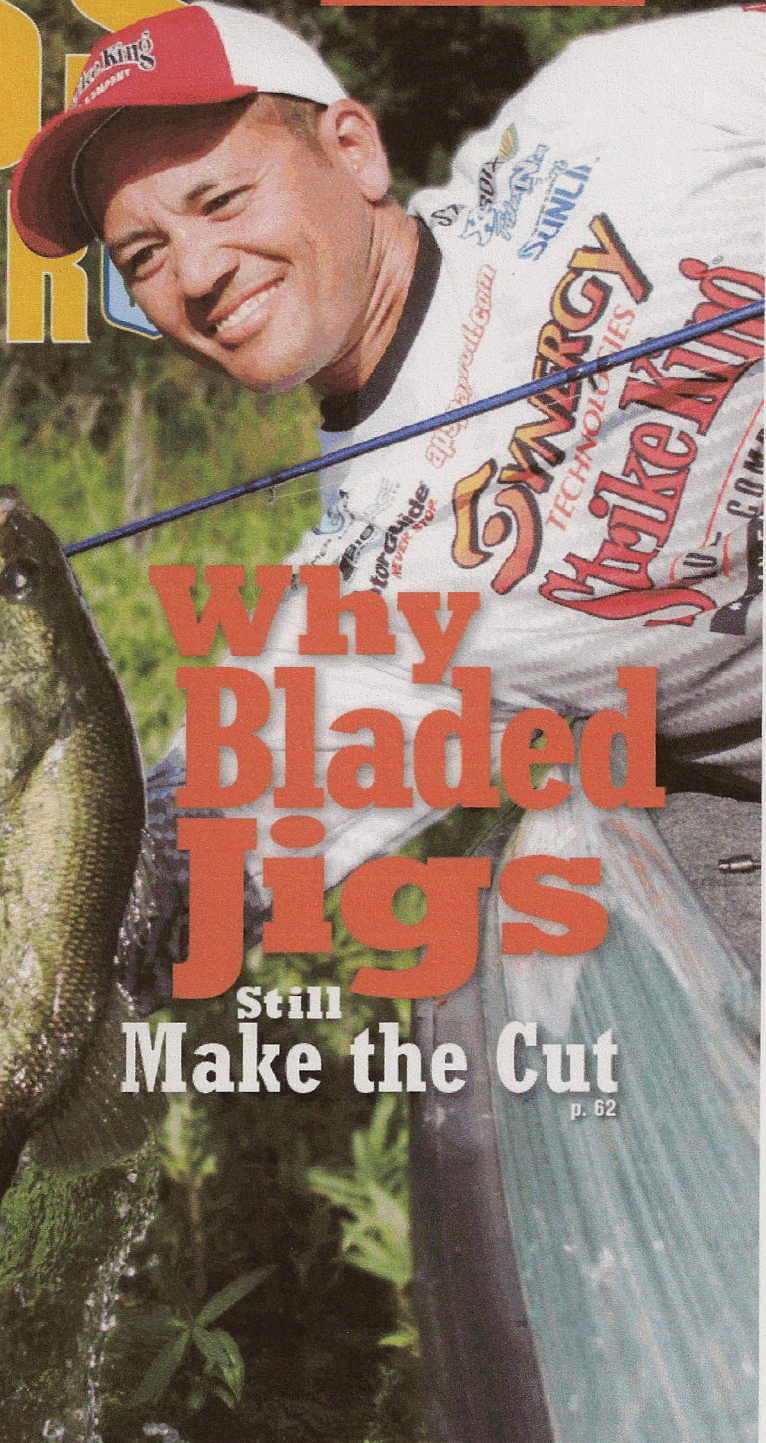


EXCLUSIVE: Dissecting Dottie p. 36



# BASS MASTER

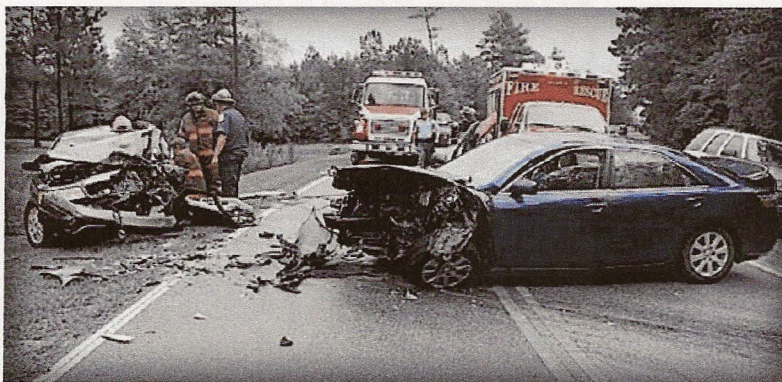


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Season  
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# Why Bladed Jigs

Still  
**Make the Cut**  
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Take the  
Frustration  
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A debilitating car wreck nearly ended Deputy Sheriff Rick Massie's life. Bass fishing has helped bring it back

# 10-50

(Accident) By DON BARONE

*"When the cold, hard rain just won't quit and you can't see your way out of it ..."*

Dateline: Officer Down  
I want the last thing I ever see to be the eyes of my wife.  
I want the last thing I ever see to be the faces of my children.  
I want the last thing I ever see to be the blessing of my priest.  
Not pavement.  
Not tiny bits of shattered glass.  
Not my face in a busted up rearview mirror.  
I want the last thing I hear in life to be, "I love you."  
Not an airbag explosion.  
Not the dinging of the car door alarm.  
But that's all Troup County Deputy Sheriff Rick Massie heard as he sat pinned in his squad car on a steamy, foggy Georgia night.  
"I couldn't move much, but I did manage to hit the button and call out ... 10-50 ... 10-50 ..."  
Back at dispatch, Tonya, the 911 supervisor on duty, sat staring at the screen, saw the call ID, her husband Rick's ID.  
And all she could hear was the squad car door bell dinging.  
Then came the radio call, "10-50 ... I've been in a 10-50 ..."  
And Tonya pushed her 911 dispatch chair back and started to jump up, and right as she turned to run out the door, she heard this cross the emergency airwaves ...  
"10-50 ... Tonya, don't come out here ... don't come out here ... go to the hospital ..."  
As Tonya turned back to look at the police scanner, this was the last thing she heard from Deputy Sheriff Rick Massie, her husband of 13 years, the father of her children ...  
"10-50 ... I love you."

But Tonya didn't go to the hospital. Instead she went straight to the 10-50 call, the scene of the accident, and when she got there, through the Georgia fog all she could see were blue and red lights, and two mangled cars.

"As I started to run past the EMTs and firemen, one stepped out and stopped me, said I shouldn't go down there, but I told him, 'I just need to tell Rick I love him.'"

And the man stepped aside.

Tonya fought her way through the crash debris, through the rescue workers, and when she reached the patrol car she saw Rick was still trapped inside.

"I got to him and I said 'I love you but you ain't going to make me raise our babies by myself, you ain't going to go.'"

Tonya, sitting across the table from me in an Athens, Ga., BBQ restaurant, bowed her head and looked down at the wooden table after telling me that story. Next to her sat her children, 10-year-old Chuck and 7-year-old Tara Lynn, known as Turtle, and to the wooden table Tonya then said, "It was the last thing I said to him, that was the last thing I said to him ..."

Next to me, a tear rolled down Rick's face.

And mine.

*"... you find your faith  
that's been lost and shaken  
you take back what's been taken ..."*

That Oct. 8, 2008, LaGrange night wasn't supposed to end that way. "It was the last call of my shift," Rick is telling me the story over a two-eggs, bacon and pancake breakfast in IHOP.

"I was on my way to chew out some kids who we suspected of riding around and busting up mailboxes with a baseball bat."

It was a nothing call, not an emergency; more like a "come to Jesus" call: "You know, scare the kids enough that they stop doing stupid things like that before they get in real trouble."

But real trouble came around a bend.

"I was doing 50 on the rural road, but the car that hit me was doing 80. It was raining, and the kid inside the car was texting and lost control on the curve ..."

Rick pauses, trying to find the words, trying to find how to say life would never be the same again ... for Rick.

"We hit headlight to headlight. When I came out of the curve suddenly there was a blue car in my lane. I had no time to do anything; I never even had a chance to touch the brakes. The last thing I remember ... the last thing I remember was this blinding flash of light ... and then ... and then ... the airbag went off. I remember seeing the powder shoot out as

the airbag deployed. It looked like a flower blooming."

The collision occurred within an eighth of a mile from where Rick was going to turn off the road.

"My car stopped that kid from dying. If my car wasn't there he would have shot off into the woods."

The 17-year-old boy who smashed head-on into Rick suffered a hurt back and a sprained wrist.

Deputy Sheriff Rick Massie wasn't so lucky. "The boy was in a Toyota Camry; it was totaled. I was in my patrol car, a Crown Vic, and the front end of it just folded in on me; everything came into the driver's compartment."

Rick described his injuries by saying, "Let's start at the top and go down to the bottom." Let's do that: Rick suffered a bleed on the brain, chips out of his backbone, a torn artery from his heart that was bleeding internally and possibly life threatening, massive damage to his abdominal wall, exploded ligaments in his left knee, and a dislocated and "torn off" right ankle that was only held on by the skin of his calf.

Evacuated in a helicopter to Atlanta Medical Center, Rick spent 12 days in the hospital, and as of our breakfast has had "11 surgeries; they have completely rebuilt my abdominal wall with a prosthetic device."

He wears an abdominal brace, an ankle brace, a knee brace, and walks with a cane.

But that's not what hurts the most.

Not being a cop anymore hurts the most.

Especially because he was fired.

"Troup County, and the Troup County Sheriff's Office, has this policy. Two weeks before Christmas in 2009 I got a phone call. On the phone they told me that because I hadn't been able to return to work in 12 months, I was in violation of the policy, and that I was being terminated."

As Rick is telling me this, I also know that he still needs three more surgeries.

"I told the county I was still disabled and that my doctor wouldn't clear me to go back to work. They said it was policy, and I was fired."

Rick now gets a percentage of his former pay through workers' comp, "and my mom helps out a lot with financial assistance."

But the large man sitting in the booth across from me is smiling, and it's not because of the pancakes.

It's because we just surprised him.

Took the dude fishing.

Bass fishing.

Took him because he said his consuming desire to get back to what he loved so much, bass fishing, was one of the things that kept him ... alive.

*"... get on your knees and dig down deep  
you can do what you think is impossible ..."*

(Continued)

## 10-50

Rick had contacted *Bassmaster* Magazine, told the editor about all of the stuff that had happened to him ... the accident, the surgeries ... but also said that if it wasn't for the love of his family, and his love of bass fishing, he wouldn't be here today.

So I get a call from the editor, who says, "db, why don't you go do a story with this guy?"

And I don't answer right away, say I'm going to check some things out, and I do — some — but what I really do is dial up my friend, Elite Series angler J. Todd Tucker, a Georgia pro, and I tell him Rick's story, send him the accident scene photos ... and wait for the call I know would be coming. And it comes quick, "db ... dude ... we have to take this guy fishing."

That's why they are called Elite.

So this is what we do; two knuckleheads, me and J. Todd, come up with a plan: I call up Rick and say, "Hey, we would like to do a story about you for the magazine. Any chance you could meet me with your boat somewhere so we can go out on it? I need some photos of you on the thing fishing."

I was flat-out lying. Bold-face lie, right there.

Rick had been back on the water fishing with his son, Chuck, a few times, so it wasn't like I was asking him to crawl out of a sick bed and do this. He couldn't launch the boat — he taught Chuck how to do that — and he really couldn't fish much, what with the ankle and knee braces, along with the cane he needed to get around, but being on the water, "is what kept me going. I love fishing so much — throughout all the surgery, all the pain, all the rehab, that's what I focused on ... getting back out on the water."

Perfect for lying to him; perfect setup. So I tell him, get your boat, get your kid, I'll meet you there and I'll snap some photos, bing, bang, bing, be done in a second ... and I'll be gone.

Yeah, right.

Now picture this: I'm late to meet him ... Rick is calling me to ask when I will be at the ramp. I tell him I turned the wrong way, got lost, and will be there in 10, 20 minutes tops.

I'm lying again.

Me and J. Todd are parked, hiding behind a Waffle

House. We are hiding because we are sitting in the Big Green Egg truck with the Big Green Egg-wrapped bass boat hitched up behind it.

We are waiting for one phone call, from the owner of the marina, and a few minutes after hanging up on Rick, my cell phone vibrates. When I pick it up, this is what I hear: "He's here."

And I look over at J. Todd and nod, and he puts the truck in gear, and we drive half a mile down the road and straight into the marina, and stop right in front of Rick and Chuck.

When I get out, this is all I say, "Dude ... I'm db ... and this here is J. Todd Tucker ... and he is going to take you and your son fishing today ... surprise ... love ya man."

And the ex-deputy sheriff, a man never lost for words, is speechless.

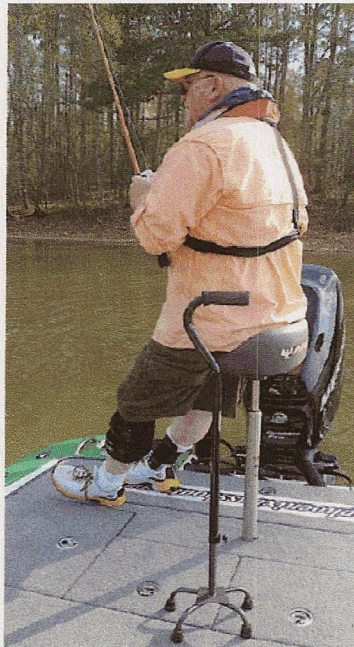
Behind him, his son is standing with his mouth open, and Rick is just looking at me, looking at J. Todd, looking at the Elite Series bass boat, and then it dawns on him just what has happened.

We got you, dude. Enjoy yourself today. Today will not be a day haunted by the accident.

Today will be a day of fishing with one of the best in the world.

And Rick busts a smile. A huge smile.

*"... keep on believing, don't give in  
it'll come and make you whole again ..."*



**WHEN RICK** Massie is fishing, much of the pain of his accident disappears.  
Photo: Don Barone

"Dang, db, you got me. You done got me good. I can't believe it."

Frankly, neither could I. In this world of Facebook, Twitter, instant secret tellin', I thought for sure we would get busted long before we could surprise Rick, but dang ... IT WORKED.

Sitting out in J. Todd's boat that afternoon with Rick, he would fish some, but mainly he would watch J. Todd show Chuck how the pros fish. And we talked — talked as two dads will talk, talked as two busted-up guys will talk.

"db, the biggest medicine in my life, believe it or not, is love. Love of my family, my love of fishing. Love, dude. Love."

I'll let Rick take it from here.

"I focused on getting back in the bass boat. If I can't be the police again, I can damn sure be the daddy again. My daddy and I had our deepest conversations out on the

lake, and all through my medical stuff, that's what I focused on — getting back out on the lake with my son, Chuck."

I look to the front deck. J. Todd is up there pointing to a dock and telling Chuck how to throw to it.

We've been on the water more than an hour.

Rick has never stopped smiling.

"Fishing has been the one thing in my life that's always a constant. It is my happy place, where I go in my mind when things get real bad. Back home, when I got out of the hospital but couldn't get around, Chuck and I played this fishing video game so much we broke the dang thing."

Rick is not looking at me when he says this. He is looking over my head, watching Chuck flip to the weeds, watching J. Todd give him pointers.

For the next hour or so we drift around West Point Lake, and we talk of family, of fishing, of the future. Rick, on the back deck, fishes some. He is still physically beat-up from the accident, needs to lean heavy on the pedestal seat back there, his knee and ankle still strapped in to heavy braces.

But then I notice this: The cane stands alone, off to the side.

Big medicine working again.

Big medicine, of love of family.

Big medicine, of love of fishing.

Big medicine, prescribed on a bass boat.

And back on the ramp ... after J. Todd let Chuck drive his Elite Series bass boat by himself onto the trailer, let him do it as Rick watched with tears in his eyes as Chuck scanned the parking lot for Dad, and when spotting him, broke into a huge smile ... back on the ramp, Rick gave me a bear hug goodbye, a bear hug from a bear of a man.

A bear hug from a cop who has seen it all.

A bear hug from a man hurt both physically and mentally.

A bear hug from a man fighting to come back.

And before he let go, this is what he whispered in my ear. This is what this grizzly bear of a man, who has been through so much, who has given so much, said to me.

"Love wins, dude. Love wins."



*"... it always will, it always does  
Love is unstoppable."*

*Unstoppable by Rascal Flatts*

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