

EDUCATION DECEMBER 14, 2015

Man shot in the head beats odds, graduates from FIU

HIGHLIGHTS

Robert Bozeman Jr. was shot outside a Cutler Ridge club in 2005

He was told he'd never walk or talk again

Has dreams of writing a book about his experiences



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BY CARLI TEPROFF
cteproff@miamiherald.com

The day Robert Bozeman Jr. was shot in the head was supposed to be a fun night out with a couple of co-workers at the grand opening of a Cutler Ridge nightclub.

It was Friday night, Feb. 27, 2005, and the then 21-year-old had just gotten paid. He went home, dressed in his red-white-blue Fila outfit and hopped in his friend's car. When they arrived, there were dozens of people in line.

Bozeman's memories of the night end there. He woke up five days later from a coma in the hospital. From what he has been told, he was shot in the head with an AK-47 and was found lying in the middle of U.S. 1 by street sweepers.

Bozeman had to relearn how to walk and talk. But he didn't let his challenges stop him.

He began speaking about his experience and enrolled in Miami Dade College, where he earned an associate's degree in mass communication. He then enrolled in the communication arts program at Florida International University. On Monday night, he graduated and was recognized for his accomplishments.

"It has been a long road," said Bozeman, who wants to write a book about his experiences. "This is a really big day for me."

Every semester, FIU selects several students who have beaten the odds and graduate as part of its Worlds Ahead recognition. For the fall commencement ceremonies, which run through Tuesday, 24 students out of 4,600 graduates were recognized.

Students from all around South Florida are graduating this week. On Thursday, the University of Miami will hold a ceremony for its 1,000 graduates.

"When we have individuals who have overcome incredible odds we like to recognize them," said FIU President Mark Rosenberg, just before the Monday night ceremony, where he planned to recognize Bozeman and two other Worlds Ahead graduates in front of about 5,000 people. "His story can give hope to other people."

Bozeman, who grew up in Miami, graduated from Miami Norland Senior High School in 2002 with dreams of becoming a writer. He tried his hand at becoming a musician, but didn't really know how to accomplish his goals.

He ended up getting a job at AmericanAirlines Arena and was part of the crew that cleaned up after basketball games. When his co-workers asked him to go to the club, he was all for it.

“My family tried to get me to stay home,” he recalled.

After the shooting, Bozeman said he struggled with depression. Doctors removed part of his skull because the bullet went in through the back of head and came out by his nose, he said. For years, he used a hat to cover his “deformed head.”

He began speaking at rallies, colleges and universities about gun violence, because he said too many of his friends were dying from something that he survived.

With the help of his mother, who died in 2013, he enrolled in college and worked part time. In 2010, he had surgery to fix his skull, but Bozeman said he still struggles with memory issues and vision loss.

His sister Idris Bozeman, 36, said seeing her brother graduate is “truly amazing.”

“The doctors told him he’d never walk or talk again,” she said. “He proved them wrong and persevered.”



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Shot in the head but God had other plans for you young man. I commend you for your courage, determination and how you stared adversity in the eye and beat it.

Write your book, share your story and use it to inspire, uplift and encourage others. This may very well be your calling and God's purpose for yourent life. Your story is life changing.

My wife and I experienced many doors slammed in our faces but we understand that it just wasn't our time. We didn't stop because we knew God would open doors for us and He did.

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