

## After brush with death, SF man determined to give back to SF General Hospital

By Will Reisman

It's a curious physiological trait that allows human beings to experience brief moments of calm lucidity during otherwise intense bouts of duress.

The examples range from the relatively superficial — like a star basketball player coolly knocking down a game-winning jumpshot in the NBA playoffs — to the more extreme, such as a veteran pilot safely landing a passenger airplane in a raging snowstorm.

For 29-year-old San Francisco resident Antonio Garcia, his moment of grace under pressure came about four years ago. That's when he was lying dazed on the ground after a bicycle accident, blood spewing out of his neck from a more than 9-inch gash that had punctured his jugular.

"I'd never been confronted with anything close to that situation in my life, but I just had this intuitive sense not to panic," Garcia said. "Because I knew if I did, I would bleed out faster and then I'd die."

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A bike accident in 2010 put a 9-inch gash in Antonio Garcia's neck. Doctors saved his life with a series of surgeries, including one in which he suffered a stroke on the operating table.



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In the aftermath of the crash, through grueling rehabilitation and fears that his life would never be the same, Garcia resolved to find a way to repay the people who saved his life: the trauma unit at San Francisco General Hospital.

At first, he joined a steering committee for the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation, a nonprofit organization that raises funds for the hospital. While he enjoyed the experience, it was not enough.

Earlier this year, with his 30th birthday looming in September, Garcia found a way he could truly express his gratitude — a charity event that would integrate his love for the grueling athletic competitions he nearly lost the ability to perform with his desire to help the S.F. General foundation.

## **A BRUSH WITH DEATH**

Garcia's life nearly ended Aug. 11, 2010. He was biking rapidly down Valencia Street when he rolled over a fist-size rock in the road and careened into the back of a parked car. Garcia's shoulder completely smashed out the rear window, and his neck was sliced open by the exposed metal lining.

After pulling himself out of the car — his body was almost completely inside the vehicle after the crash — Garcia sat down on the street and asked several ashen-faced onlookers to call 911.

Getting little help from the shocked bystanders, his first stroke of luck came when a former medical doctor who happened to be driving by screeched to a halt and ordered Garcia to lie down. The woman fashioned a tourniquet for Garcia and generally ran the post-accident show until paramedics arrived. (Garcia has attempted to contact her to offer thanks, but she has opted to remain anonymous.)

By the time Garcia reached the trauma unit at S.F. General, he had lost several liters of blood and his prospects for survival were rapidly decreasing.

“The neck is really densely composed of muscles and tissues, and Antonio's accident caused a severe laceration, leaving a lot of that material essentially dangling out and exposed,” said Dr. Andre Campbell, the chief surgeon at the trauma unit during Garcia's injury. “At the time, I wasn't sure we were going to be able to put everything back together, because there was such a severe disruption.”

Over the next two days, the trauma unit performed a series of operations that saved Garcia's life. Despite suffering a stroke on the operating table the day after the accident, Garcia woke up and was conscious and talking roughly 48 hours after the gruesome injury.

Within four days, he was walking around the intensive care unit; after six days, he was discharged; and six weeks later, he was back working at his job as an advertising salesman.

Garcia's rapid recovery came as a surprise to his doctors, who initially warned him that he might not ever walk again and would likely never get back on a bicycle. But Garcia, who was training for an Ironman triathlon at the time of the accident, became determined to regain his active life.

He worked out rigorously with a physical therapist four times a week, and by spring 2011 he was ready to get back on a bike.

Garcia's first go-round on the bike was an uneasy ride in his Noe Valley neighborhood for

about 10 minutes. While he wasn't breaking any speed records, Garcia felt comfortable enough to repeat that endeavor a few times — all without alerting his friends and family, whom he didn't want to worry.

Finally, after a few weeks of getting himself acclimated, Garcia felt comfortable enough to return to serious biking, and that meant a journey over the Golden Gate Bridge.

Upon completing that trip, Garcia broke down in tears.

“It was really emotional,” he said. “As soon as I crossed the bridge, I pretty much started crying. I put something up about my trip on Facebook and got a lot of love from my friends. It was kind of the capper to a real emotional roller coaster.”

## **DETERMINED TO GIVE BACK**

Since his recovery, Garcia has wanted to show the hospital his gratitude with more than thank-yous. His brainchild has become the 30/30 Run — a 30-kilometer footrace around San Francisco.

Ideally, it will raise \$30,000, with all the proceeds benefitting the S.F. General foundation.

“We have a lot of people who want to give back to the foundation, but I don't know if anyone has quite had the enthusiasm of Antonio,” said Sara Haynes, interim executive director of the organization. “This is certainly the first time someone has pursued this kind of avenue to help us out. I think everyone here is really impressed with his initiative.”

Garcia's mother, Laura, isn't surprised by her son's determination.

“He's always been very charitable, even when he was really young,” Laura Garcia said. “When he was 7 years old, he left a note for Santa at Christmas telling him not to bring any gifts for him since there were other kids in the world who needed them more. His father and I were so touched by that. We were like, ‘Who is this little boy?’”

Tapping mainly into his cadre of friends and other associations, along with campaigns on Twitter and other social-media outlets, Antonio Garcia has raised \$2,500 for his 30/30 race, which is scheduled for Sept. 28.

He plans on canvassing popular community gatherings like The City's Sunday Streets events while actively recruiting volunteers to help direct, organize and assist in the race. Knowing that the 30K race — equivalent to 18 miles — may be daunting for some runners, Garcia is hoping to enlist about 100 people to compete with him.

He has a website — [www.3030run.org](http://www.3030run.org) — that provides more information about his back story (including a very emotional video) and details on how to help.

Campbell, the S.F. General surgeon who has kept tabs on his former patient since the accident, called Garcia a very “remarkable, resilient young man.”

“It was touch and go with Antonio for a little while there,” Campbell said. “He’s really overcome a huge amount of obstacles to get to this point in his life. I’m so happy for how well he’s done.”

For Garcia, the 30/30 Run is his way of saying thank you.

“You learn to appreciate every day of your life after something like this,” he said. “I’m just in a better place right now — physically, emotionally, personally, spiritually. I can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that the accident is the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

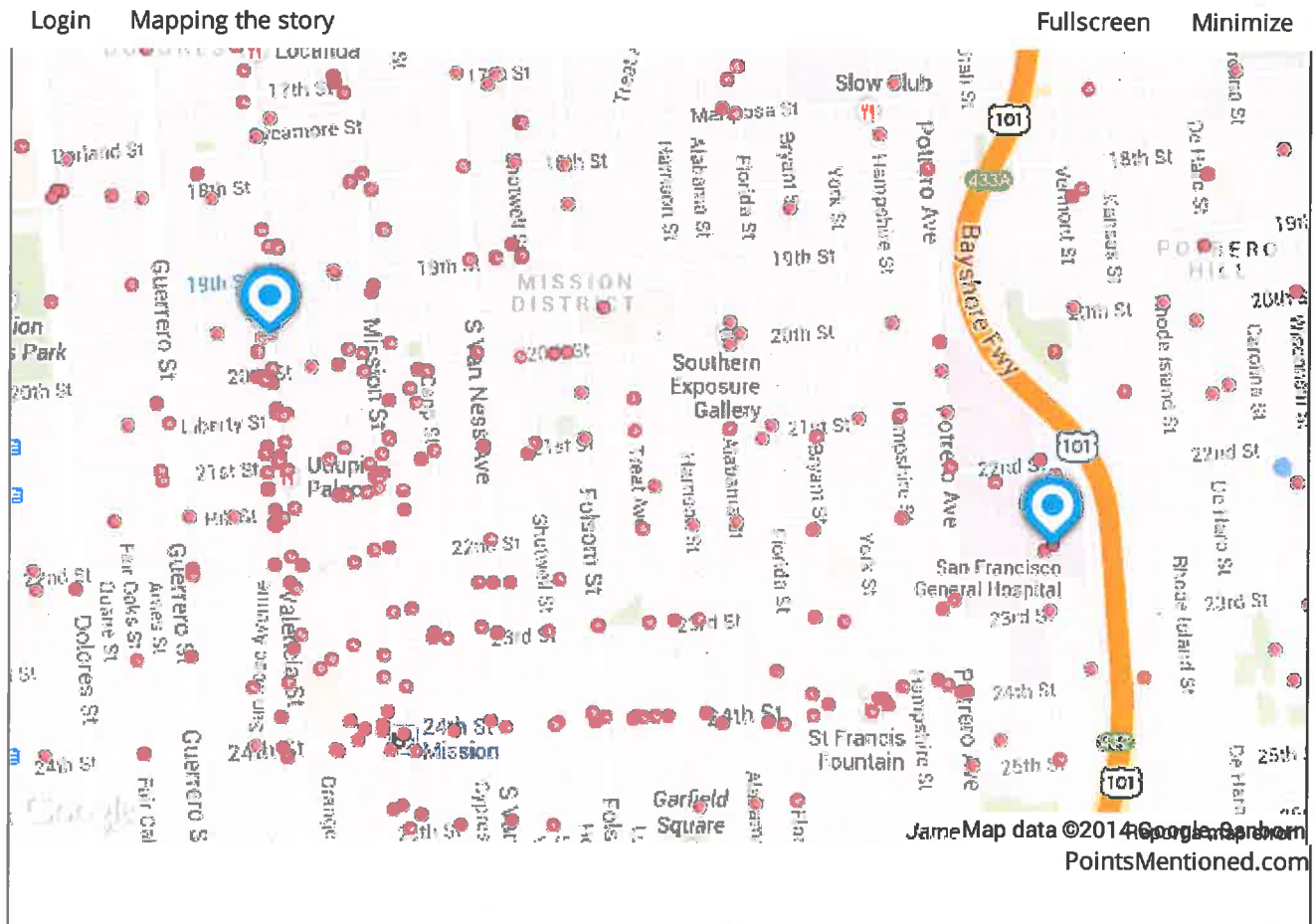
### 30/30 Run

*Antonio Garcia is organizing a run to benefit the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation.*

[www.3030run.org](http://www.3030run.org): Website provides more information about Garcia’s story — including an emotional video — and details on how to help.

Garcia has raised \$2,500 for the 30/30 race.

Race is scheduled for Sept. 28 at Fort Funston. There are 15- and 30-kilometer options to run. A \$30 donation is requested.



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