

# DAVID ROSE DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

DECEMBER 20, 1988,  
IS A DAY THAT WILL BE  
ETCHED IN DAVID ROSE'S  
MIND FOR THE REST OF  
HIS LIFE.

THAT WAS THE DAY THE  
54-YEAR-OLD FORMER  
MARTA BUS DRIVER WAS  
BRUTALLY GUNNED  
DOWN AND LEFT TO DIE  
IN A SENSELESS ACT OF  
VIOLENCE.

BY SHIRLEY L. SMITH



# SENSELESS SHOOTING LEAVES

It was ten minutes before midnight. Rose had just gotten off his usual 15-minute break and was readying to pull out of a stop in southwest Atlanta when a man walked up to his door and pointed a gun at him.

Thinking it was a hold-up, a startled Rose tried to reason with his assailant.

"I said, 'If this is a robbery, you can have whatever I've got.'

"What's the problem?' Rose continued. 'Put down the gun and let's talk about it.' He says, 'I can't do it,' and that's when he fired."

Rose, who was hit in his right side and shoulder, staggered to his radio to call for help. He was transported to Grady Hospital, where he spent more than six hours in surgery only to find out on Christmas Eve that his spinal cord was irreparably damaged. He would never walk again.

Most gunshot wounds do not result in death. More than 150,000 people are treated annually in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for nonfatal firearm-related injuries. The majority of those injured were, like Rose, victims of assault.

The number of nonfatal gunshot wounds is alarming to the staff at Shepherd Center, says Montez Howard, director of Shepherd's spinal cord injury program. Hospital records indicate that the number of patients with spinal cord injuries caused by gunshot wounds comprised nine percent of injuries in the years 1982-90 but accounted for twice as many in 1994-95.

Data on spinal cord injuries from 12 other rehabilitation facilities reinforce this trend. The percentage of spinal cord injuries resulting from acts of violence — mostly gunshot wounds — has increased dramatically since 1990, especially among African Americans and Hispanics, according to Dr. Mike DeVivo, director of the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center.

Firearm injury is one of the leading causes of both traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, two of the most severely disabling conditions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC estimates that 1,400 firearm-related spinal cord injuries occur annually.

"There's so much violence that people accept it now," says Rose, who knows only too well its long-term physical and emotional effects.

Rose says his assailant will never know the pain he caused him and his family. Before the case came to trial, the gunman died in jail of AIDS. But before he succumbed to the disease, the gunman allegedly told a cell mate that he shot Rose because he wanted to "see what it felt like," according to Rose.

"I felt more anger after he died. If he went to court, I would have been able to tell him verbally what he did to me. I was cheated out of that," Rose says. "Not only did he cheat me out of that Christmas, he cheated me out of being able to run and play with my two grandchildren. He didn't just do this to me, he did it to my whole family."

The shooting also shook Rose's sense of security.

"I'm uneasy about being out at night now," says Rose, who currently works the 5:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. shift as a radio dispatcher for MARTA.

His wife, Patricia, herself a victim of armed robbery in 1983, still bears emotional scars from her encounter.

When he learned he would be paralyzed for life, Rose says he wanted to die. He cried for days. And, like many victims of violent crimes, he questioned, "Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?"

But through the support of his family, his minister and the chaplain and staff at

Shepherd, where he spent three months in rehabilitation, Rose was able to develop a positive attitude and rebuild his life.

"I don't sit around and feel sorry for myself," he says. "I don't dwell on the things I can't do; I just do the things I can."

He went back to work only a few months after the shooting. Initially still depressed about his injury, Rose is now a model employee, according to his supervisor, Fred Hayes.

"I can always depend on David," says Hayes, chief of radio communications. "He's one of the best I've got. He's got a knack for working with people and is an extremely hard worker. He's always asking things like 'How can I improve on this?'"

More importantly, Rose discovered it was still possible to be happy. But it was undoubtedly an uphill battle.

"Physically, I had to relearn everything from driving to getting around in a wheelchair and bathing myself," he says.

Rose also had to make changes in his personal life. He and his wife had to sell their home in Hapeville — where they lived for 30 years and raised two children — and build a wheelchair-accessible house in Hampton, Ga.

Prior to the shooting, Rose enjoyed taking long drives and attending sporting events. "Now, two hours driving is about all I can tolerate," he says. "And it's not practical to go to baseball and football games. The stadiums are not very accessible."

Rose exercises regularly. "Everyday, I have to exercise my lower extremity limbs to keep them from getting stiff, and I use weights five days a week to build my upper body strength."

Although he insists he has overcome his anger and resentment and learned to accept his disability, Rose says living with it requires daily effort. "You can't take anything for granted." ■