

# Introduction

DAILY BULLETIN

TOUR BUS, FIRE ENGINE CRASH; FIREFIGHTER  
IN CRITICAL CONDITION

3/16/2005

*ONTARIO — One man was killed and a firefighter was left clinging to life after a casino tour bus packed with dozens of passengers collided with a fire engine on the 10 Freeway Tuesday morning.*

*Upland Fire Department engineer Tom Barilla, 40, who was driving the firetruck, was ejected and suffered major chest and head injuries, according to California Highway Patrol officers at the scene.*

*With the eastbound 10 at Fourth Street closed down, Barilla was airlifted to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, where he underwent emergency surgery. He remained in critical condition late Tuesday.*

*The two other firefighters on the engine sustained minor injuries.*

*The vehicles collided at about 7:30 a.m. as the Upland fire crew was responding to an earlier accident on the westbound carpool lane of the 10 Freeway.*

*Barilla, who was headed eastbound on the 10, had planned to park his engine next to the freeway median to gain access to the westbound side and was gradually merging left into the carpool lane, CHP Officer Tony Nguyen said.*

*The tour bus, driven by 51-year-old Nam Jae Chung of Lakewood, was traveling eastbound in the carpool lane when it collided with the left rear of the engine, causing the engine to rotate counter-clockwise.*

*The right front of the bus struck the driver's side of the engine, Nguyen said. The engine then veered right, crossing all lanes of the freeway, coming to rest on the right shoulder just west of Fourth Street.*

*The tour bus came to a stop in the carpool lane. No other vehicles were involved in the crash.*

*Firefighters were forced to cut through crushed metal to free the panicked bus passengers.*

*Twenty-six people, including the three Upland firefighters, were taken to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center for treatment.*

*"(Barilla's) family doesn't want the details of his condition released but I can say he sustained injuries to his chest, face and head," said Dr. Dev GnanaDev, the hospital's medical director.*

*Mike Barilla, 41, said Tuesday afternoon that his brother Tom was still in intensive care and that the family was waiting.*

*"He's very critical right now," he said by cell phone Tuesday from Arrowhead Regional.*

*Mike Barilla said Tom has a wife, Dora, and two young daughters, and has been with the Upland Fire Department for 18 years.*

*"He comes from a background of firefighters," Mike Barilla said. "My dad was a firefighter, I'm a firefighter in Pasadena and our other brother is a firefighter in Phoenix."*

*Mike Barilla said his brother is known as the handyman in the family.*

*"He's always over at my house fixing things," said Mike Barilla, who is a firefighter/paramedic at Pasadena.*

*GnanaDev said the hospital was put under a code orange alert as a result of the collision.*

That firefighter in critical condition was my husband Tom Barilla.

Do miracles still happen? I believe they do. I feel amazingly blessed to have experienced a miracle that was manifested in my life through a tragedy . . .

Human tragedy comes in many forms and it leaves its mark upon those it touches. That mark will be one of desolation or become a building block to a deeper and more meaningful existence here on earth. My father once told me that trials and tribulations were just life's path to growth. I never would have believed that a tragedy would bring me a life with a greater love and passion for everything, but it did. Dad you were right.

We all watched the events of 9/11 and were changed forever. Tragedy can make you stronger and more resilient. Tom used to say that he saw people every day on their worst day. Firefighters are faced with tragedy every day, but as a matter of survival they distance themselves emotionally. But when one of their own falls in the line of duty, the response opens up the emotional floodgates and a reality is uncovered. Years later you still see stickers saying "We will never forget." That saying was proven a reality; firefighters don't forget their fallen.

On March 15, 2005, the Oak Room of Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, with a capacity of 200, was filled with fireman from all regions of southern California. They were there to show support for a fallen firefighter tragically injured on the freeway when struck by a tour bus traveling to a local casino. The vivid images of a demolished fire engine were plastered on every local and national media channel. I wondered why all of these people were there to see Tom. Did Tom know all of these people? No, they were there showing their support because someone in their family was fighting for his life and they were there to offer any gesture they could. Tom's accident represented all of them, a part of the firefighter family. Tom was the fireman on 9/11 that they couldn't help. Tom was each one of them. Each fireman in that room knew it could be any of them at any time lying in a hospital bed fighting

for his life, but it just happened to be Tom that day. Tom was the statistic waiting to happen.

In the months following the accident, firefighters from all over the country poured out gestures of love and support to our family. Tom received a hand signed T-shirt from New York firefighters that we hung in his hospital room. The local firefighters stationed near the hospital visited Tom daily with food, support, and well wishes. I was so blessed to witness the incredible bond between fellow firefighters. If the world were more like the brotherhood of the fire service, it would be a much better place.

Our family was given a miracle. Tom survived against all odds. The power of prayer, community, and prompt emergency medical attention worked together and restored Tom back to health.

The human body has an amazing ability to heal. We are not only physical beings; we have emotional and spiritual components. Healing has many aspects and can be accomplished through faith, love, and support. Tom suffered a traumatic brain injury along with multiple chest and facial injuries. I was told his chances of survival were minimal and if he did survive the results would be devastating. No one expected him to live, let alone make a full recovery and return to work in six months. Though Tom was the only one who was physically injured, our family was healed through Tom's accident.