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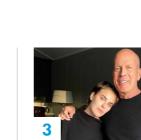
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After Recovering from Severe Brain Bleed During a Workout, L.A. Man Celebrates Becoming New Dad (Exclusive) "It takes my breath away thinking about raising them," Chinna Balachandran says of his twin girls

ROYALS

By Susan Young | Published on June 17, 2024 12:00PM EDT



• He tells PEOPLE that he once thought he wouldn't recover enough to build the life he now has, with a wife and kids

- "I have this newfound appreciation for life that makes fatherhood feel so much more special," he says Chinna Balachandran says the life he had five years ago ceased to exist
- after he almost died from a head blow during a boxing workout leaving him with a severe brain bleed and major physical and psychological complications.

"For a while I thought this is what my [new] life is going to be: in pain, on a

bed, taking pills while waiting to die," Balachandran, 35, tells PEOPLE in

an exclusive interview. "All I knew was that I was blessed to be surrounded by my parents and [my partner] Erica. But having kids, going back to work, none of that seemed possible." Until it did: Balachandran spent years regaining his physical and emotional health, relearning crucial skills like how to walk and how to even

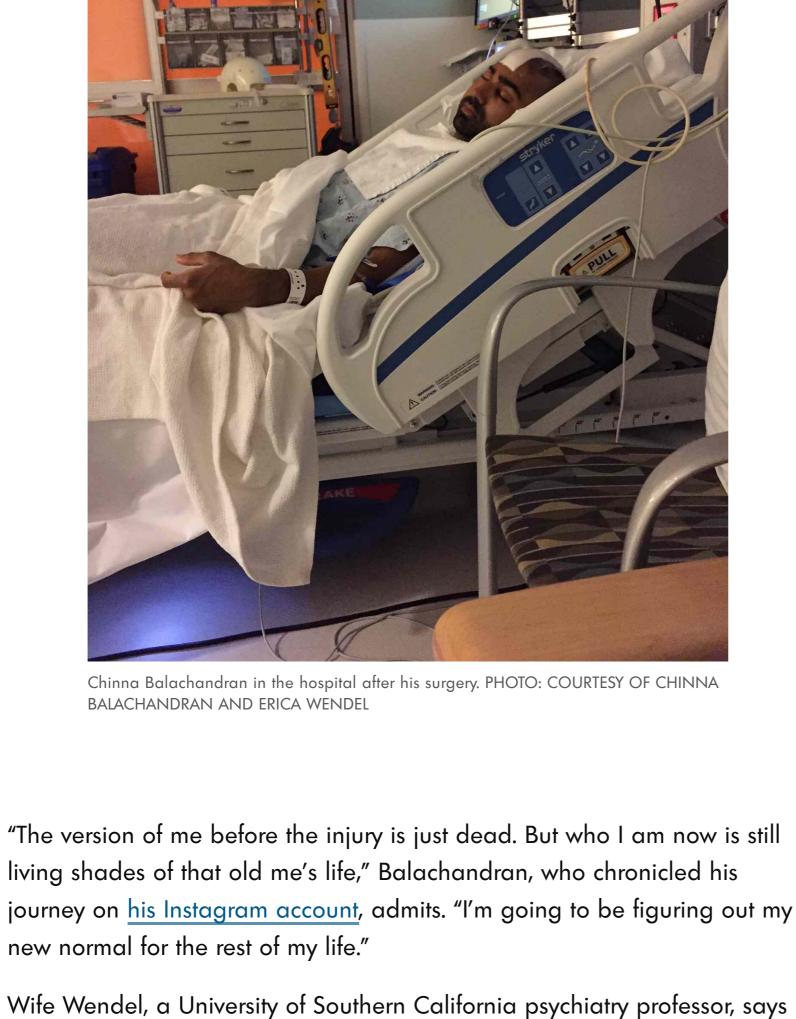
move his eyes without issue. It was hard on him and his new family. But not impossible. "Just because I'm not the person I was before, it doesn't mean that I'm

necessarily worse off. It's just different," Balachandran says. "And that's the

same message I hope to convey to other survivors." He is now the proud father of twin girls, Maya and Anjali, born in

able to return to work as a psychologist at a Los Angeles psychiatric hospital for teens.

December. He married Erica Wendel, 36, in September 2021 and was



But now Balachandran, whom his wife affectionately calls "Chin," has a "new lease on life and an appreciation for life the other one didn't," Wendel says. "He's overwhelmed with gratitude to be alive."

"recovery was really hard on our relationship": "In addition to the physical

really quick to get sad or angry and it took a while to figure that out."

aspects of recovery there were things around emotional regulation. He was

Twins Anjali, left in pink, and Maya in yellow on right. PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHINNA

Becoming parents was healing in its own way, despite the struggles.

tried repeatedly to have children after they were married, with Wendel

having several miscarriages before getting pregnant last year with their

"I think the amount of time that passed between the injury and us actually

having the babies allowed Chin to heal in some really important ways,"

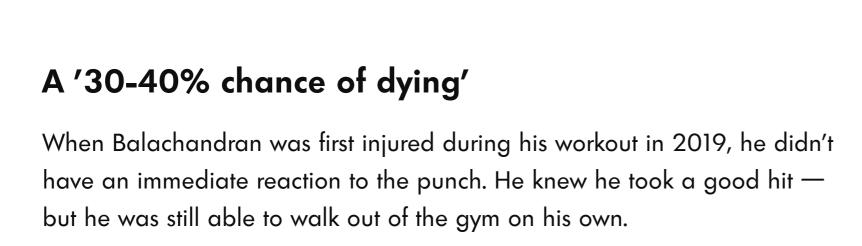
The couple, who first met while students at the University of Texas at Austin,

BALACHANDRAN AND ERICA WENDEL

twins.

she says.

have symptoms, he says.



It was only about 90 minutes later after he drove home that he began to

"I'm seeing dark circles out of both my eyes, I'm losing the ability to move

the left side of my body, losing the ability to speak," Balachandran recalls.

"I collapsed, but was able to signal Erica who was home and she called 911." Balachandran was rushed to the hospital at UCLA, where doctors removed the entire right side of his skull to relieve the pressure on his swelling brain.

"If you come in with a brain bleed like this, you have a 30-40% chance of

either dying or ending up in a persistent vegetative state," his

neurosurgeon Dr. Isaac Yang tells PEOPLE.

themselves to complete an obstacle course.

series airing in 2020-2022.

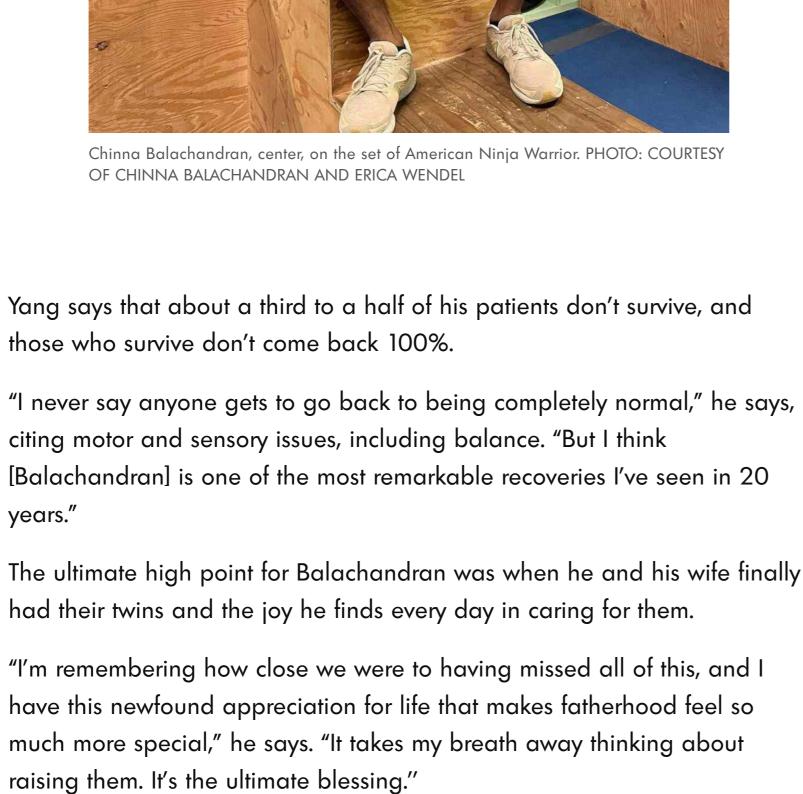
Balachandran not only survived, he pushed himself to recover as much of his previous capacity as he could, learning again how to sit up, how to walk and how to move his eyes without experiencing violent seizures.

During his dogged training program and physical therapy, Balachandran

Balachandran was featured in his qualifying runs in seasons 12-14 of the

decided to compete on American Ninja Warrior, where athletes test

"I was able to do something that was honoring the broken version of me in a hospital bed wondering if I would even be able to bathe myself any more," he says.



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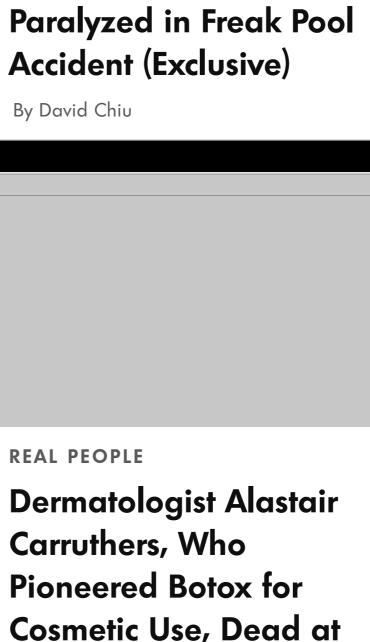
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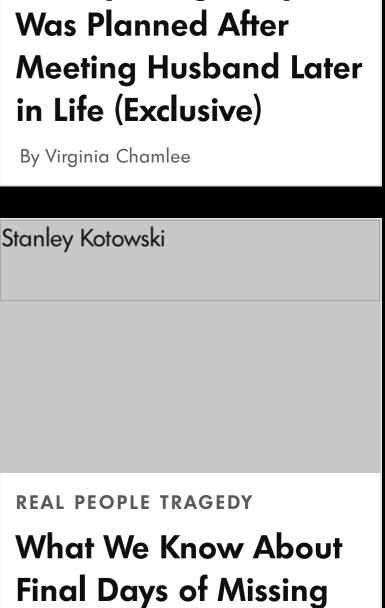
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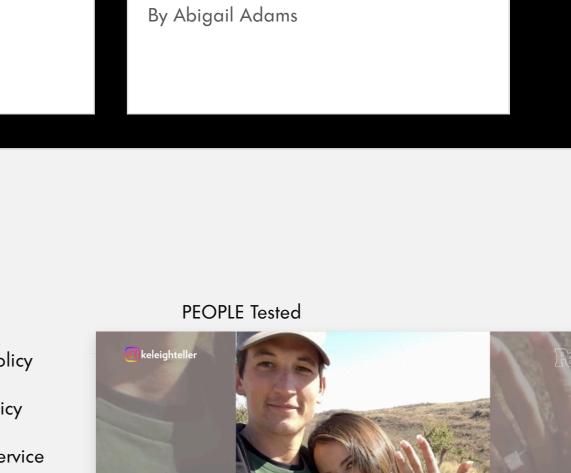
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