When Seth Sherry, a nominee for the 2012 Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application, went to Zambia with his family in 2011 to work as a senior agronomist for a high-efficiency fertilizer company, he knew his chosen path might carry some risk. In an interview last year, he said, “This is the end of the road.” Because Zambia is a landlocked country, many companies don’t have a reason to come here. “I have to do a lot of research on my own. I can’t rely on others. Travel is difficult and distances are vast. I have to plan my trips well and make sure that I always have extra fuel with me. You don’t want to get stuck out in the bush when the sun is going down.”

But Sherry never dreamed that his experience would give him a second chance to pursue his passion of contributing to the agricultural productivity of developing nations. That second chance had come because of his miraculous recovery from injuries he suffered in an automobile accident in July.

“We were driving from Zambia to Mozambique to vacation at Playa Tofu, a beautiful spot for snorkeling and seeing whale sharks,” Sherry recalls. “We like to do adventurous things as a family.”

Leaving early in the morning to allow time for a two-hour stopover to go through customs, the entourage included Seth and his wife, Caroline; their five-year-old son, Thomas; and their daughter, Cali (who will be two in June); Caroline’s younger sister; and three friends. On one of the main roads through Zimbabwe, their Land Cruiser hit a culvert and rolled three times, crashing into a tree just at the front passenger seat where Seth was sitting.

Most seriously injured of the group, Seth had broken eight vertebrae in 13 places, fractured his skull in three, and broke some ribs in addition to other injuries. “I woke up while I was still in the vehicle,” says Seth, who was actually in the car for four hours while emergency personnel worked to extricate him. “After a while, I noticed that a piece of the glove compartment was stuck in my knee, but that was sort of an afterthought compared with everything else that was going on,” adding that he is grateful and happy to be alive.

According to Sherry, only 1–3% of people who sustain injuries like these even survive, let alone walk again. But Seth is literally a walking miracle. The numbing in his fingers has dissipated, and he can type, write, and play his guitar. Although the range of motion in his neck is still quite limited, more physical therapy is expected to bring improvement.

“I still love Africa. I don’t know if I will go back for a long-term assignment—right now I’m promising my wife that I won’t,” says Sherry, who indicated he is interested in research about how national level agricultural policy dictates rural agricultural growth. “There are enough people who want to grow and improve—who take an active interest in bettering themselves—and I want to be part of helping to make that happen. Eventually, I would like to teach.” He has already done some consulting work with a couple of organizations.

“I don’t know why some people survive an accident like this and others don’t. While my injuries limited me for a while, I am getting stronger every day. The accident showed me how much good there still is in the world. It has strengthened me and given me a resolve to find a way to share that goodness with others,” he concludes.

It was a simple invite to attend the International Annual Meetings of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA during his first year of college that set Seth’s feet upon his career path in the field of agriculture. A Golden Opportunity Scholarship from the Agronomic Science Foundation helped him see a new and exciting world full of possibilities. If you would like to help make a difference in the lives of people like Seth Sherry who are reaching out to help others in the world, consider becoming a mentor or a scholar and/or contributing financially. For more information, contact Alexander Barton at abarton@sciencesocieties.org or 608-273-8095.

Former Golden Opportunity Scholar Seth Sherry.