

FEBRUARY 2016

# TBI HOPE & INSPIRATION

Magazine

**HEALING YOUR HEART  
AFTER A BRAIN INJURY**

*Journaling a New Story*  
After Brain Injury

**DAYS GONE BY**

Learning to Become  
**USEFUL AGAIN**



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TBI Hope &  
Inspiration  
MAGAZINE

*Serving All Impacted by  
Traumatic Brain Injury*

**February 2016**

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# Welcome

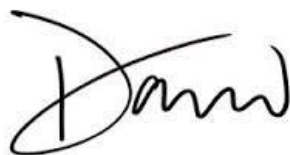
Welcome to the February 2016 Issue of TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine. This month, we are pleased to present both first-time contributors as well as tales of hope and inspiration by some familiar names. This issue is one of our most hope-filled issues ever.

Next month we celebrate Brain Injury Awareness Month – my sixth as a TBI survivor. And why not celebrate? The silence that has surrounded traumatic brain injury is slowly lifting as a new national narrative emerges, casting more and more light on what has remained hidden from the public eye.

If you are in a position to help end the silence that surrounds TBI, I encourage you to do so. One voice carries far, many voices even farther. Together we can do what can't be accomplished alone!

To our regular readers, welcome back. You already know that inspiration awaits you in this current issue. And to our newer readers, especially those who are new to the unfamiliar landscape that surrounds brain injury, welcome home. You are among friends here, souls who “get it” about life after TBI.

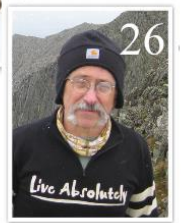
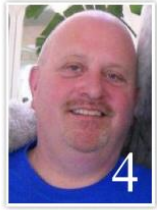
My hope, in fact the hope of all who contribute to our publication, is that you may see a bit of your own story in one of our articles, perhaps identify a bit, and come away knowing that you no longer walk alone.



David A. Grant  
*Publisher*

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# Learning to become Useful Again

By Steve Brydon

I need to be useful again. I have repeated this phrase to myself hundreds of times since I received my TBI. I was in a car accident on 4/1/2011 while on my way to the large corporation where I had worked since I was 16 years old. The company was a grocery retailer and I started there as a bagger. I was 48 at the time of my accident, and had worked my way up in the company to Store Manager.



Through the years I held many positions such as Deli Manager, Assistant Store Manager, and many more. It was a highly responsible position that I held, and I was even selected by my peers to be the manager from my market area to serve on the executive council, meeting with the company President every month and representing the dozen stores in my market area.

I was always a planner: someone who had a plan to follow with desired goals in mind. Even when you plan, or try to plan, things can happen that you were not planning for or even expecting, as was my experience when I got my first job at 16 years old. It was just a job to make some money so I could do what I wanted in my free time, and buy albums, concert tickets, and perhaps a car eventually. It didn't start out as a stepping stone for a career. It was just a job. I was a bagger at a grocery store, and worked hard. After I carried the cart of groceries out to the customer's car, I would actually **RUN BACK TO THE STORE SO I COULD BAG FOR THE NEXT CUSTOMER.**

I learned what hard work could get for me when I was promoted to the grocery department to stock shelves. The other baggers asked me, "how did you get into the grocery department?", because it was a more desirable position that they all wanted. It was then that I made the connection that it must be the hard work that got me the job in the grocery department.

I continued working for that grocery store all through high school, and even through college - in fact, I selected my college because I could continue to work at MY grocery store - and I thought of it as MY GROCERY STORE. I continued working there in the grocery department until a meat cutter spoke to me and said, "You should think about becoming a meat cutter. The pay is very good and it's a good job!" Another meat cutter had left his paycheck stub on the dashboard of his pickup truck and I could see that he was making over eight dollars an hour. When I started working, I was making \$2.65 an hour. By this time I had gotten a couple raises and was making \$3.15 an hour. I seriously thought I was making big money, and was actually concerned that I had to figure out what I was going to do with ALL THAT MONEY!

I felt good about myself and my career...So, for many years I felt useful. I miss that.

I first tried to find a support group that might help me with my issues, but there were none in my area that supported high functioning people, so I started my own! We called it HI FI, which stood for head injury functioning independently. Being a part of the group helped me feel useful but it seemed to suffer from a decline in members and interest after a few months. So I kept searching.



I had a long history of being useful, but then I suffered a TBI and have not felt useful since. I am limited in my physical abilities but look for options to feel valued and contribute something. I volunteered at an animal shelter and a bookstore, but neither was helping me.....so I continued the search.

With plenty of time on my hands I researched things that interested me. I watched a show on the internet about the life of Stephen Hawking where he said that everyone has something to contribute. I was inspired by his story and the accomplishments that he has made, despite his illness. So I continue to think there is something I can do. I hope that perhaps sharing my story with others who may be going through their own difficulties may help them to gain hope for the future.

One thing I gained from the support group was from asking others how they deal with their personality change. I said that I liked the old me but could not find him. Another member said that the old me was killed in the car accident and is never coming back, but now I have the ability to create the new me!

With that, I decided to stop looking at the past and concentrate on the future and work on making me a better person. Nothing can be gained by looking at my past and the wrong decisions I may have made and wishing things were different. **WORK ON THE FUTURE.**

It seems that in the past 30 years I focused too much on my career and not enough on my family. Though it was my decision, and though I can rationalize the focus on my career for my family's benefit, I now realize that it was also for me and my own desires to be useful.

So now after my TBI, my wife wants a divorce and I have little relationship with my children because of my own actions prior to my TBI. But that is the past and I have to work on the future.....and I will. Today I have hope that my best days are yet to come!

### ***More about Steve***

*Steve Brydon is a traumatic brain injury survivor living in the White Mountains region of New Hampshire. Steve is the founder of the HI FI Brain Injury Support Group. Steve prides himself at being "at the ready" to help any survivor in need.*

# **Join Our Caregivers Group on Facebook!**

## **Because a TBI Affects Everyone!**





# Welcome to the World of Traumatic Brain Injury

By Jennifer White

As a little girl, I played with dolls and dressed them like a mother would. I would also carefully pick out a few other dolls and called them the mother's children. I dressed the mother and her children how I thought a mother and children should look and, oh yeah – I added a puppy in the mix that I named Hershey! As long as I can remember, I always wanted children. I

dreamed of how I would dress them, where I would take them, and the hobbies I would encourage. Then, on July 28, 2000 the dream of having a child changed for both my husband and I, after I had a massive stroke, brain surgery, and a comprehensive stay in rehabilitation where I had to relearn all the rudimentary skills I learned as a child...how to walk, talk, swallow, eat, make a bed, boil water, and push things forward. In rehab, I learned how to push my own wheelchair forward, walk with the aid of a walker, nourish my frail and stick-like body with food that I struggled to eat, and perform light housework. I went from being a VP for a top nonprofit fundraising company to a permanently disabled person.

After the stroke, I learned to live in the world of the disabled. While you are waking up, having your first cup of coffee and remembering the things you might have forgotten over your holiday break, there is a disabled person with a traumatic brain injury who is nursing a sleep hangover, putting on his/her adaptive equipment, and trying to remember what goes first: breakfast or lunch, shoes or socks, shampoo or conditioner. While you are driving to work, a disabled person is struggling to hold his/her child without dropping the baby. Please don't forget that there are people in the world that are not like you: someone who might need a hand tying their shoes or just hearing the word "hello".



Before I had an acquired brain injury (ABI), I did not understand what brain damage was like. After the brain injury I was challenged with getting dressed in the morning without falling, walking without veering to the right or left when my destination was straight ahead and learning that my future was in big part not completely up to me anymore. I had to let go of some of the control I so passionately struggled to get before my ABI. Most importantly, I had to let people help me. Once thinking that asking for help was weakness, I now believe that there are people in my life that want to help me and now I let them. It feels much better to have allies in life than going it alone.

After the brain injury, I lost my mother to cancer after losing my father to the same disease only a few years prior. My world was rocked and I lost the last of two very important people in my life. I am thankful every day that I have my husband to help me through this very difficult time. I was recently diagnosed with asthma, a relatively minor lung condition that had gone undiagnosed for years. I was sad that I could not call my mother and tell her how bad I felt or how scared I was before it was diagnosed. But I did have my husband who I rely on to support me when I am sick and well. I learned after the brain injury that it is okay to rely on people and is actually pivotal to healing.

“I am thankful every day that I have my husband to help me through this very difficult time.”

Whether it is a friend, a family member, a relative, the clergy, a physician, or someone else. Let them in, let them help you. Life is unpredictable. I never thought when I was young that I would be on Medicare at age 37 and on long term disability at 37 years old...never experience motherhood, never be a grandmother...never see my children graduate from college, get married, have their own children. It is now my reality and a reality that I have had to accept over the last 15 years. It stings! It burns! But, I am still thankful I did not die when I was given a 4% chance of living. I have gained new skills and have learned to appreciate things I once never noticed, and I love people more than I ever showed before the acquired brain injury.

### ***More about Jennifer***

*Jennifer White is a traumatic brain injury survivor from St. Louis, Missouri. When she's not writing about her life as a survivor, she enjoys spending time with her family and of course, quilting.*



# Days Gone By

By Brian Maram

Having spent many hours on the beach and in the ocean as a very avid scuba diver, in the blink of an eye a once reality became a thing of the past. Ever since suffering my stroke I had not had the opportunity to return to the beach and could only reminisce over days gone by.

Two and a half years post-stroke, I had the opportunity to take a one-week vacation at a seaside resort. Alone at the coast, I spent my days at the hotel swimming pool basking in the sun. As the week drew to a close and having spent all my time in the safe confines of the hotel, I decided to

head down to the beach for a much-anticipated walk on the water's edge. As I slowly made my way towards the beach, I started to dream of how great it would be to feel the sand and water on my feet once more. Images of me walking along the surf started to flash through my head: the taste of salt water on my lips from the fine misty spray of the breaking waves on the shore line. Water washing up the beach, encircling my feet and gently removing the sand from between my toes.

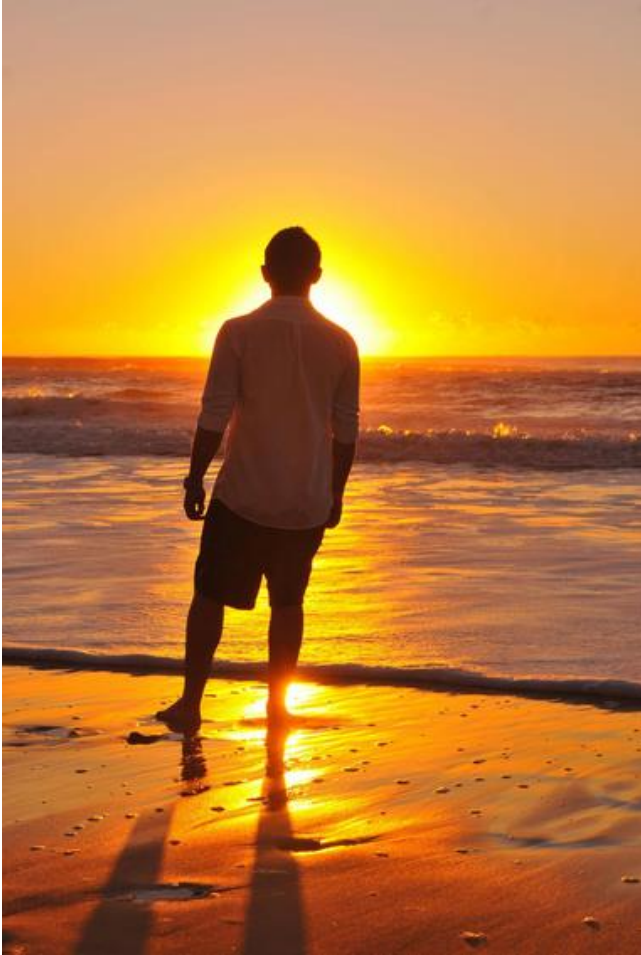
When suddenly, the bubble abruptly popped as I came face to face with the steps leading onto the beach. I was back in reality, the real world. I stared at the wet slippery steps in front of me; covered in loose beach sand and sprinkled with water droplets from the dripping bathers who had just used them. Holding onto the hand rail for dear life, knuckles white with fear and looking like an intoxicated drunk, I slowly made my way down the stairs, one step at a time.

Reaching the bottom, I was faced with wet, well-compacted sand, making it easy to walk on. So far all was good. Slowly, I took my first steps towards the water's edge, but after a few steps I was faced with the reality of the dry undulating beach sand. Conscientiously I took my first step forward onto the dry sand. Because of the foot drop following the stroke, my foot hung down like a ballet dancer pointing her toes. Unable to raise my hanging toes high enough, they caught the peak of the first mound of sand, causing the beach to come racing up towards my face at an alarming speed. Hold it, the



beach was not coming to me; it was me falling flat on my face into the sand. There I lay, unpretentious, flat on my stomach, spitting out a mouthful of sand.

Mortified, I slowly sat up. Willfully I looked around to see who had witnessed this ordeal. I must have been a sight for sore eyes. Fortunately for me, being late afternoon, there were very few people around. Carefully and deliberately, I stood up and made my



way toward the water's edge to fulfill my dream of having the wet sand oozing between my toes as the warm Indian Ocean gently washed it away.

Instead, a shore break wave came crashing down close to me, almost knocking me clean off my feet. As the water came rushing up the beach, it rapidly engulfed my feet with force. After briefly coming to a standstill, it turned and just as rapidly started to make its way back into the big ocean, forcefully pulling the sand out from beneath my feet. Suddenly, I felt the warm water enclosing my body as I lay there in the returning water, like a beached whale trying to return to the ocean. So much for my dream walk on the beach.

Having many rocks buried beneath the sand on this stretch of beach, I decided to play it safe and head back to the safety of the hotel. The last thing I wanted to do was to lose my balance and injure myself by falling onto a rock. Precariously, I made my way back over the undulating sand towards the steps. For now, my dream to leisurely walk on the beach had turned out to be a nightmare; but that did not mean it would never happen. My chance will come again!

### ***More about Brian***

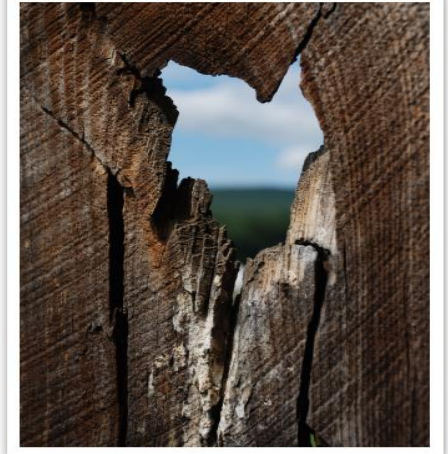
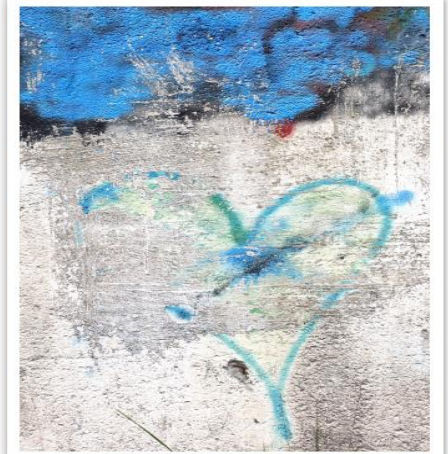
*Brian Maram is a Traumatic Brain Injury / stroke survivor from Johannesburg, South Africa. Brian takes pleasure in motivating other stroke and TBI survivors. He is in the process of writing a book about his journey and is a regular contributor to TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine.*



# Hearts All Around Us

A Photo Essay by Sandra Madden

*Hearts All Around Us* is a collection of photographs and inspirational quotations, in conjunction with the story of Sandra's experience living with brain injury and chronic pain. Looking at the world through new eyes, Sandra sees much of what so many others pass by. Perhaps you can look through new eyes, and see with the eyes of your soul. What you see just might surprise you!



## ***More about Sandra***

*Sandra A. Madden, a graduate of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University is a photographer and writer, a Special Events Coordinator at the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA), and a brain injury survivor. We encourage you to support Sandra and her book project. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of her book will be donated to the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts.*



# Living One Day at a Time

By Drew Palavage

Hi all! Let me first say that this community and publication have been invaluable to me as I start this journey. Reading and seeing other people's accounts with TBI has been a godsend. You see, I am still a relative "newbie" in year one of a newly diagnosed TBI. First, a little about me - I am in my mid-fifties, a husband to a wonderful wife, and a father to a wonderful 17 year old girl. I guess you could say pre-accident that I was generally a "man's man". I liked to compete in outrigger canoe, dragon boat, and have

represented the U.S. at a world-class level (Australia, China, and throughout Europe to name a few). I used to paddle my outrigger miles offshore in the ocean, especially after hurricanes on the east coast because the surfing was better.

I liked to snowboard, bike ride (I did a couple of "century" rides), surf, target shoot, and train in MMA (mixed martial arts). I played the ukulele, guitar, and hand drums. I worked out six days a week and was generally healthier than guys half my age! I did a lot of the cooking, especially grilling in the summer. I did my own landscaping and received many accolades from the neighbors for my yard. I completed many home improvements including replacing all of the windows in my turn of the century home. I worked as a science writer in the past and most recently as a Clinical Specialist in a neuro-ICU for fifteen years and I studied nursing as well. This all came to a screeching halt last March.

I was up snowboarding in Vermont with an ex-special forces friend. I remember arriving and taking a couple of runs. That was it as I "reportedly" wiped out and hit a tree. They thought I was dead at the scene. I was medevac'd by chopper to a trauma center in New



Hampshire. There, I was intubated (eventually trached), placed in a “halo” vest, and had a feeding tube and PICC line inserted. My wife was driven to the hospital by a good friend. I spent approximately two to three weeks there. My wife now tells me that all of the staff in the ICU were great. They related to me as a fellow “ICUer” and felt it could be any one of them lying there.

I was driven by ambulance with my wife at my side to a rehabilitation hospital closer to where we lived. My wife informs me that I started to have trouble during the long ride back and I informed the ambulance personnel that I was dehydrated and that they should hang an IV. They did and I improved. I don't remember.



My first recollection was probably about the second week of rehab. Suffice it to say, the staff including the nurses, aides, respiratory therapists, PTs, OTs, and Speech therapists were all wonderful. I spent three to four months there, with short stints to the regular hospital (where I worked, mind you) for an infection, etc. Even though I could go up on the roof deck at rehab to get fresh air, I longed to be outside. I was

diagnosed with DAI (diffuse axonal injury), possible cervical spine damage, and a possible brachial plexus injury to my right arm. I had severe right-side weakness, speech difficulties, and double vision -all of which I'm still struggling with today. I was mostly confined to a wheelchair but used a cane during PT. Special glasses were made for me to aid in the severe double vision.

The Halo and cervical collar eventually came off as the ligament damage had healed, and the PICC, trach, and feeding tube were eventually removed. I was getting ready to go home!

I've been home now since August of 2015. I did go to outpatient therapy five days per week for approximately five weeks, then I went three days per week for several more weeks. I will start up again with PT, OT, and Speech Therapy in the spring. In the meantime, I get out of breath doing the treadmill (walking), stationary bike, rowing machine, and weights just about every day. I am truly happy to learn that exercise does benefit our diagnosis and I feel best on those days when I get in a good workout. I also read, both aloud and to myself every day, to work on the speech.

My thoughts on being home: IT'S WONDERFUL! The first thing I did was say hello to my dog. He really missed me! I have made it a point to get outside every day, even if it's a -5 degree wind chill. My wife has been great and she allows me to "test my wings" as it were without hindering me, although if you ask her, she was probably a little leery with some of the things I did. I've climbed a few rungs on a ladder and blew leaves off of my porch roof. I've hung a bannister (with my wife's help) downstairs to the basement. I've gotten the yard ready for winter. I've grilled chicken and salmon outside and taken the trash and recyclables out to the curb, albeit slowly, to name a few. All of these things make me feel alive, like I'm contributing something again.

My point to you as caregivers - let your loved one try things as long as they're safe. They need to feel useful and that they can still make a contribution. Those things I'm most proud of are learning to use chopsticks with my left hand, changing a thermostat and light switch with my daughter and wife's help.

I was ecstatic when I didn't need the wheelchair, the commode, or hospital bed any longer. I was very happy when I could take a shower "standing up" instead of in a shower chair. I'm very happy to say that I haven't fallen even though I'm still quite wobbly. I do have bad days and times. Particularly before bed and when I wake up. You see, I still see myself as being able to do all of the old things in my dreams. It is a rude awakening to wake up to reality.

**“I was ecstatic when I didn't need the wheelchair, the commode, or hospital bed any longer.”**

Some things I hope will improve and I hope my voice improves so I don't sound like I'm drunk all the time. People tell me it's improving. We'll see. Even though I've had one eye surgery, I hope the double vision will continue to improve with glasses or perhaps another procedure. My follow up is in a few weeks. I hope my feeling or

sensation will get back to normal, especially sensitivity to the cold (I always feel like I'm burning or heavy on the right side). I'd like to be able to drive again, for I do miss it. I hope when it gets nice that I can walk around the block without looking like I'm struggling (with or without the cane), and I eventually hope I can run and bike again! Some of the videos out there give me heaps of encouragement in this regard.

Everyone going through this wants to know, "does it get better?" I know that I wanted to know. If you ask people who have seen me at my worst, the answer is a resounding "YES!" If you ask me, I don't know? ...as I sit here plinking away with one hand/finger. I know I won't be able to do all of the things I used to be able to do. But that's okay. I just hope I can do some of the things - one day at a time!

### ***More about Drew***

*Drew takes pride in being a good husband and father. He was/is also a fierce competitor and works hard every day. Right now he enjoys working out and maintaining his home.*

## **Living With Hope**

**By Patrick Brigham**



Next month is our one-year publication anniversary. Just like our cartoon mascot Hope has grown over the last year, so have you. Next month we will feature a special section on growth after a TBI and we'd love to hear from you. Send us an email to [growth@tbihopeandinspiration.com](mailto:growth@tbihopeandinspiration.com) and tell us how you've grown over the past year and share any new gains you've had. If we publish your contribution, you'll get a special gift from us here at TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine as part of our month-long anniversary celebration!

# Journaling a New Story after Brain Injury

By Barbara Stahura

When a brain injury happens, the familiar story of a life can be altered in ways not possible with any other kind of injury or illness. So much you knew about yourself—the wealth of information you depended upon to lead your life—can blur or disappear, leaving you stranded and struggling in an unknown place. Along with cognitive and emotional challenges, you may face challenges with your physical abilities. You can feel as though you’ve been kidnapped to an alien planet where nothing is familiar and you are lost in dangerous territory.



Family caregivers can feel equally bewildered, as well as terrified. I certainly did when my husband sustained a serious traumatic brain injury more than a decade ago. But my journal offered a safe sanctuary where I could pour out my deepest thoughts and feelings without judgment or criticism. Writing somehow made them more manageable. Despite being diagnosed with secondary traumatic stress, journaling allowed me to hold on and cope with the overpowering uncertainty, fear, and anxiety.

As I’ve found during eight years of guiding journaling groups for people with brain injury and family caregivers, telling your story through journaling can enhance the healing process. “Healing” here does not mean restoring your injured brain to its former functioning or your life to the way it used to be. Instead, it means finding healthy ways to become aware of, accept, and acknowledge what has happened so that you can move forward into your new post-injury story. Journaling, for even five or ten minutes at a time on a regular basis, can help release you from yearning for the past and open positive doors to your envisioned future.



## How to Journal

There are no rules in journaling, except perhaps to date all your entries. So don't worry about correct spelling, grammar, or punctuation. You need not be a "good" writer. Simply write in whatever way is comfortable for you. You can write on paper or use a keyboard. If a brain injury prohibits you from doing either, you can speak your entries into a recording device, use speech-recognition software, or find a trusted confidante who will scribe your words without judgment or changes.

Keeping your journal private allows you to write honestly. But if you occasionally write an entry that you never want anyone to read, you can tear it out and destroy it. The benefit of journaling comes in the writing, not in preserving what you write.

To begin, you can simply pick up your pen or put your hands on the keyboard. But it's helpful to create a structure for yourself by starting with a prompt (for example: Today I feel... or, The most important thing I can do now...) You can experiment with various techniques such as Dialogue or Unsent Letter, or even setting a time limit.



If you're writing about a traumatic experience, don't simply begin writing with no structure in place. Even something as simple as a five-minute limit can help you avoid writing yourself off an emotional cliff with no way back to safety. Stop writing if you feel yourself getting unusually upset. And over time, try to keep a balance between positive and negative so that you don't end up endlessly ruminating on the darker aspects of your life.

After a brain injury, you might not be able to write much or for very long. Do whatever you can, and please don't judge yourself harshly. As your condition improves, you will be able to write more. If you're a caregiver, you might have difficulty finding time for self-care, but know that you can journal in only five or ten minutes at a time. A small journal will fit in a purse or pocket, and you can write wherever you are.

As you continue journaling, you will have written memories of your healing and of how far you have come since brain injury altered your life. And there, in those words on the page, you—whether survivor or caregiver—have created the foundation on which to build the new story that will carry you into the future.

### ***More about Barbara***

*Barbara Stahura, Certified Journal Facilitator, has guided people in harnessing the power of therapeutic journaling for healing and well-being since 2007. She facilitates local journaling groups for people with brain injury and for family caregiver. Co-author of the acclaimed “After Brain Injury: Telling Your Story,” the first journaling book for people with brain injury, she lives in Indiana with her husband, a survivor of brain injury. To learn more, please visit [www.barbarastahura.com](http://www.barbarastahura.com)*

# Contributors Wanted!



Share your...

- ✓ Personal Story
- ✓ Photography
- ✓ Artwork
- ✓ Poetry



*Read Our Submission Guidelines>>>*



# How Yoga helped Me

By Amy Zellmer

On a cold February morning, my life changed forever. Walking down the driveway of my building, I slipped on a patch of sheer ice. My feet went straight up, and I landed with my head taking the full impact, briefly knocking me unconscious.

When I started to get up, I knew I wasn't okay. I had an excruciating pain in my skull where my head hit, and I was seeing whirly, bright lights out of my left eye.

A visit to the doctor confirmed I had a severe concussion, major whiplash, C4/5 damage, a dislocated sternum, and multiple torn muscles. I had no idea the road to recovery I would face, and how drastically my life had just changed.

I had been doing yoga since college because it brought me balance and peace, and was an instant stress reliever for me. With all of my physical injuries added to my traumatic brain injury (TBI), I could no longer do yoga.

After months of vertigo, dizziness and balance issues, cognitive problems, short-term memory loss, and the pain of my physical injuries, I was at the end of my rope. I felt like I would never find any relief, and worried that the TBI would leave me permanently impaired and unable to ever do physical exercise again.

I consulted with a neurologist, chiropractic neurologist, as well as the National Dizzy and Balance Center. I was encouraged to attempt some physical movement, as it would eventually help my body work out its kinks and stabilize my balance issues. It seemed counter intuitive at the time; however, I was desperate to have some sense of normalcy and routine in my life.

About fifteen months after my accident, I took private lessons with my yoga instructor in an attempt to find poses I could do—poses that wouldn't trigger my vertigo or cause tension in my neck or sternum/clavicle area.

My instructor taught me how to use a chair or wall to support myself in standing poses so I didn't feel like I was going to fall. We found five poses I could do with modifications that didn't cause any problems or flare ups, including: Tree, Mountain, Cat/Cow, Puppy Dog, Forward Bend, and Seated Spine Twist.

Within about six weeks of doing these five poses every day for 10 minutes, I gradually added Down Dog, Plank, and Warrior for a breath. My vertigo and dizzy issues seemed to almost completely subside, and my balance was coming back closer to what it was



pre-accident. Now with modifications I can do many of the poses I used to do. I still can't do any back bends or tip my head backwards, but I am on an amazing road to recovery, thanks to yoga.

I urge anyone with a TBI or other injury to try to incorporate yoga into your daily routine. If you think, "I'm not flexible, I can't do yoga," you are absolutely wrong!

If I can do this, *I know you can too!*

### **1. Listen to your body.**

Don't do anything that hurts or causes you pain. Mild discomfort is to be expected if you haven't stretched your body in a while, however, if it actually hurts, listen to your body. Don't do that particular pose, or modify it to fit what your body is capable of. If a pose triggers vertigo, try modifying it so that your head doesn't have to move, or else move on to a different pose.

### **2. Connect your breath.**

Oxygen is critical for brain health, and yoga helps you connect your breath to your movements. Take strong, deep inhalations, and allow the out-breath to help you get deeper into the pose and deeper into the now ~ releasing all negative thoughts and emotions.



### 3. Modify poses.

In the beginning I could only do 5 simple, basic, stretching poses. I had to use a chair or wall to hold onto for balance. I couldn't do any poses that required my head forward or backward. Don't feel obligated to do every pose in a series, do what you can do and go at your own pace. Yoga is an individual "sport" and there is no one to impress other than yourself.

### 4. Believe in yourself.

I know it's a challenge when you haven't been able to do physical exercise in months, but I finally took the plunge and I know you can too! Yoga has SO many health benefits, and I truly believe in you and your ability to get moving and start feeling better. Let go of the resistance that is holding you back, and allow yourself to move forward in your recovery! Your mind, body, and spirit will thank you!

### *More About Amy*

*Amy Zellmer is a professional photographer and author located in Saint Paul, MN. She suffered a traumatic brain injury in February 2014, and is currently advocating to raise awareness about the severity of concussions and TBI. She released her first book "Life With a Traumatic Brain Injury: Finding the Road Back to Normal" in 2015. For more information, please visit [www.facesoftbi.com](http://www.facesoftbi.com)*

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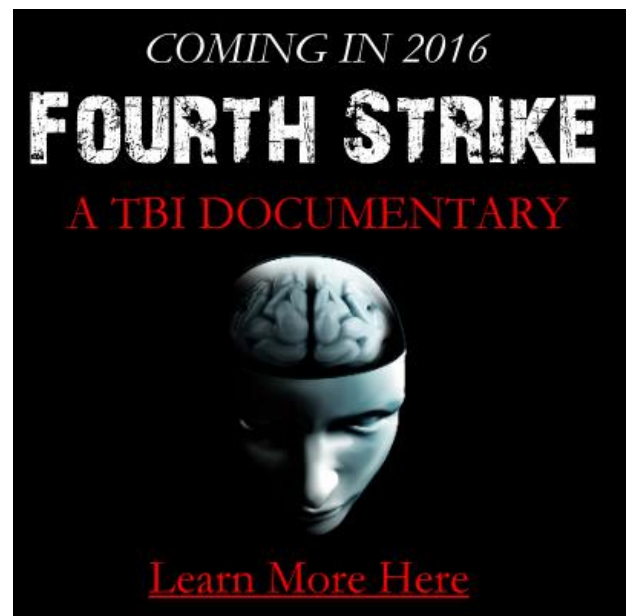
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# Healing your Heart after a Brain Injury

By Barbara J. Webster



Winter can be a tough season for anyone but it can be exceptionally difficult for a brain injury survivor. On top of struggling with the winter weather, limiting outdoor activities due to the cold temperatures or slippery surfaces and the typical “winter blues”, brain injury survivors are often struggling with a fundamental Life Crisis: who am I and what is my value if I can’t do what I used to do, if my friends aren’t my friends anymore and I’m a problem for my family?

Something essential that I learned and wish I’d known during my journey is that there is usually a grieving process associated with healing from a brain injury. I learned that there are common stages associated with the grieving process; denial, anger, bargaining, depression & acceptance. I also learned that processing grief is not a straightforward path, that one typically moves back and forth in the different stages and that is “normal”. I learned that in order to heal and be able to move forward, it is necessary to recognize your feelings, acknowledge the losses, allow yourself to feel the feelings and mourn the losses.

The devastating losses brain injury survivors experience are far-reaching. On top of struggling with physical injuries and cognitive deficits, there are usually secondary losses as well; income, jobs, social networks, friends, even family and homes. Survivors often lose much of their life that took years, sometimes many decades, to build.

Needless to say, the changes and losses I experienced had a profound effect on me, on my Being. I found myself struggling with a fundamental Life Crisis: who am I and what is my value if I can’t do what I used to do, if my friends aren’t my friends anymore and I’m a problem for my family? I had lost my self-confidence and my “sense of self.” I was becoming more and more depressed.

Something else to consider is that your family and friends may be grieving too. When you think about it, they have lost the person you used to be and the role you used to play in their lives as well.

Getting in touch with my spiritual guides was instrumental in helping me move through the grieving process and heal my heart. I needed to hear, to be re-taught, that I had value in my Being, not just in my doing. Being part of a support group for brain injury survivors let me know I was not alone in my struggle. Many find it necessary to seek professional help to help them cope with and navigate this complex process.



One of the keys for me was to forgive myself; forgive myself for not being able to do what I used to be able to do; forgive myself for being human. I also needed to forgive others for their shortcomings; for being human. Ignoring your feelings will hold you back.

Your grief and whatever way it manifests in your life will create stress and inhibit your rehabilitation process overall. Our brains work best when we feel well, physically and emotionally.

*“We are human “beings”, not human “doings.” ~Bernie Siegel*

*“We are human “beings”, not human “thinkings.” ~ Deepak Chopra*

### **Strategies that can be helpful:**

- ♥ Keep a Grateful Journal, writing down 3 things every day that were successful, an improvement, or made you smile.
- ♥ Arrange regular get-togethers with friends, even if just to chat on the phone or to meet for a cup of coffee or tea.
- ♥ Spend some time on a hobby.
- ♥ Practice random acts of kindness.



- ♥ Volunteer.
- ♥ Get some physical exercise, every day.
- ♥ Go outdoors; soak up some fresh air, sunshine and vitamin D.
- ♥ Sign up for a class, anything that interests you.
- ♥ Think about what is most important to you and how you can bring more of it into your life.
- ♥ Keep your perspective, refer to your calendar and journals to look back and note improvements. Celebrate what you can do now that you couldn't do six months or a year ago.
- ♥ Remember that you are still the same unique and valuable person inside, with the same loves that you had before your injury. No one and no injury can take that away from you.

Depression, like winter, is usually temporary, but if you feel like you are losing hope, please seek professional help.

### ***More about Barbara***

*Barbara J. Webster is author of Lost and Found, A Survivors Guide for Reconstructing Life after a Brain Injury, Lash & Assoc. Publishing and a contributor to Chicken Soup for the Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor's Soul.*

## **Join our Facebook Family**

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# Compensatory Corner What Works for you?

*We continue to offer strategies that help those impacted by Traumatic Brain Injury. Compensatory Corner is your place – by survivors, for survivors.*

Since Surviving my TBI almost 9 years ago, I also was dealt the severe anxiety disorder card as well. Due to this not-so-fun card, having a calm "Me Space" has become my best friend. Without it, I was in a panic all the time. I didn't know what would set off my next Trigger, or why. But it was just waiting to go off. BANG!

I have made my home, since I live alone now, my "Me Space." Others would say I'm isolating myself from the world, but I'm not. I am involved with about 50 support sites & groups on the Internet around the world for survivors. I chat with survivors every day, many times they are feeling depressed or upset and I'm able to help them refocus their thoughts, able to give ideas, able to help.

I run a community support page. I am on the phone with survivors several times a week. Many times I'm able to tell if one has forgotten to take their needed medication again and remind them to stop and take it before we continue talking. We talk about what's troubling them until they are calm and feeling better again, just having a friend to talk to. I spend the rest of the time either doing research about brain injury or living the daily difficult life of a Survivor.

I'm a very busy survivor! Just because I don't deal with the "normies" out there in society doesn't mean I'm not part of a society, I'm just a part of the society I choose to be a part of. I choose to be a part of my society: The Brain Injury Society. The "We Community!" ~ Jeni (Jennifer Stokley)

# Being Dirt Simple

By Jeff Sebell

We all know life can get very complicated after TBI. All the noise. All the bright lights. All the commotion. All kinds of overload which can lead to confusion, frustration and stress.

I've come up with a solution for me: We all know there is nothing simpler or as easy to understand as dirt, so I have decided that being dirt simple is the place for me. Dirt simple is what I want to be. I don't know many people who feel like this, other than myself, but my primary goal in life is to be dirt simple.

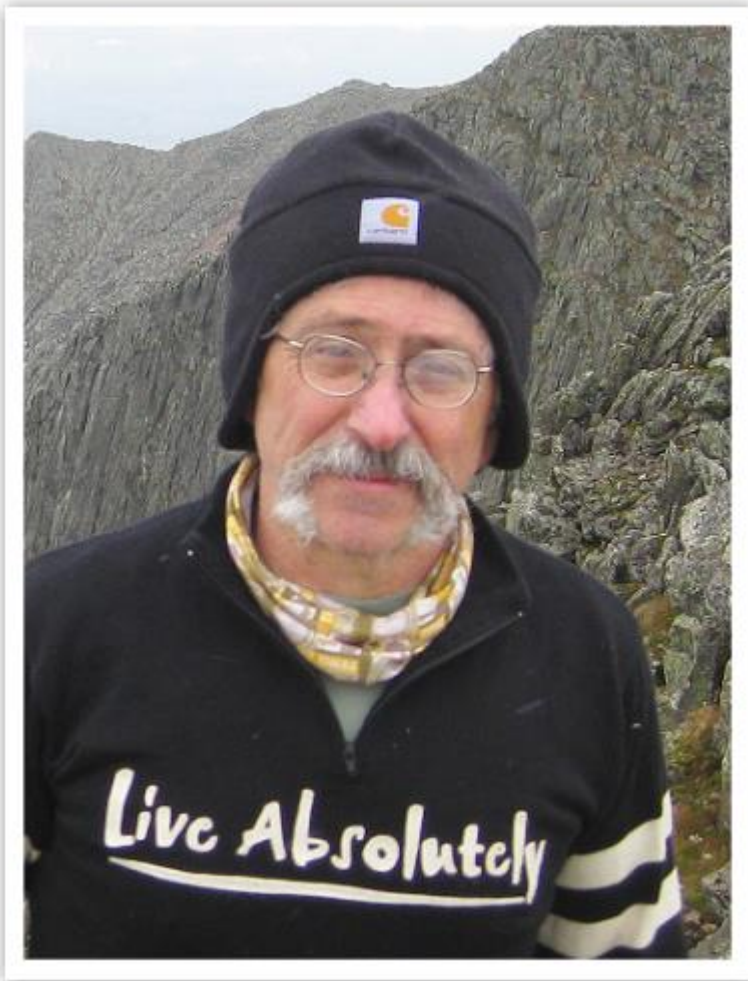
I think of being dirt simple as being in the mountains at sunset with the only sound being the sun making its fall out

of the sky: Nothing to think about. Nothing to do. No stimulation.

## The Joys of Dirt Simple

The truth is, if I had my old life back I probably wouldn't want to be Dirt Simple. I would probably still be trying to “achieve”, as the vast majority of people do, and by doing so I would miss out on some things I've grown to think are important. I wouldn't be trying to connect with my own humanity and the humanity of others. I wouldn't have a need to feel and promote those basic human emotions that make my life so rich. As a result, I would be losing out on a lot of important stuff that makes my life worth living, and the worst part is I wouldn't even know I was missing out.

My life now is all about putting to work those important lessons I have learned. The way I choose to live my life has to do with filling my life with meaning.





Being "dirt simple" is the best way for me to put meaning in my life, get myself back, and regain my "personhood" after TBI. I want to go to the place where I understand who I am, can find where I belong in the world, and what I stand for as a human being. Keeping my life simple: my wants and needs, my interactions; even my thoughts and desires, will make understanding and coordinating my life easier, and thus, more rewarding.

If I do all of the above, I may be limiting myself in certain ways, but I will function that much better and become really good at what I choose to do. This has become important to me since I experienced my brain injury, forty years ago.

### **Achieving is Deceiving**

How many people do you know or have heard of who achieve great things but whose personal life is a mess? That is the great secret that people always whisper about. I might go as far as to say that it also is the great deception, for many people who are achievers don't really achieve anything important at all.



The idea of "achievement," as most of society views it, is something I am not really interested in. Now, I have to be honest here: part of the reason for this is because some of my skills and abilities have been diminished since that "damn brain injury", making it unrealistic to achieve on society's terms, or based on what the "old Jeff" would have been able to accomplish. I do, however, want to succeed on my terms, and I have spent a long time working on my terms.

### **What are my terms?**

That has taken me a long time to find out.

At times I have been sidetracked, or lost my bearings, and there was definitely a time after my TBI when I wasn't sure where I wanted to go. I just kind of floated; reabsorbing

as much of life as I could. There was a time after that when I was working in a family business, supported by other family members. I was married with children and that, in large measure, happily created a whole bunch of priorities.



When everything hit the fan, almost 30 years after my TBI, I had to confront my life as it really was and not as I thought it was; I ended up getting divorced and starting over. Eventually, based on the circumstances I faced, as well as based on a determination of what was important to me as a human being, I arrived at my new goal: being "dirt simple."

### **Being Dirt Simple as a Virtue**

My revenge on my TBI is to live my life and be the best human being I can. In order to do that, I keep things simple. This is in direct contrast to just about everyone else who seems to think that being "crazy busy" is a sign of success, multi-tasking is good, and that walking down

the sidewalk or driving and holding your cell phone in front of you so you can read it, means that you have hit the big time.

I have bought into the virtues of simplicity. I don't want or need much, other than to be the best human being I can. It's made my life manageable and rewarding; a life I wouldn't trade.

### ***About Jeff Sebell***

*A long-time survivor, Jeff is the author of "Learning to Live with Yourself after Brain Injury." You can read more about Jeff and his journey on his blog at [www.TBISurvivor.com](http://www.TBISurvivor.com)*

# The Back Page

Over the last year, TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine has grown and evolved. Contributions from members of the professional and medical communities, family members and of course, our survivors have helped make our publication the fastest growing publication of its kind – now serving a worldwide readership. This is a shout out to 24 year old brain injury survivor Ritchie Schwie. Ritchie submitted the survivor art below. Way to go Ritchie!

**Happy Valentine's Day from Ritchie Schwie!**



*At TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine, we LOVE contributors. Got something you'd like to share? From artwork to photography and of course reader stories, we all have something to offer. Learn more about contributing at [www.tbihopeandinspiration.com](http://www.tbihopeandinspiration.com)*