

NOVEMBER 2015

TBI HOPE & INSPIRATION

Magazine

Just for you...

**A Very Special
Holiday Issue!**

**FROM TRAGEDY
TO TRIUMPH**

HOLIDAYS
THE BEST OF TIMES
THE WORST OF TIMES

**DISTRACTIONS
& DIVERSIONS**



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TBI Hope &
Inspiration
MAGAZINE

*Serving All Impacted by
Traumatic Brain Injury*

November 2015

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Welcome

The holiday season is in full swing and this brings new and often unexpected challenges to families that live daily with traumatic brain injury.

There are the social challenges that many face by spending more time with friends and family. There can be a profound sense of loss as many who were close to us have stepped quietly out of our lives – their absence is felt more so this time of year. There are financial pressures than can affect just about anyone.

But this is also a great time of year to celebrate the blessings that have befallen us. Many of us have new social circles that include other survivors and supporters. Life for most gets smaller, but with that, new appreciations can be found.

A smile shared, a call to a friend, a card mailed to someone you love – these are all seemingly small things that can brighten someone else's day.

Life with a brain injury will always bring about a unique set of challenges. But as my wife Sarah and I have learned – over time, a new and meaningful life can indeed be built anew. From our family to yours, we wish you the happiest of holidays.

May you find peace in your journey,



David A. Grant
Publisher

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Learning to rebuild a life fractured by brain injury is not an overnight task. In fact, it's a lifelong journey as this survivor shares.

Strategies for Surviving Social Minefields

By John Byler



I have been accumulating great strategies after working with my SLP Rick Sanders and Social Worker Sally Johnson. I share full credit with them. They each have about 25 years of experience working with TBI survivors, many a lot worse off than me.

John's Holiday Survival Strategies...

Agree on a coping signal with your spouse or partner

Use a word or phrase to signal a spouse or friend that you are finding it impossible to cope in a social situation. Whisper the signal and leave the room. He or she will provide you cover. My own signal is simple: I say to Lynne, "I can't do this."

Don't do "the linger!"

"I can't do 'the linger'" sounds like a line from a Seinfeld script, but it's a tactic that works. After an event that requires your attendance, avoid the schmoozing that generally follows. Even before you begin to sag cognitively, flee.

Manage yourself at family and friend gatherings

It's usually easier to go into the kitchen before dessert and do all the pots and pans - with earplugs - than continue in conversation around the table. If someone comes out to help you, thank them and say that it's easier for you than talking. Your guest will probably understand.

Recognize what kind of day it is, and act accordingly

One day I wrote in my journal, "Told Lynne I felt handicapped today. Everything is hard." Both she and I knew I'd be keeping a very low profile all day.

Leave at the height of the party, when you're feeling good

Lynne and I went to a party with some close friends. Michael and Nancy Jane sang professionally early in their careers, and out came the show tunes on their grand piano. At one point, Michael and I launched into "My Funny Valentine," one part Sinatra (him) and one part Elvis Costello (me). When we nailed the ending we all laughed, Michael and I hugged, and I was happy.



I immediately retreated upstairs and stretched out on a couch, not sleeping, just closing my eyes and enjoying the sounds of my dear friends laughing. I liked to think that they would be laughing harder had I been my old self, but that was okay. We'd had our moment.

Say no to cruel traps!

Bumper stickers reduce complicated issues to a few words. Here in Massachusetts, one bumper sticker promoted a ban on certain animal traps and the catchy phrase turned out to be a valuable tool for me. If I'm confronted with the possibility of a cognitively draining experience I think, "Say no to cruel traps!" In a room where, say, multiple conversations are taking place, if somebody strikes up a conversation with you, Say no to cruel traps and excuse yourself.

Keep track of the time

Lynne asked if I wanted to go with her and Will someplace and I said sure. Then I counted how long it had been since I'd rested and it had been 5 ½ hours. I was due to crash and they went without me. I slept for two hours and was okay for the rest of the evening.

Have a friend keep an eye on the clock for you

Forty minutes into lunch with my friend Ted, I began slurring my words and it was getting harder for me to put my thoughts together. Like a good friend, Ted took the initiative and said we should probably wrap up. I saw that was a great strategy.

I have understood each tip they have given me, but I have also ignored or underestimated their importance. Remembering to follow survival tips is probably the most important thing you can do to live better with even a mild brain injury.

Many of them might not feel natural, so you have to consciously remember to put them into practice.

Meet John Byler

John survived a collision on Route 495 just outside of Boston in September of 2005. He placed his recovery in the hands of Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston. John knew he needed to write a book about the best of the strategies he learned. *"You Look Great!" -Strategies for Living Inside a Brain Injury* has resonated with survivors, caregivers and clinicians.

National Directory of TBI Speakers Project

The Advisory Council of the Brain Injury Association of America has undertaken a project to develop a national directory of speakers who have had brain injuries.

It is our goal to make the directory as inclusive as possible, so the many people who have personally experienced BI/TBI can be involved in helping raise awareness about the topic.

We also want to make it easier for organizations looking to provide programs about BI/TBI to find speakers in the many areas involved with BI; from military to athletics, youth to elderly and etiologies from trauma to strokes, infections to toxic exposures, assault to domestic violence.

If you are speaking publicly about BI/TBI and are interested in being included in this national directory or have any questions about the directory, please contact Cheryle Sullivan, MD Member, BIAA Advisory Council at cherylesullivan@yahoo.com.



The Burden of Thoughtlessness

By Michael Strand

It's been almost thirty years since I had my accident that caused me a severe brain injury. I'm pretty high functioning, but I'll never be more than that. High functioning is the new normal. One way that this manifests itself, and is particularly annoying during the holidays, is through my lack of occurrence.

This looks exactly like being thoughtless, and I suppose that's what it is, but there is a key difference. When someone is accused of being thoughtless, it is usually seen as something that person could fix if they only wanted to. A brain injury simply makes it a fact. An unavoidable fact.

I do make notes and put in place such supports as are possible, so I can remember things like gift ideas and special dates. Unfortunately, much of what makes being thoughtful so wonderful is the unexpected and spontaneous. It is a struggle just to put the supports in place to fulfill the minimum of obligations, how can I go above and beyond that to the next level? The part where it is obvious that I think of and value others who are important to me.

The annoying fact is that this is just part of what makes brain injury a disability. I am unable to be spontaneous. It isn't even a good idea to try! When I try to be spontaneous, I usually just end up being inappropriate. Like all my other brain injury related disabilities, I should just accept this limitation and move on. Do what I can to mitigate the damage, but accept with equanimity "the things I cannot change." Now, I do this a lot, but I have difficulty accepting this aspect about myself when it comes to this lack of occurrence.

I love my wife so much. I truly appreciate the many things she does for me, the many sacrifices she has made by being married to me. It hurts me when something comes up where I should have thought of something, or should have done something, without having to be asked. She deserves so much more than I give. I



will not say “can give” or “am able to give,” because that just makes it sound like an excuse. As a salve for my soul, and a quantum of solace (to borrow a James Bond title), I do try to make up for it by being ever ready and cheerful to do anything she asks. Not as an obedient servant, but as a loving partner. Before I make myself seem superhuman and over-doting, note that I said “I try.” At times, I’m just too tired to be cheerful and supportive. I’m usually so focused on not leaning too heavily on her for the things I do need, that it is easy for me to be short and angry with her.

During the holidays is the time when I find myself in numerous social situations where there is a crowd of people and activity going on all around me, dates and names to remember, and where everyone is doing their very best to be extra thoughtful. It is like a minefield for brain injured people!

It is tempting, as I come to a close, to offer some sort of brief tip or cheery “be grateful for what you have” adage, but I think that would be disingenuous. I think we all know that we have to do our best with what we’ve got. My point here is simply to offer a warm communion. A simple acknowledgement that this brain injury thing is tough, especially during the holidays. I know that I am not alone in feeling this way. Nietzsche wrote, “Sharing joy increases it, and sharing pain decreases it.”

Meet Michael Strand

As a survivor who has lived with brain injury since 1989, Michael shares his experience through his written work including several books and his brain injury blog. Michael is also a Chicken Soup for the Soul contributing writer.

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Dealing with the Holidays

By Natalie Griffith

The holidays. Christmas is my favorite holiday: the tree, the apple cider, the presents, and of course making holiday Christmas cookies with my daughters! I love ALL of the holidays: Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day (my favorite), 4th of July, Halloween, and Thanksgiving are a few, but of course my favorite holiday is Christmas!

I love holidays so much because I get to participate in them and spend the extra time with my girls; holidays are fun, they are meaningful and should be celebrated because I am alive!



When a holiday approaches I get pulled in to the excitement by my children, which I love, but I have to be careful that I don't get too overwhelmed or frustrated; I tend to become overwhelmed too easily. I can't forget that through the feelings of frustration: I am a conqueror, a fighter, an overcomer!

Rather than respond in frustration or anger which tends to be easy sometimes, I gracefully and kindly remind my girls that I'm a little slower now. Yes I've improved a great deal but I can't just 'jump back into life' after getting the TBI; it's easier said than done. I've recovered a great deal but yet I still have issues with my memory and processing. I try to plan things more in a pattern, have a schedule. I'm a planner, but who isn't after getting a TBI?

Too much information becomes overwhelming for me. I tend to feel bombarded like everyone is coming to me for something, especially my girls, and I have three teenagers! I can adjust and adapt. My mom knows what to expect when I visit. The problem is that I look fine, seem fine and act fine because I am fine. It's been almost 6 years, but people tend to forget that a brain injury will affect someone FOREVER no matter how much we've recovered!

Every day is a healing/recovery process and it is important that I acknowledge where I am in my recovery and what I've gone through.

Even my children lose sight of the fact that I have a brain injury since I drive them to and from school every day, talk with them in the car, listen to them speak, give some advice and do so much for them. I think they forget that I'm injured because of how I act and do things. Being a mom is something I have always wanted, it's just different now because of my accident, but regardless, being a mom is pure joy. I have to ask other moms questions on how to respond or deal with my children sometimes because I am relearning how to be a mother. Advice from others is a necessity after a TBI.

“Too much information becomes overwhelming for me.”

The only thing about the holidays that disappoints me is money, or lack thereof. I still don't have a consistent job so I try to make the best of it for my girls. Since 2013, I've had five paying jobs but thanks to the government I am able to get monthly income to help me survive when I don't have a job, yet it is still not enough. Money shouldn't buy happiness and it doesn't. My kids understand the difficulty I'm going through, but it makes me feel like a disappointment to them because they are my children, and as a parent I feel like I should spoil them to the best of my ability.

Through it all, I have to give myself credit for all I've accomplished because I wasn't supposed to be alive. SUPER IMPORTANT... acknowledge where you are in your recovery: LOVE YOURSELF. Yes it's different and can be very hard at times, but YOU ARE A MIRACLE and have overcome SO much, don't forget that accomplishment! Don't rush, compliment yourself, give yourself credit, love yourself; enjoy the holidays that you get to take part in because you are alive!

Meet Natalie Griffith

Natalie was brought back to life, given a second chance at life on Christmas Day. She has been working on relearning how to be a mom and interact with her children. Say's Natalie, “I love to make things pretty, BEAUTIFUL, so I have started a cleaning organizing straightening job, bathrooms & kitchens are my specialty. Never, never, never give up!”

Lost in Transition

By Jeff Sebell



Isn't it always the small things that drive you crazy?

The little things take you by surprise and you don't know what to do about them. They are the things you think you should be able to control, but they make you feel helpless and frustrated. To top it off, they are the hardest things to accept or explain.

Transitions are one of those little things.

By now you all know that me and my TBI don't always see eye to eye. Especially when transitions are involved. Many are the times I want to go in one direction or start a new task, but my Brain Injury has other ideas, and I stay stuck.

Each person's day is typically marked by a number of transitions; no one spends the whole day thinking, talking, or doing the same thing. We move through activities, emotional situations, thoughts and mini-relationships all day.

Thus our daily lives are marked by times when we are required to turn on a dime; whether it be something new we have to do, a quick change in the subject of the conversation we're having, or new people popping into our life.

As we go through our day, we are expected to transition from one thing to another because that's what living is all about: people change the conversation when we aren't ready, or things happen out of the blue that we must adjust to.

This Aint Your Grandma's Transition

Chances are, before our brain injury we were able to adjust seamlessly to people and changing events. Now, post-TBI, perhaps our mind goes blank when

something new comes up, or we say the wrong thing because we are stuck on an old conversation, or we just can't seem to be able turn the corner to begin something new. Our ability to make these seemingly simple transitions has a great impact on how we feel about ourselves and how we value our contributions.

I realized that, in my daily life, I had to make a number of these simple transitions all the time, and my inability to make the small transitions smoothly contributed to the feeling of not being able to function properly, along with a general feeling of hopelessness and of life "sucking".

One of the "small" transitions I still find especially difficult, is when I am talking on the phone and am unable to pick up subtle shifts in the direction of the conversation.

The conversation happens with me stubbornly staying on the track I have planned out. I miss potential opportunities because I am unable to process the conversation fast enough. The result is that when the conversation ends, I beat myself up, wondering what I was thinking when I either said or didn't say something.

“The conversation happens with me stubbornly staying on the track I have planned out.”

Sometimes, an inability to shift gears and pick up on conversations or events is due to how our brain functions now: how quickly we process information or our ability to make connections. No, we are not dumb or stupid, but our brain works slower now than it used to, making it hard to keep up with changes that occur throughout our day.

I can also have trouble with transitions when I least expect it, like when I'm moving from one task to another. I just don't feel as nimble. I realized I needed some kind of "buffer" time, which would allow me to clear my mind, and get the old task out of my system; sort of like clearing the RAM in a computer by shutting it off for a bit.

What I started doing was playing a game of solitaire to mark the transition, so that in my mind I knew things were changing, and I could be ready, mentally, to move forward.

When we begin to understand and better relate to some of these "smaller"

transitions that occur in our everyday lives, we can better approach the 800 pound elephant in the room, which is how we make the transition from being a well-adjusted human being, living a normal life, to an individual who has experienced a brain injury.

This is the transition of all transitions, but we must realize that this one transition is made up of all the smaller transitions we face, and which we must master or accept. The truth is, we are probably not going to "master" all the transitions we make, but we need to find a way to feel good about ourselves as we move through the various situations we are confronted with.


Many times this can be accomplished simply by preparation.

By better understanding why we do things the way we do, we can know ourselves better. Being able to adapt to the way things are will better prepare us to move forward in a positive manner.

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

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Distractions & Diversions

By Norma Myers

It's been three years since the tragic accident that took our oldest son, Aaron, and left our youngest son, Steven, with a severe TBI. The date of the accident, coupled with Aaron's August 9th birthday, leaves me feeling more anxious and emotionally drained in August than any other month.



This year, in an attempt to combat my anxiety during the month of August, I found myself rapidly moving from one project to another. You can picture me with a “Do Not Disturb” sign hanging around my neck! The more consuming the project, the more satisfaction I felt. I ignored the signs of exhaustion and kept making lists. Early in the month, I found myself in a regularly-scheduled counseling session, during which I was asked how I was handling the month of August.

With no desire to linger on the question, I gave what I thought was a quick response: “I’m ready to move on.” For some reason, counselors like to dig! It didn’t take long to reveal that I was using every possible distraction as a form of survival. When I retraced my actions to the beginning of our journey, there was every sign that I had embraced diversions. A moment of being distracted means a moment of escaping my reality ... a reality that includes acceptance of living daily life without our first-born son and navigating the turbulent waters of traumatic brain injury.

Maybe, without realizing it in your own stressful situation, you have practiced what I call “distracted survival skills.” Consider this visual: you have an injury or an ongoing nagging pain that keeps your focus until one day you feel a more severe pain in another part of your body that sends off an alarm totally distracting you from the previous pain. For me, our devastating news split my heart between hearing the news of the death of one son and traumatic brain injury for the other.

I survived by putting all of my attention and energy into Steven's recovery from his brain injury. I was not able or willing to face daily life without Aaron. Focusing on Steven's recovery saved my life.

Practicing distractions and embracing diversions in the early stages of our tragedy



proved to be helpful, but as the calendar pages flipped, my actions left me analyzing. For me, analyzing often comes with a high price of guilt. Let me explain. Three years later, I find myself asking questions like: Why did I think I had to be strong for everyone? How could I have “normal” conversations with visitors? How could I smile or laugh? How could I enjoy morning deliveries from Starbucks?

In my mind, these things were not normal behaviors for a mom watching her son fight for his life while a life celebration was being planned for her first born. But in retrospect, I don't know how I was supposed to feel and act! This journey did not arrive at our door with a parental “how to” handbook!

I'm slowly learning to release the guilt. By allowing myself to feel even the most painful emotions, I can see that I was willing to do anything to distract myself from the devastating reality of Aaron dying. By attempting to carry on with normal behavior, I allowed myself to escape to a place where Aaron was still with me. I could handle Steven's injury, but not Aaron's death. By putting all of my focus on Steven's recovery, I didn't have to feel the pain of being separated from Aaron. If I could convince the rehab center to keep Steven longer, I wouldn't have to return to our home. I wouldn't have to face Aaron's empty bedroom.

After practicing this survival behavior for almost three years, it is frightening to think about not having a distraction. I have gone from being consumed with Steven's recovery to home improvement queen! On a light note, I'm really good with power tools!

Don't get me wrong. The passage of time has made the pain of this horrific experience less excruciating for me, and I believe that one day healing will arrive. For now, I'm going to allow myself as much time as it takes to feel the emotions I denied myself while wearing my "mom" survival armor – the very same armor that encased my broken heart, shielding it from completely shattering.

Meet Norma Myers

Norma and her husband Carlan spend much of their time supporting their son Steven as he continues on his road to recovery. Norma is an advocate for those recovering from traumatic brain injury. Her written work has been featured on Brainline.org, a multi-media website that serves the brain injury community. Her family continues to heal.

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Rethinking Your Holiday

By Deborah Schlag



For many, getting through the holidays is a struggle. People have an idea in their mind of what they expect for the perfect family gatherings, traditions, parties, special dinners as well as expectations of others they'll be spending time with. When all that is mixed together with disappointments or un-forgiveness of past behaviors of those others or ourselves, or other unresolved family issues, we can see why it is truly a difficult time for many... on a good day.

Adding any kind of illness or injury complicates things, especially if that injury carries with it long term recovery times such as brain injury. I say this about brain injury because there are so many unknowns complicating the actions and reactions of the injured person, and those around, that most times no one really knows what to expect. While everyone involved is dealing with so many uncertainties, preparing in advance is a must. Plan for and educate those who may not fully understand the situation, then do your best. Find creative ways to accomplish what needs to be done to keep you or your loved one comfortable. Simple is good.

I never thought the injuries I experienced from an auto accident were going to be long term. I thought I would be back to normal (or what was normal for me) in a week or so. Even when I was told to expect a 3-5 year recovery, I was sure they had mixed up my file with someone else.

The first Thanksgiving came; to this day all I can tell you about it is I was there with all my children, grandchildren and a few others, nothing else. The same is true of Christmas, it came and went, I have no memory of that either. We loved and celebrated life every day in our house, but the holidays were even more so. I loved the tradition of it - my families' traditions, the colors, the lights, and especially the music. In fact you could hear Christmas music played throughout

the year at my house because I loved the way it made me feel, always cheery, upbeat and hopeful. One of our traditions had been when Thanksgiving dinner was over Christmas began. As the table was cleared, food put away, with the turkey bones picked over and on the stove for the next day's soup, the music started with Elvis Christmas. Everyone danced around the kitchen and helped - - everyone!

There was so much that I didn't participate in All YEAR that first year. Because our family was so large, normally I started right after Christmas planning and shopping for the next year. By Thanksgiving I would have everything done, gifts wrapped, and filled with anticipation of the excitement and joy on the faces of those I loved when they opened their gifts. It was never quite clear who was more excited: those receiving, or me excited over giving them. While others were ramping up going through holiday rush and sales I could sit back and enjoy every minute of it. If I ran into something extra it was just icing on the cake. To miss that was huge. Huge for me because I wasn't doing it, huge- especially my husband, because he was by default doing his job and also mine. I was with my family and missing them all at the same time.

By the time the second Thanksgiving came around I was more awake. I don't remember helping much; I probably slept until everyone showed up. All my children, their children and others were all there talking, joking, and laughing. I don't remember it with the exception of shortly into the meal I was unable to process, which turned to overload and shaking. I had to take my plate to another room where it was quiet for everything to calm down.

Everyone knew and we all wished it was different, but until improvement came we did what needed to be done to get through.

I remember the second Christmas because we were in the process of moving. My husband, our two youngest children and I spent Christmas at the Residence Inn. We (really my husband did most of it) cooked a Christmas dinner on a much smaller scale, we had a small little tree from the floral department of a local store and we each had one gift. It was quiet and full of love and I will never forget it.

Life is always changing and we have changed with it, the holidays are no different. We like to make memories for our gifts. We go places, do things, we're silly, we laugh and play. We've gone to the balloon fiesta in New Mexico, having Christmas

“By the time the
second
Thanksgiving came
around I was more
awake.”

in October. Or we can be found celebrating at the beach in August. We plan in advance – every other year we go someplace together. That way everyone saves up for what we are to do. Even the younger grandchildren love this more so than the traditional celebrations. This is an awesome way to celebrate, especially when separated by distance – no worries about others traveling in bad weather or getting stuck in an airport or dealing with the crowds. The other thing about it is that it's a memory etched in everyone's heart and mind, unlike the sweater or toy that will go by the wayside or be forgotten in several months. We will be with our children long after we are gone through the memories we created with our time.

I consider myself healed even though I do several things differently. Because I no longer frequent places with high EMF (electro-magnetic fields) like major cities, concerts, malls, and such, my husband takes one of the kids with him to do things he would like to do that I no longer can do. This is a great thing for all of us. He never has to feel like he is missing out on something he would like to do and has one on one time bonding those relationships. When they get back I get to see and hear it through them, their excitement, their experience, so they relive it again with me. The kids also spend time with me doing other things that I never used to do, maintaining my bond with them. Even though our children are fully-grown it's important to have and maintain a good relationship with us together and each separately.

We haven't stopped there; while we do love the whole traditional dinner thing we also love Mexican food. On Thanksgiving and Christmas I fix enchiladas, fresh beans, and rice, then we do the traditional meal another day. Don't be afraid to switch things up. Adjust to what is easiest for everyone concerned so that everyone has a great time.

Most of all celebrate every day! Each day as you wake realize it is a gift given to you.

More About Deborah

Deborah Schlag is the author of the award-winning book *Becoming the Healer, The Miracle of Brain Injury*. Deborah lives in North Carolina with her husband where she has founded Awakenings Center For Inner Healing & Empowerment – a non-profit healing center to bring healing to others and empowering them to move forward in their own healing process.



Holidays – The best of Times, the Worst of Times

By Amiee Duffy

I love Thanksgiving! I love Christmas! I love New Year's Eve! I love the entire time of year between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve! However, even though I have always enjoyed this special time of year and all of the traditions that go along with it, it is stressful. Menus, grocery shopping, Christmas shopping, wrapping, family get-togethers, parties & Christmas cards.

This year, I am still "recovering" from my mTBI. I am getting a little nervous. Honestly, I am getting "a lot" nervous. Those recovering from

TBI know that a stressed out brain does not help matters, so I am working on developing a PLAN.

I have made a list of the things I normally do this time of year. (Wow! I was pretty amazing! No wonder it got a bit stressful at times.) After creating my list, I prioritized it. What things can I let go of doing? What things are on my "must do" list simply because they make me happy? Fortunately most of those things don't have to happen on a certain date.

When I am feeling good, those are the days I will do things with my children. For example, getting a tree may not happen at the same time and it may take a few days to decorate it, but it will happen. The rest of the decorating around the house can wait if I'm not up to it. When decorating outside, a must-do is a wreath. But this year I can just put a spotlight on it and the rest of the outdoor lights don't have to be put up.

Creating and writing Christmas cards is a favorite holiday activity of mine. I can begin this earlier than I normally do and continue writing and sending them into January. However, I can let go of writing a personalized message on every card. Holiday shopping - I plan on doing as much as possible online. People love gift cards too! For the preparing part of the holidays, I feel prepared. The socializing

part, not so much. Thanksgiving with extended family and Christmas with children and parties given by other people happen on THAT day. And THAT day may not be one of my best.

I am not sure how I am going to feel and as I am writing this, I realize that the first step is getting comfortable with the uncertainty. I have prepared my extended family for Thanksgiving.

"I am so looking forward to seeing you. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate because I can't drive the two and a half hours in bad weather. My brain can't handle it. If I'm having a difficult time that week brain wise, I will call in advance so you don't go through all the trouble of preparing a meal for the four us."

Holiday parties - I plan on prioritizing. I will not go to every party. I will go to parties for a shorter period of time. I will strategically place myself in a corner or area away from the loudest area of noise. I will let a person I trust know that if they notice me getting fatigued before I do, to let me know discreetly. I will remember the SLOB mnemonic if I begin getting overloaded while speaking - SLOW down my speech or the speed of the entire conversation so my word retrieval and processing is better, speak LOUDER if I am getting breathy, OVER ENUNCIATE if I start feeling as my speech is getting sloppy, and BREATHE.



The period of time between Thanksgiving and January first, is meant to be a time filled with love, laughter, and forgiveness. This year I plan on loving who I am at this moment, forgiving myself when I feel I am letting others down because I can't do everything in the same way I typically do, and remembering to laugh at myself when I have my "TBI moments."

Meet Amiee M. Duffy, M.Ed

Amiee M. Duffy is the proud mother of three children. She has been teaching for over twenty years and is looking forward to using what she has learned about Executive Function and Working Memory in order to better serve all students in her classroom.

From Tragedy to Triumph

By Jessica Taylor

In a split second, the life that I once knew vanished forever. Abandoned to the whims of fate, my inner world was tossed into complete chaos. Here, emotions and feelings had no source, no rhyme or reason.



Toronto, Canada, 1969: On a cold and dark wintry evening, while out conducting routine business, I tumbled head first down a steep flight of stairs. After suffering a devastating head and brain injury and a near-death experience, I woke up in a hospital bed. At the foot stood three complete strangers: my husband and two young daughters. Later, looking in the bathroom mirror, I beheld the horrific image of a gargoyle.

Escaping the doctor's knife, I left my husband and absconded with my two daughters to England. There I looked to the only person I could trust: my mother. But standing in my way was a stepfather who was determined to make my life a living hell. Forced out of my mother's home while being hooked on massive doses of uppers, downers and barbiturates, I rented a house for my daughters and myself.

Sadly, even with my youngest daughter acting as caregiver it became abundantly clear I didn't possess the mental or emotional capacity to be the mother I once was. Even with sending my beloved girls back to live with their father in Canada, his stable love could not keep my children from developing emotional problems.

Suffering on the brink of madness, I lived in an incredible world on the fringes of reality. While re-experiencing infancy, adolescence and early adulthood, I made my way into English society only to become a vulnerable target for unscrupulous predators. They knew, without having to be told, that within my beautiful, mature body lived a child-like mind. But I had my protectors too in the form of well-known jazz musicians who took me under their wing.

My 16+ years of recovery were not without their humorous moments. Verbal dysphasia and comical anecdotes led to much embarrassment and laughter. I

learned to laugh again but also learned to rely upon my intuition, my inner voice. Some strange, unknown force led me to the Isle of Wight, UK, where I immediately found a cozy bed-sit overlooking the ocean. The heating bills were too high, so I sought warmth in the research room at the library. When the librarian asked me what I wanted to study, something made me cry out, "God!"

This was the beginning of an exciting journey, a quest to discover who and what I truly am...a quest that took 14 arduous years of research. It was then I stumbled upon an amazing discovery: through my intensive work I learned I was actually and inadvertently healing my brain through stimulating dormant neurons. Steadily and slowly, I grew in mental and spiritual awareness.

My chosen subject, the science of religion and the supernatural, changed my life and steered me towards a new way of thinking, opening a portal in my mind and led me to recently completing a 66,740 word story about my findings which I hope to have conventionally published!



Peace, however, was still a long ways away. A grueling court case led to one of the longest court battles in Canadian history, a battle marred by collusion and fraud, making both legal and medical history. Somehow I rose above it all, especially with the support of new, trusted friends, the deep love of my daughters, and my spiritual beliefs. Rising like a phoenix from my own ashes, I gained

the compassionate capacity to embrace others suffering the devastating effects and grievous losses of brain injury.

Through my participation in the worldwide movement for brain-injury awareness, I enact change one step at a time. Especially by educating those cruelly prejudiced against the brain-injured and insisting upon and advocating modifications in outdated rehabilitation systems.

That long-ago misshapen face in the mirror is now a faded memory. In its place is another image: a strong determined crusader. From the hospital room of so long ago where I fought for my life, I now fight for the lives of others. I didn't give up then and I won't give up now.

Meet Jessica Taylor

Jessica E. Taylor is the author of the books 'The Journey Back' and 'From Tragedy to Triumph: Journey Back from the Edge'. She is an activist for Head Injury Awareness, and was honored to have been featured in the Betty Clooney Center Newsletter, March 2013. She was also featured on the Hidden Heroes documentary film on Canadian TV as well as several National TV and radio chat shows in both the North and South of Ireland.



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.

“Realizing that I can no longer live as I used to, I try to keep my pace slower. It’s not easy, but it gets easier.” ~R.H.

“I try to avoid holiday shopping on weekends. This may sound small, but crowds overwhelm me. I find that going out when there are fewer people helps keep it fun.” P.K.

“Last year I lost my job of over 20 years. To make things easier, I have scaled down gift giving and will do a lot of baking this year. My friends LOVE my holiday cookies and it doesn’t break the bank!” F.D.

Contributors Wanted!



TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine is always looking for stories to publish. Submit your story by email to mystory@tbihopeandinspiration.com.

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