

Brain Injury

November 2018

# HOPE

supporting the  
brain injury  
community

MAGAZINE

SERVING ALL AFFECTED BY BRAIN INJURY

Where Readers Find

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# Welcome

## Publisher's Introduction

### **HOPE MAGAZINE**

*Serving the Brain  
Injury Community*

**November  
2018**

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#### **Welcome to the November 2018 issue of HOPE Magazine!**

Over the years, readers have reached out to us, noting that the diversity of our contributors is something they have come to enjoy about HOPE Magazine.

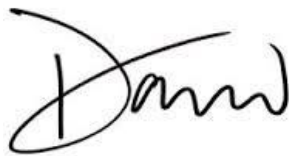
This month, the aggregate years of the survivors featured is measured in decades. With experience comes knowledge and wisdom, as survivors – and those who love them – learn to navigate the waters of life after brain injury.

Our contributors have shown both willingness and courage as they openly share about life after brain injury. It is in their sharing that we all learn.

Every story has value. Every life has worth. We are looking for others willing to share about their own personal conquests over brain injury. You can learn more about submitting your story on our website at [www.BrainInjuryHope.com](http://www.BrainInjuryHope.com). Don't worry – you don't need to be a writing professional.

A heartfelt thank you to this month's contributors. Without them, there would be no HOPE Magazine!

Peace,



David A. Grant  
*Publisher*

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*"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."*

~Confucius



# People Think I Have it Easy

By Dawne McKay

Life was great that fall morning. I had just spent the night at my boyfriend's house and was watching the sunrise as I drove to a job that I loved. I finally held a position within an Organization that I had been dreaming about. I was healthy, happy and extremely driven. I was in a wonderful relationship that had just blossomed, and I had great friends both personally and professionally. I was an excellent driver with an exceptional driving record for the last twenty years and I had never been in a horrific accident. I was well liked and full of confidence. Life was good.

I vaguely remember the first impact from the distracted driver that hit me from behind causing me to be tossed around my vehicle and I do not remember the second impact from a tractor trailer. I remember feeling trapped, cold, frightened and confused. I was rushed to a local hospital then immediately transferred to a trauma hospital where I stayed for a few days mending multiple injuries including a head injury.

“I vaguely remember the first impact from the distracted driver that hit me from behind.”

My good life now consisted of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, medical appointments, legal appointments, sleepless nights, nightmares, financial burdens, anxiety, and chronic pain. Once mobile, I was introduced to outpatient rehabilitation where I attended twice a week. After a year or so I was told I

had reached a plateau which meant I had to accept the fact that I would not fully recover but I would continue treatments. Did I mention my good life also consisted of depression and weight gain? Receiving news that you have reached a plateau in your recovery can do that to you.

Every activity is painful, and you are forever mourning the "you" who once accomplished so much in a day. Confidence has taken a back seat and I no longer enjoy being in a vehicle. I can now predict weather and can tell you when it will rain. I can even go as far to tell you when there will be a change in the barometric pressure - lucky me! A peaceful night's sleep is a thing of the past as my nights are now interrupted with trying to find a comfortable position to deal with the pain. I lost the job I had worked so hard for and close friends disappeared. My good life is now facing the fact that I have arthritis in many areas of my body and I feel like I have aged ten years.

Financially, this life-changing event almost broke me. The battles that take place with insurance companies after a car accident is shameful. Fighting for what you paid into is a full-time job in itself. My good life now consists of hearing numerous remarks from people that seem to know me better than myself. Remarks such as, "Must be nice not to have to work," "You will feel better once you get your settlement," "You look fine," "You need to get over it," and "There is nothing wrong with you," just to name a few. I still get upset and angry hearing these types of comments because people just don't seem to get it.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not ask to leave my job. I did not quit, get a promotion or get fired. That decision was made for me the morning a driver decided to drive distracted and rear end me at a high rate of speed.

**Financially, this life-changing event almost broke me. The battles that take place with insurance companies after a car accident is shameful.**

For the people who think I have it easy, I would ask that you change places with me for one day. Live with my chronic pain and tell me if you still think I have it easy.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not choose to have sleepless nights filled with flashbacks, nightmares, chronic pain, and anxiety. That life change was made for me because a driver was not paying attention.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not choose to wait over a year to receive any type of income while my insurance company decided if my injuries were significant enough. That decision was made for me because I could not work.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not choose to become forgetful and no longer a multi-tasker. That decision was made for me because my head crashed into the windshield of my car, which caused a traumatic brain injury.

For the people who think I have it easy, being involved in a car accident is not a sudden windfall. I would prefer to be driving into work today but I am not able to.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not choose to have PTSD. That decision was made for me after being involved in a horrific car accident.

For the people who think I have it easy, I did not choose to stay in bed all day today, that decision was made for me because I live with chronic pain.

For the people who think I have it easy, although I may look fine to you, I ask you to remember that my life completely changed because of my accident. Surviving a car accident is a daily struggle on so many levels and even though you may see me smiling, I suffer from chronic pain, PTSD and I am on my third night with barely any sleep. Unless you have experienced a horrific car accident first hand, you will truly never understand, so please don't be so quick to judge.

## **Meet Dawne McKay**

*Dawne McKay is the founder of MVA Support & Recovery, an online support group helping those who have been involved in motor vehicle accidents. Dawne also blogs about her own personal experience as a survivor of a horrific collision. You can find her group, MVA Support & Recovery, on Facebook.*





# Twenty-five Years of Brain Injury

By Scott La Point

Without even thinking, it happened, again and again. Nearly a half-dozen times. The reflexive, almost unconscious movement of my left hand to the frontal cortex area of my helmet, followed by a tap, tap, tap, tap. As if on autopilot, every time I passed another cyclist who wasn't wearing a helmet, my left index finger instinctively reached for my orange Lazer Helium, tapping it four or five times to indicate, *"You forgot your helmet."*

As with previous excursions, today's ride was no different, with undulating hills and patchy blue skies and unusually temperate weather. Only September 23, 2018, my ride took on greater significance because that day marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of that late September afternoon in 1993 when I was hit from

behind by a food-delivery truck while cycling solo on an old, mostly deserted highway in Shreveport, LA. From what I later learned, the distracted driver attempted to speak to me after

**"The distracted driver attempted to speak to me after delivering me seventy-two feet down the road."**

delivering me seventy-two feet down the road, but I was snoring, he told police. Deep in coma, I had nothing to say. For four days. More than thirty days of post-traumatic amnesia beset me afterwards.

Perhaps it's the survivor of TBI in me (or the neuropsychologist) that keeps me pointing and reminding, indicating in some small way that wearing a helmet might just save someone's life. Whatever the case, most cyclists riding past are oblivious of the reason for my gesticulation, mistaking it for a wave as they usually respond "Hello!" In my more than twenty-odd years of doing this, only one person (that I know of) has ever reacted harshly: an angry, middle-aged man who, riding past as I made my finger-tapping motion, turned around and confronted me at a red light, shouting, "I don't need another father!"

Father issues aside, his incensed response let me know that I had hit a nerve. Yet, as hard as I try, keeping myself from repeating this finger-to-helmet motion is almost impossible. It's become an obsession, an addiction of sorts, one that I have convinced myself is meant to help another cyclist from sustaining brain damage.

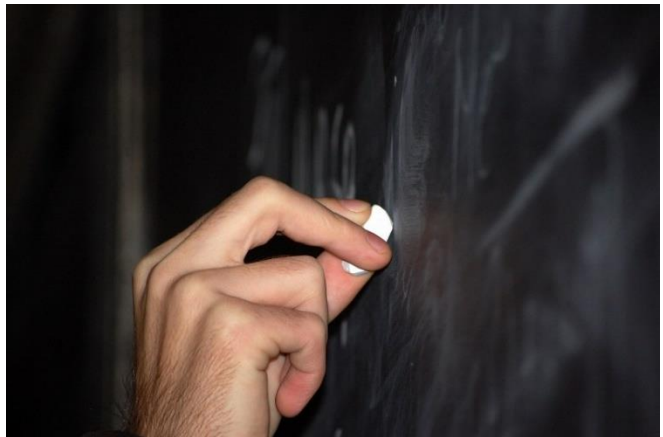
In my two decades of work in the field of brain injury and as many years in the saddle, there are a number of things I have learned about the psychology of people, the cycology of cycling, and the wisdom that comes with twenty-five years of being a survivor of brain injury.

#### *Things I have learned...*

*Not every injury to the head results in a brain injury. But those that do, concussions included, should be taken seriously and evaluated by someone knowledgeable about TBI (e.g., neurologist) then treated by a comprehensive team of therapists (i.e., neurology, licensed psychologist/neuropsychologist, OT, PT, SLP, licensed counselor or brain injury specialist).*

*One bad experience with a neuropsychologist doesn't mean the entire field of neuropsychology is bad. Just as there are dishonest auto mechanics, there are Doctors of Psychology who are practicing in the field and probably shouldn't be. You don't give up eating pizza because of one bad Domino's delivery, do you?*

*Football is a brutal sport, regardless of age. Enough is known about concussion and possible long-term deficits that youth football probably should be banned. Grown men who continue to play professionally knowing all that we know today, probably should be evaluated by a psychologist.*





*Though often overlooked, nutrition's contribution to healthy brain function as well as mental health/wellness cannot be overlooked. What your mom told you as a kid is true: You are what you eat.*

*My teenage son's brain won't be fully formed until about the age of twenty-five, so it's important that I model grace and understanding along with firm boundaries and consequences for his lame-brained decisions and actions.*

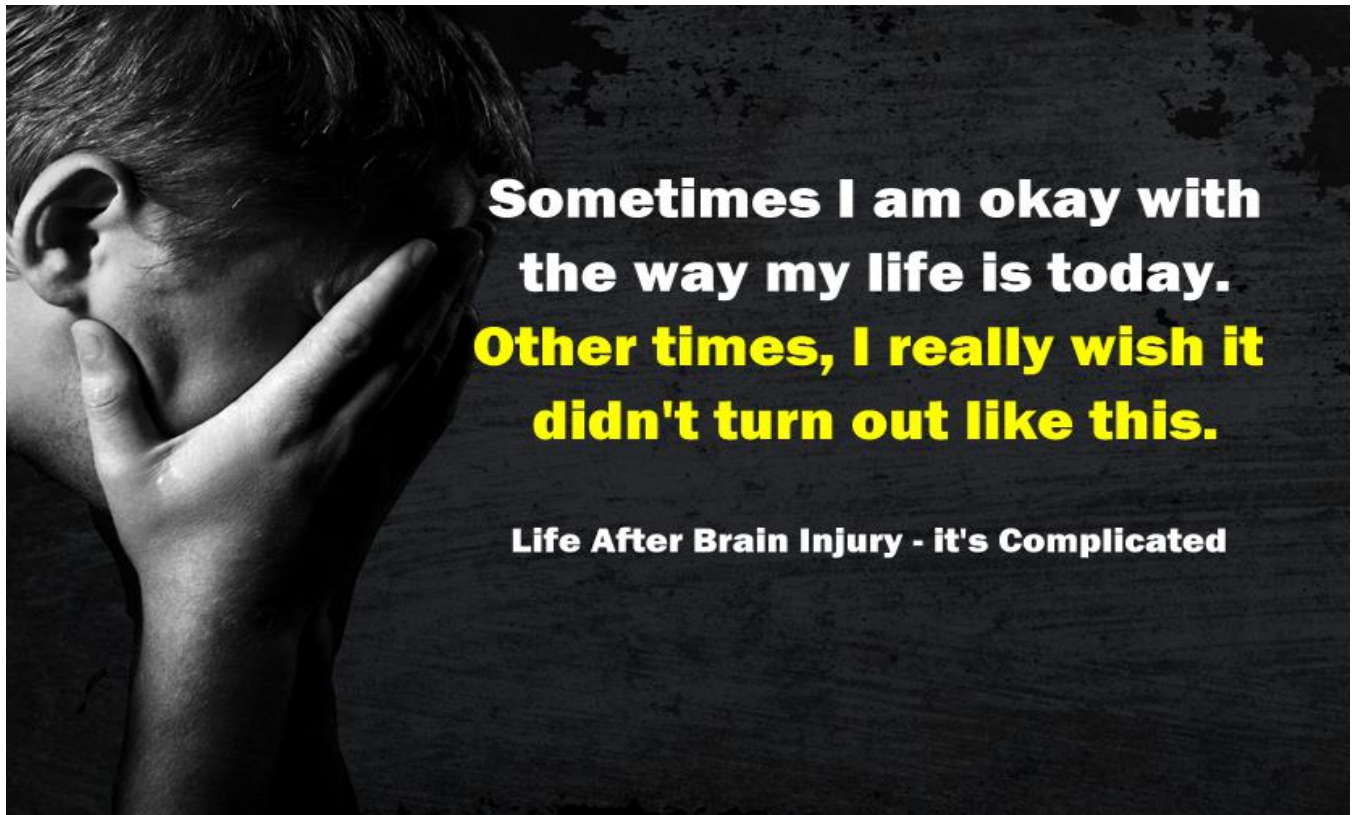
*Life is short. It is hard. But a life worth living is one where personal happiness is a result of serving others and living for a cause bigger than one's self.*

*Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.*

*Medication is never the life-saver it's made out to be; it's more like a life-preserver. It's usually meant for short-term, not long-term use. It is intended to help get someone who is drowning to dry land. Once there, skill-building and cognitive therapy are sometimes as efficacious as anything big-pharma has to offer.*

*Learn to be a good mono-tasker. Our brains were never wired, never created to be able to concentrate on two things at once. Multitasking decreases one's ability to learn as well as one's attention span, short-term memory, and overall mental functioning.*

*Suffering isn't something that one can necessarily overcome. Instead, we must learn to embrace it. It is in our times of distress and misery and grief that we learn life's biggest lessons. Learning to make sense of and even embrace suffering can yield life's greatest treasures.*



**Sometimes I am okay with  
the way my life is today.  
Other times, I really wish it  
didn't turn out like this.**

**Life After Brain Injury - it's Complicated**

Research shows that cycling is good for your noggin, along with brain-derived neurotropic factor (BDNF) produced while cycling, promotes the formation of new brain cells.

Psychology doesn't have all the answers. Although it is a science built upon empiricism and norms and standardization, there are many questions it cannot answer. As a professor once told me, so much of what one needs to do to be successful takes using common sense. Many of us have forgotten how to do that.

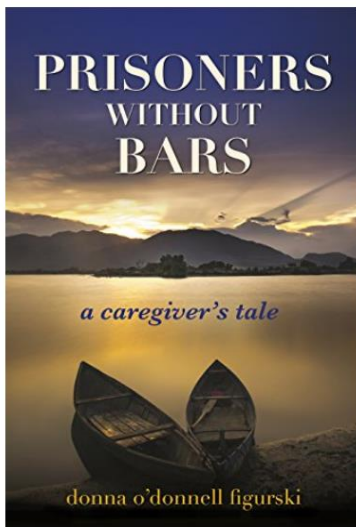
I've learned that some of the best therapists I have ever had were my closest friends. Stay close to those who have your best interests at heart – and enjoy the journey!

### Meet Scott La Point

*Scott La Point, Psy.D., sustained a severe TBI in 1993 when he was hit from behind by a truck while cycling. Dr. La Point is a licensed psychologist/neuropsychologist and Brain Injury Specialist who lives in Loveland, CO. He facilitates support groups for individuals with brain injury. Scott has worked in various capacities in the field of brain injury, from peer mentor, newsletter editor, and job coach to life skills trainer, program coordinator, and licensed counselor.*



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# Invisible Trauma

By Margaret Evans

"You look great!"  
Words that should cheer me up.  
Instead, it's hard to find a "thank you."  
I wear red.  
Inside my brain feels like  
a dark shade of gray, heavy as steel.  
No one knows.  
Hard to believe for some.  
Looks are convincing, questions take work.  
To wear pain  
would be too much to bear.  
Instead I continue in silence.  
The answer.  
Find help from those who know trauma  
who patiently guide me toward the light.



*Margaret Evans was hit by a truck as a pedestrian standing on the sidewalk in 2016. She flew 10-15 feet landing in between two cars. She has found writing poetry therapeutic to her recovery and shares her poems on her website: [www.JourneyOfaTBI.com](http://www.JourneyOfaTBI.com). Margaret currently works part time as a counselor leading therapy groups in Portland, Oregon.*

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# Brain Pain

**By Jeannette Reina**

For those of you unfamiliar with brain injury, I'm going to try to tell you what it's like, for me, to go through this. Three-and-one-half years later I'm still hoping for that happy ending. There are numerous other publications out there on this subject, but every person's experience is different. In writing this, I hope to connect to others on a similar path and having a similar experience.

I was an extremely active adrenaline junky athlete. Surfer, trail runner, mountain biker, adventurer. I wasn't necessarily great at any of these, but I certainly enjoyed them. I raised three kids pretty much by myself while going to pharmacy school, taking board exams, and getting licensed. While going to pharmacy school, working and taking care of the kids, I swam, mountain biked and ran. A lot. I did this by sleeping four hours or less per night for over five years. Plus, I always naturally had a ton of energy and just didn't need much downtime.

I graduated from pharmacy school in 1997 at the age of thirty-six, miraculously passed the grueling two-day California board exam, took a job, and moved back to my native California, where I hadn't lived since I was twenty-years-old. I missed the wide-open outdoor wild spaces of my former Wyoming playground, so I learned to surf. I got sufficiently good at it to have a most excellent time. My biggest

wave had a twelve-foot face. This doesn't seem so big, but to be fair I learned to surf at thirty-nine. I've never loved any sport more. I was in the water every spare second. I had whales under me, dolphins all around surfing the same waves, scary sea lions yelling at me, and even a nine-to-ten-foot long white shark change his mind mid-strike and dive a microsecond before he hit my leg. I surfed at home in California, in Hawaii, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Nicaragua. I was very dedicated and spent untold hours in the water.

In May of 2014, I was in Denver for my youngest daughter's college graduation, when I was rear-ended by a hit-and-run driver on the freeway. I lost consciousness for several seconds (I'm not sure how long), but when I woke up I was shocked to see the car wasn't completely crushed around me. I was in the left lane of a busy freeway, but I couldn't think of what to do. I called 911 hysterically crying and the dispatcher told me to move the car to the right shoulder. I literally couldn't remember how to drive and began to panic. After several minutes of talking to the dispatcher, I managed to pull the car over.

In May of 2014, I was in Denver for my youngest daughter's college graduation, when I was rear-ended by a hit-and-run driver on the freeway.

The ambulance took me to the hospital because of concerns about my neck. I was super dizzy, but nobody seemed to care about that. I couldn't sit up at the hospital because I kept almost passing out. Again, nobody seemed to think that was significant. They did an x-ray on my neck and since it wasn't broken, they sent me home. I iced my neck and slept much of the rest of that afternoon. The following day I walked a few miles to get a massage, shake off the accident, and "loosen up," but I kept getting nauseated and dizzy.

The following day was the graduation, most of which I don't remember. When it was time to fly home a couple of days later, my oldest daughter dropped me off at the ticket counter area of the airport and went to park the car. When I got inside, I couldn't read some of the writing on the signs and I couldn't figure out what to do or where to go. I was standing there in a ridiculous stupor when my daughter found me. The agent refused to let me fly when she saw how disoriented I was, so she rescheduled my flight for a few days later. At that point, I knew that I needed a scan to make sure I didn't have a brain bleed, so my daughter took me to a different emergency room, where I was diagnosed with neck strain and concussion. "Concussion" is a nice way of describing a "mild" traumatic brain injury. They call it mild if your skull isn't smashed, cracked, broken or penetrated.

I eventually flew home and when I got there, I realized I couldn't drive because I couldn't keep the car in the lane. I also couldn't stop myself from staring way too long at anything interesting on the side of the road. Always a problem anyway, but after THE ACCIDENT it got a million times worse. I couldn't walk even halfway down the block, go to the store, stand up for very long, look at any type of electronic screen, pay my own bills or do any paperwork or banking, tolerate any noise except quiet relaxation music through my noise-canceling headphones, engage socially with anyone, or work.

Oddly, I stopped biting my nails and they grew out long and I had to cut them all the time. I think the logical worrying side of my brain wasn't working, so I was living almost completely in the present moment, and I didn't feel stress. Thank goodness for my adult middle daughter who pretty much did everything for me.

I was told several months later by a neurologist that if I had been properly diagnosed by the first hospital, I would have been given correct instructions for care and probably wouldn't be in the Post-Concussion Syndrome nightmare I continue to live in.

My symptoms are headaches, nausea, dizziness, exhaustion, depression, ears ringing, memory and processing issues, a bizarre numb face thing, inability to deal with stress, blood sugar issues, inability to exercise much at all, can't work much, can't deal with crowds, noise, bright lights, and various other issues.

What prompted me to write this article is my discovery of a recent study that shows that regular people like me are three to four times more likely than the general non-concussed population to commit suicide after an average of 5.7 years post-concussion. It's worse if you've had more than one concussion. I've had at least three or four that I know of. Terrifying business indeed, and I can totally relate. As I'm writing this I feel like my top teeth are going to fall out because I have such a bad headache.

Severe depressions are one of the real dangers of a brain injury. I have not had a depression episode for a couple of months and I can clearly see that the depressive periods do pass, even if they last for weeks. Medications haven't worked for me, as they cause severe side effects in my case.

“What prompted me to write this article is my discovery of a recent study that shows that regular people like me are three to four times more likely than the general non-concussed population to commit suicide after an average of 5.7 years post-concussion.”

I'm reminding myself right now that I might have more severe depression episodes, to not be surprised by them, and to just breathe through them and keep existing. The despair that can come is so intense that I absolutely can't do justice to the misery with mere words. During my depressions, listening to audiobooks can give me a break. Reading and retention are still not so easy, but an engaging audiobook is easy and can temporarily move me out of that bleak, dark ocean while I'm listening to the story. (I check them out of the library digitally and load them onto my phone, so it's free.)

I'm watching a blizzard while I write this. I've discovered that even though I have chosen to give up my adrenaline rush sports in exchange for a safer brain, I can get that rush from extreme weather. Wind, snow, and thunderstorms are amazingly satisfying replacements. The beauty of a Rocky Mountain sky cannot be matched, in my opinion, and I appreciate the incredible beauty all around me, every single day.

Today I feel very peaceful and hopeful, and for that I am grateful. Not every day is like this, so when these days come I enjoy them and eat whatever I want, which is fun. I rarely, if ever, used to let myself do that. Another good thing that has come out of all this is that I literally have time to stop and smell the roses. And dance with my cat.

## Meet Jeannette Reina

*Jeannette is a lifelong adrenaline seeker, mother, grandmother, lover of outdoors, lover of learning, animals, and children. She has found a way to live a meaningful life after her brain injury and hopes that others will find inspiration in her story.*



**I don't claim to know everything. I claim to be a seeker of knowledge.**

*~Marie Osmond*





# The Central Park Piano Teacher

By Kyle McCann

Twenty-two years ago I was brutally attacked in Central Park, leaving me brain-injured. Recovery statistics didn't look good. But with excellent medical care, family love, and my own hard work, my brain rewired itself to compensate for the parts that atrophied. I spent the years since then successfully reclaiming my mind. Aside from my epilepsy and dry eyes, I've recovered.

On June 4, 1996, when I was thirty-two years old and living on West 57th Street in Manhattan, I took an afternoon walk in Central Park. I had just taught a piano lesson. Newspaper articles, not my memory, tell the story. My walk took me to the area near Central Park West and the West 80s known as Summit Rock. A man pushed me down and bashed my head along the Belgian blocks bordering the macadam path. He tried to rape me, took my wallet and left the Park. I was unconscious, my right eye had swollen shut, the bones above that eye were shattered, I was bleeding profusely from my ear and nose, and my brain had begun to swell. The criminal was caught June 13th.

**"A man pushed me down and bashed my head along the Belgian blocks bordering the macadam path."**

I had a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), which happens when the brain is battered about inside the skull enough to induce a coma. Fate was then on my side. A dog walker sought help, the EMS paramedic drove me to New York Presbyterian Hospital, and I was treated by a preminent neurosurgeon. Dr. Jam Ghajar follows a medical protocol for severe TBI that saved my life. Patients

who survive this injury are often disabled, physically and/or cognitively. A year before my attack, Dr. Ghajar and his nationwide Brain Trauma Foundation published an answer to what they saw lacking in neurosurgery—a scientifically based treatment protocol for every phase of severe brain-trauma care. I spent a month in the hospital, my coma ending after the first week, and had five brain operations. In one, Dr. Ghajar temporarily removed my forehead bone to make room for my swelling brain.

In July I was admitted to the Kessler Institute of Rehabilitation, in East Orange, NJ. The brain doesn't awaken all at once from a coma. Upon admission I was confused, agitated and restless, needing to be tethered to my bed and wheelchair, and had aphasia, a brain disorder that had me speaking nonsensically.

I relearned how to walk, eat, and speak, and was helped cognitively and emotionally by a neuropsychologist. I had expected difficulties with attention, concentration, memory, and language processing. No doctor can predict the extent to which a severe TBI patient will recover.

I did not (and do not) remember being attacked. When told other things about myself, I'd debate. This is a classic severe TBI mentality. To the patient, who can't remember being injured, they're still the independent, capable person they were before. I had almost no short-term memory. I couldn't recall my parents' daily visits. My parents, though retired, brought to my care insights from their respective careers—my father, the factual approach of an engineer, my mother, the intuitiveness of a special education teacher.

“

**I relearned how to walk, eat, and speak, and was helped cognitively and emotionally by a neuropsychologist.**

”

Seeing that my walking during physical therapy left me more alert, they started walking with me during non-therapy times. My walking improved and by late July I refused to use a wheelchair.

On August 4, I returned to New York Presbyterian Hospital for Dr. Ghajar to replace my forehead bone and reconstructive surgeon Dr. Gregory LaTrenta to repair my nasal fracture and reconstruct my right eye orbit. Because the upper orbital bones had been shattered, my right eye was pushed forward in its socket, preventing my eyelid from closing and my eyebrows did not line up. I returned to Kessler, my progress quickened, and I was released on August 23.

Of my recovery speed, the head of Kessler said he had seen nothing like it in his thirty-five years in the field. Dr. Ghajar attributed it to the promptness and quality of my medical care, my youth, and my determination. Surely the people of all religious denominations who prayed, responding to a request from my mother quoted in the newspaper, are also to thank.

After Kessler, I lived with my parents in New Jersey, where I continued to relearn what TBI had taken. Encouraged and guided by my parents, I began with basic skills and progressed. In my out-patient therapies at Kessler, I saw that I had a “flat affect,” always deferring to others and that my mind lacked depth. At home I played piano, wrote, taught piano, and in 1997 went to Rutgers University to get a master’s degree in music—all challenging and thus invaluable. Earlier that year I developed epilepsy, a condition of having seizures, which is common after TBI.

Today, things are good. Having jumped physical, cognitive, and psychological hurdles, I have sharpened insight and deeper perspective. I now have a loving husband and daughter. Who cares that my scalp is scarred, my eyes don’t tear, and I have epilepsy?

## Meet Kyle McCann

*Kyle McCann lives on Long Island with her husband and teenage daughter. She teaches and plays piano, accompanying chorus concerts at local schools, and plays the organ in various church services each week. Of all the press her story received, she is most grateful to Malcolm Gladwell for his July 1996, New Yorker article, “Conquering the Coma.”*





# Out of Adversity Comes Triumph

By Kelly Starling

Six months of intensive brain therapy. More than 365 doctor appointments in a single year. Out of work for eighteen months. Still recovering.

This has been life for Carolyn Chandler, an AT&T senior manager in the Office of the President, for the last two years. And it's all because of a smartphone distracted driver.

But out of adversity comes triumph – and the chance to create more awareness around people with disabilities.

Carolyn was turning into her apartment complex on January 23, 2016, when another car slammed into the back of her Subaru. The driver was fumbling for her smartphone when she hit Carolyn.

The impact was so violent, it knocked Carolyn's car up and over a huge rock and across a sidewalk. The crash left her with brain swelling, and damaged eight of her twelve cranial nerves. There were drastic consequences.

“But out of adversity comes triumph – and the chance to create more awareness around people with disabilities.”



Carolyn averaged two doctor’s appointments each day the first year following her accident. Carolyn had to re-learn how to walk, talk, write, cook and turn her head. But those weren’t her only challenges.

There was the pain – an ocular migraine that lasted eighteen months – and multiple sensory issues. She’s still recovering from extreme sensitivity to light, loud noises and fast movements. Yet, she considers herself fortunate.

“I’m lucky, and I’m so grateful for all the doctors and people who have supported me. I’m especially thankful for AT&T’s flexibility as I re-entered the workforce,” she said. “But it still doesn’t take away the pain or the fact that I had to miss my grandpa’s funeral, my niece’s birth and my mom’s sixtieth birthday because of it.”

Even though Carolyn has had to rebuild her life, she doesn’t hold a grudge against the distracted driver who hit her. But she does want the accident to serve as a reminder about distracted driving.

“I know it’s hard to resist the urge to pick up your smartphone while you’re driving, but the consequences of not resisting that temptation are drastic. It’s a bad habit that luckily didn’t kill me.” Nor did it dull her sense of humor. Carolyn often wears a T-shirt with “Functional.” printed on the front. In good humor, Carolyn Chandler often wears this T-shirt to address the stigma about traumatic brain injuries.

“Sometimes when people find out I have a traumatic brain injury, they tend to think I’m not functional,” she said. “So, I had a friend make me a T-shirt with the word “Functional.” printed on it. While I did it tongue in cheek, I shouldn’t have to tell people I’m functional.”

There is a silver lining. Carolyn credits her beloved pet-turned-service-dog, Sophie, for much of the progress she’s made.



Carolyn’s always been a force behind positive change in her community. So, when she saw the need for a virtual chapter of her employer’s Ability Employee Resource Group (ERG) she started one. Ability works to create a culture of understanding, awareness advocacy and advancement for individuals with disabilities. A big part of that is changing the stigma that a person with a disability is no longer a valuable and contributing member of society.

“The virtual chapter is about advocating and advancing. We want to make being part of our ERG accessible for everyone, disability or not. ERGs are about celebrating and learning from and about diversities. And through that, we all advance, we all get better.”

And Carolyn is proof of that.

## Meet Kelly Starling

Kelly Starling is a lover of words. She has spent her entire career in communications; first as a news producer for a West Palm Beach TV station, and then as a public relations manager in the nonprofit and corporate sectors. She currently is a senior media relations manager for AT&T and a contributor to the company’s online employee news site.

During her 20+ years with AT&T, Kelly’s role as a professional communicator has run the full of PR. Her greatest love is telling people’s stories.

A native South Floridian, Kelly graduated from Florida State University with a B.S. in media performance and a minor in journalism. She lives in Palm Beach County with her husband, son and their 2 dogs.



## Living With Hope

By Patrick Brigham





# All Mixed Up

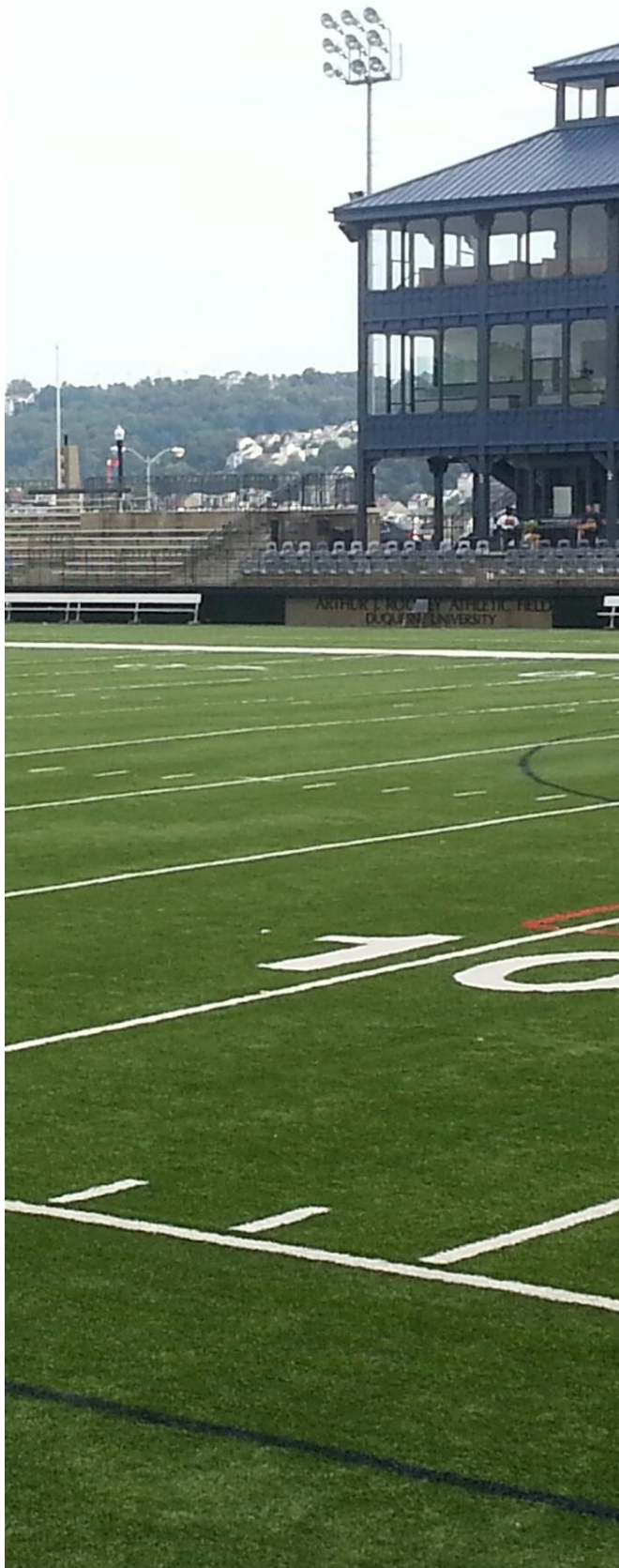
By Ted Stachulski

On my first day of first grade, before the first bell even rang, I got my second concussion while kicking around a soccer ball on the school playground with my new friend Bruno. He was a huge kid who was twice the size of me and clearly the biggest kid in our grade. As I tried to kick the ball past him it ricocheted off his body and hit me in the forehead. I fell backward and smacked the back of my head on the ground. Bruno lost his balance and landed on top of me. I was trapped beneath him until a teacher pulled him off of me.

For forty-three years it's been a joke between us and our classmates. "Remember that time..." I saw stars, lots of stars. My vision was blurry, and it was hard to focus. When I tried to stand up, I noticed I had an issue with balance. Later, I threw up my breakfast in front of everyone. The teacher had Bruno and another student escort me to the nurse's office.

"I saw stars, lots of stars. My vision was blurry, and it was hard to focus. When I tried to stand up, I noticed I had an issue with balance."

I spent the morning lying down with ice packs on my forehead and throwing up in a funny shaped pink plastic container. When my symptoms didn't improve, the school nurse called my mother to take me to the local hospital where just two years earlier I had stitches put in my forehead after smacking it open on a coffee table. At the emergency department, I continued to throw up and feel dizzy.



When I returned to school the next day I had trouble with balance, paying attention to the teacher, following instructions, organizing my desk, seeing what was on the chalkboard, and finding my way around the school. I felt like I was walking around in a daze and everything was in slow motion, like being stuck in quicksand. No matter how hard I tried to keep up with everyone, I was falling behind. I was all mixed up!

Recently, I obtained a copy of my educational records and inside the folder, I found an Individualized Education Program (IEP) from the first grade. My deficits were so obvious to my teachers that they promptly requested an IEP for me the first week of school. It was often modified throughout the school year as I progressed.

However, none of the documents contained the words “concussion” or “Traumatic Brain Injury” even though their notes point out my cognitive, physical and behavioral problems. None of my siblings ever needed an IEP and they didn’t have any concussions.

I was often pulled out of class to go to a “special room,” where I would do activities with special education teachers. It didn’t take me long to figure out that I was the only child in my classroom who had to go to the “special room.” I vividly remember one episode where I was pulled out of class as usual, but this time I had to sit on the floor just outside of the classroom to play Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders with my special education teachers. It was very embarrassing being watched by my classmates as they looked at me through the open doorway.

The special education teachers were very nice and caring. From the very beginning, they kept the classroom lights off and sometimes pulled down the window shades to help me with my light sensitivity. They started out slowly by having me color in basic shapes with crayons and cutting them out with special gripped scissors. From there I progressed to harder things like playing flashcard



memory games and coloring in more detailed pictures (activities I had no problem doing the year before in kindergarten).

They taped my work onto the large windows of the special education room and had my homeroom teachers come in to see how I was progressing. We often looked out those large windows to watch kids at recess play basketball and foursquare and talk about how I could get better again at playing sports. We'd then go outside and bounce balls around to work on my balance and eye-hand coordination. When spring came, I signed up for instructional league baseball and never looked back.

Over the next ten years, I earned several trophies, ribbons, and awards playing multiple sports and just as many concussions. Even with all that special education rehabilitation I had in first grade, I was never taught in school or by my coaches about the dangers of concussions and the need to protect my brain. As I got older, I hid my concussions and dealt with the symptoms on my own in order to play. By the time I got into high school, I had developed a pain pill and alcohol addiction problem to deal with the pain from the repetitive hitting drills we did in football practice (which are now banned), and a lot of concussions.

I learned that my grades plummeted during certain times of the year depending upon the sport I was playing. It was a hard balancing act to pull off alone and eventually the cumulative effects of all of the concussions I sustained forced me to drop out of high school. Once again, I was all mixed up, but this time I had no IEP to save me.

Today I am grateful to know what I've got. Life as a brain injury survivor is not easy. But today I strive to educate and advocate for others. I can't change the past, but I can put my experiences to good use.

## **Meet Ted Stachulski**

*Ted Stachulski is a former multi-sport athlete, Marine Corps Veteran, Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor, creator of the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor Guide. Ted is also a Veterans Outreach Specialist and an advocate for brain injury survivors, their family members and caregivers. You can learn more about Ted at [www.TBITed.com](http://www.TBITed.com)*



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# CONCUSSION:

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- \* Report it.
- \* Take time to recover.

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BLURRY VISION

SENSITIVITY TO  
LIGHT OR NOISE

FEELING SLUGGISH, HAZY,  
FOGGY, OR GROGGY

CONCENTRATION OR  
MEMORY PROBLEMS

CONFUSION

JUST NOT "FEELING RIGHT"  
OR "FEELING DOWN"



**It's better to miss one game than the whole season.**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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# Brain Injury Academy

By David A. Grant

Before I was struck by a car in November of 2010, it's safe to say that I knew absolutely nothing about brain injury. I had never knowingly met a brain injury survivor, all-things-concussion had yet to make the national headlines, and a concussion was something simple that you got if you bumped your head.

My life as a student in Brain Injury Academy was not my choice. But early on, my wife Sarah and I began to understand that the more we learned, the more power we had. Knowledge gave us the power to ask the right kind of questions. Knowledge gave us the power to say to someone who crushed our hopes, that our lives would be better off without them. And in a completely unexpected twist, knowledge gave us the power to serve others within the brain injury community. We understood brain injury better than many “professionals.” Me, because I lived with it, and Sarah, because she had a front row seat.

“Knowledge gave us the power to ask the right kind of questions.”

Looking back over the years through the prism of time, we have gained stunning insight into this often-misunderstood condition. Nothing beats on-the-job training.

Early on, we learned a whole new vocabulary. Words like *aphasia* and *neuroplasticity* are not commonplace outside the neuro community. Then there was the letter game. There were countless acronyms to learn. EEG, PTSD, TBI, ABI... the list goes on.

Let's not forget the relational lessons.

*Relation Lesson 101: People Leave Your Life*

*Relation Lesson 102: Those Who Stay Treat You Differently*

*Relation Lesson 103: The Person You Once Were is Gone*

These few examples barely scratch the surface of all that we have come to learn about brain injury. This month marks my eight-year brain injury anniversary. This equates to eight years of hard knocks training. Think about this: Had I been in a traditional learning environment, I would have an advanced degree by now.

Over the years, we have learned that our knowledge has immense value. Both Sarah and I have been very open advocates within the brain injury community. It has been the biggest silver lining to what might have been nothing but a dark cloud.

But never did I envision that brain injury would strike our family again. Lightning is not supposed to strike twice – but it did.

On September 9, a few short weeks ago, my mom sustained a brain injury in the form of a cerebral hemorrhage. We have watched mom struggle with word-finding, and her new cognitive challenges mirror many of my own.

Early on, I thought that all brain injuries were traumatic. Over time, as I moved through Brain Injury Academy, I learned that there are *traumatic brain injuries* as well as *acquired brain injuries*.

**“But never did I envision that brain injury would strike our family again. Lightning is not supposed to strike twice – but it did.”**

While the root causes are vastly different, the aftermath is the same. It's akin to different lyrics set to the same music.

At the time of this writing, Mom is still in the ICU at a local hospital. Her future is uncertain at best, and we have been told to prepare for the worst possible outcome. But amidst the tears, the overwhelming exhaustion, and the outright fear that we are going to lose her, comes profound gratitude. We are able to use our experience to better help Mom, and to share with our family what she is going through in more understandable terms.

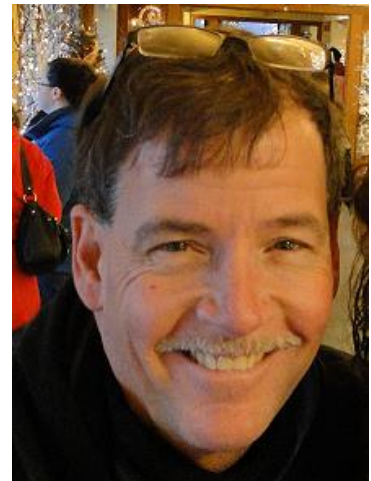
“For the first time ever, I am a caregiver – something I never saw coming.”

For the first time ever, I am a caregiver – something I never saw coming. We have spent countless hours at her bedside and when we aren't with Mom, we are thinking of her. It is an exhaustion without end, but one I would sign up for in a heartbeat. It's my mom we are talking about.

You may not have noticed that I repeatedly use the word “we” in sharing our experience. This is not by chance. No one moves alone through the challenges that brain injury brings. Sarah and I are the “we” that I have repeatedly referenced. If brain injury is part of your life, I hope you are part of a “we,” for together we can do what I cannot do alone.

## Meet David A. Grant

*David A. Grant is a traumatic brain injury survivor from Salem, NH. In addition to publishing HOPE Magazine, David is also a staff writer for Brainline.org as well as a contributing writer to Chicken Soup for the Soul, Surviving Traumatic Brain Injuries. David is a board member of the Brain Injury Association of New Hampshire. When he's not working, David can be found cycling the back roads of southern New Hampshire.*



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# A Better You

By Mike Strand

*"At these best moments a great humility fused with a great ambition: to be only what I was, but to the utmost of what I was."*

-- Stephen Spender, *World Within World*

Stephen Spender has put into words what it takes to succeed with peace and confidence while living with brain injury. I found it all too easy to bring myself down with unrealistic expectations. Trying to be the person I was before my brain injury was the chief unrealistic expectation that I had.

Things didn't change for me until I adopted a better attitude. It wasn't until I let go of trying to be who I was, that I began trying to be who I could be.

One of the first steps for doing that was to quit telling people how excellent I used to be at everything and identifying myself through who I used to be. How many times had I said, "My memory is so bad now, but I used to have an amazing memory and I rarely forgot anything!" I had to start focusing on how well I was doing despite my brain injury.

When I finally decided that I was going to learn how to do new things and make changes that I never would have even tried before my brain injury was when I started on a realistic path. Before my brain injury, enough things came easily to me that I could just avoid anything that was challenging. This got

me through, after a fashion, but it wouldn't do for living with a brain injury. Suddenly, everything was very hard and nothing was easy. Taking the easy path and doing nothing didn't seem like a choice I wanted to make.

Fortunately, one bonus to having a brain injury was that my life was filled with opportunities to impress myself and others. I no longer needed to be a captain of industry making a six-figure income. I just had to have a job and people would be impressed! I didn't need to claim that I did more before breakfast than most people did all day. If I just tied my own shoes I would be patting myself on the back every morning.

I call that "recalibrating my self-worth." At first, that meant taking pride in things that my previous self would have laughed at (I was such a jerk!) Once I had mastered the small things, the basics, I could move on to bigger and better things. Now, after only thirty years, I have done things that would have made my previous self envious.

I used to have a big ego and I spent a lot of time trying to create this image of me being superhuman. I was always insecure that someone would see through my disguise. Now I am happy being me and being who I truly am. I am comfortable being me.

All I do is my best. That is certainly all that anyone can expect, including myself.

## **Meet Mike 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.*

*Learn more about Mike at: [mikesbigbrainbash.blogspot.com](http://mikesbigbrainbash.blogspot.com)*





# News & Views

Years ago, I heard a saying: If you've seen one brain injury, you've seen one brain injury. As I read through this month's stories, I came to the realization that there is a commonality in most all of the issues of HOPE Magazine. We present brain injury as it is, and not a candy-coated version. The commonality is that survivors are overcomers. There is a great resiliency within the brain injury community.

Many of us defy predicted outcomes and move on to live lives that are meaningful and worthwhile.

It's been eight years since my own traumatic brain injury. During that time, we have met hundreds, if not thousands of others who share our fate. Not a one has claimed 100% recovery. But what they strive for, as you've read in this month's stories, is a life that is not defined solely by brain injury.



Here in the States, we will be celebrating the Thanksgiving Holiday. This year will be different than year's past as we all are trying to embrace yet another new normal since our mom's brain injury back in September.

But as we've learned over the years the most important things in life are not things. We will spend time with those we love and do the best we can with what fate again put in our lives.

From our family to yours, we wish you a happy Thanksgiving Holiday.

*~ David and Sarah Grant*