

BRAIN INJURY

Fall 2021

HOPE

support
education
inspiration

Magazine



Our Special Fall Issue...

We Are People of Hope

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Welcome

Publisher's Introduction

HOPE MAGAZINE

*Serving the Brain
Injury Community*

Fall 2021

Publisher

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Donna Cramer
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Welcome to the People of Hope Issue of HOPE Magazine!

Those of us within the brain injury community were people long before we became survivors. This special issue, our People of Hope issue humanizes brain injury. We are not statistics, we are people – people who often live with unseen and unimaginable challenges.

But the human spirit shines brightly in the brain injury community. Most every day, I see miracles – people exceeding expected outcomes, families reaching out to others in an effort to help others by sharing their deeply personal experiences, and brain injury survivors who support and love each other unconditionally.

This is our most visual issue since launching HOPE Magazine back in early 2015. A couple of months ago I put out a content call for members of the brain injury community willing to have their pictures published in our upcoming issue. The response was nothing short of amazing and completely unsurprising at the same time.

People of Hope grace the pages of this month's special issue.

Be safe, be well... and be kind.



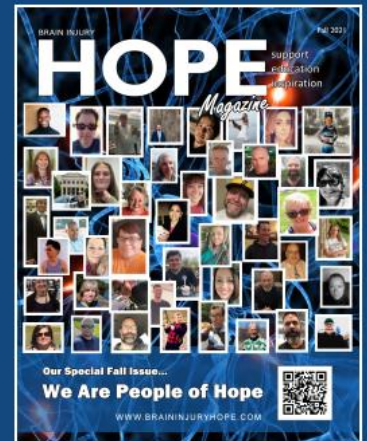
David A. Grant
Publisher

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Fall 2021



Advocacy

Education

Inspiration

Brain Injury
HOPE
NETWORK

Inspiring Others...



"Thriving and Blessed!" -Jim E., 31 Years Post-TBI.



Support Group Facilitator
Volunteer for BIAPAS
Advocate
Mentor
Warrior

Manda A., Survivor Since 2007



Hope for the Future

By Hailee Banko-Young



Seven years ago, my life changed forever. It was a typical Sunday morning, but what I did not realize is that it would not end as a typical Sunday. For the most part, I was a healthy teenager that was actively involved in sports, had no physical setbacks, and enjoyed anything I wanted to participate in. Fast-forward to a time where I could not handle everyday lights and sounds, staying awake for more than short periods of time, and did not have a perfectly functioning visual or vestibular system. That Sunday morning would result in me having a brain injury that would change who I was and would give me a new normal.

At the time of the injury, I was a newly-inducted member of the National Junior Honor Society and an eighth-grade student. At that time, I could not understand why life was dealing me such lemons. In 2014, we were rear-ended by a driver traveling fifty miles per hour while we were at a complete stop.

While I did not hit my head, my brain jostled enough to cause me years and years of continuing agony. I endured months out of school and eventually homebound education before returning to school part-time, yet I managed to keep my grades up and move forward to high school with the rest of my classmates. I began vision therapy and vestibular therapy to correct the injury that I was determined not to define me.

Freshman year of high school was upon us, and I was knee-deep in the healing process from the brain injury. I still took all the honors courses offered to me that year because I was going to let nothing get in my way. I had a small hiccup during the year where my doctors and specialists thought I had a

“In 2014, we were rear-ended by a driver traveling fifty miles per hour while we were at a complete stop. While I did not hit my head, my brain jostled enough to cause me years and years of continuing agony.”

brain tumor, but after testing, it was determined my eyes were just severely overstraining my brain. Ultimately, I ended the year on high honor roll and found out I obtained the top 10% of my class.

Unfortunately, sophomore year began, and I was still going to vision therapy and still having everything enlarged, so it would lessen the blurry and double vision, but that was nothing that would hinder me. Sophomore year, I continued to take all honors courses and even added an Advanced Placement course to my workload. While it was difficult on my eyes, I still managed to keep my grades up, make high honor roll again, and maintain the top 10% of my class.

Junior year came and the light at the end of the tunnel was finally appearing until the unthinkable occurred in September of 2017. I fell and was diagnosed with another concussion on top of the one that was healing. My life paused for a moment, and I could not believe what was happening to me. I would let absolutely nothing stop me from my academics and my future dreams of pursuing a career in the medical field.

A few weeks after the injury, which I was told was probably worse than the first one, I was inducted into the National Honor Society at my high school. It was not until a March day in 2018 that my life paused again when I was rushed via paramedics to the hospital for what was thought to be a stroke. I had completely lost feeling of my right side, was in a fog, and was confused as to what was happening in my surroundings. After extensive testing, it was determined I was suffering from a hemiplegic migraine, which mirrors that of a stroke. Since then, I have suffered two more hemiplegic migraines each needing hospital intervention to break.

“

A few weeks after the injury, which I was told was probably worse than the first one, I was inducted into the National Honor Society at my high school.

”

As senior year approached, I wanted to do something memorable during the year after everything I had been through. I decided to pitch the idea of an independent study to my school, and after approval and writing my own curriculum, I was officially doing an independent study on brain injuries. This year would be a year to remember as it led me to places, I could have never dreamt of. As the year progressed, I was holding fundraisers for different brain injury non-profits throughout my school district and surrounding districts, being invited to National Brain Injury Awareness Day on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., and holding a major fundraiser at a local restaurant, which garnered much local attention.

Before I knew it, I was being invited to speak on behalf of a non-profit at Harvard Medical School in front of the top medical professionals of Boston Children's Hospital, receiving a letter of recognition from my state governor, being recognized by my community, and being invited to talk to my local state representative. It was all a whirlwind, but it was because I never lost hope, hope that while my every day is still filled with a healing brain injury, I am not letting that write my story.

Through everything, I have had the strength to push myself academically and still excel. I currently am in my third year at Penn State University studying Biology with a Neuroscience Option and Pre-Medicine/Pre-PA track with a minor in Women Studies. I may still need to rest often, be almost five years past the age to drive and be not yet released medically to do so, and still get Botox and trigger point injections on top of taking daily medication, but I haven't lost hope in what the future holds.

We are never promised tomorrow, but with hope, if we have a tomorrow, it can be better than yesterday.

Meet Hailee Banko-Young



Hailee writes...

"My name is Hailee Banko-Young, and I am 20 years old. When I am not studying at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania, I reside in the Lehigh Valley, PA. I graduated in 2019 from Nazareth Area High School and intend to graduate in the spring of 2023 from Penn State University with a Bachelor's in Sciences degree in Biology with a Neuroscience Option and a minor in Women and Gender Studies.

In my free time, I like to spend time with my family, friends, shop, watch football (Go Penn State and Eagles!!), and travel. I have a lovable pet cat names Nittany."

Overcoming the Odds...



*Tabona S.
Survivor Since 2019!*



Gary B., Survivor Since 2014!

"Support group leader BIA-MA.
Not 100 percent recovered,
but 100 percent resilient.
I'm Gary 2.0."



*Mark R.
Survivor Since 2018!*

"TBI sustained in RTA with a car while cycling
in April 2018-Adelaide, Australia
Daily head fog specialist!"



Becoming Conscious

By Donna Cramer



A Beginner's Guide to Dealing with Workers' Compensation and Insurance Companies

There are myriad things to negotiate after sustaining a brain injury. Finding informed doctors and the specific treatments that will help you heal are significant parts of the journey. Dealing with workers' compensation or insurance companies can also be part of the brain injury journey. I had no idea how the compensation system worked. I hope that the following words may help others find some clarity as they navigate the system. Never give up! You can find others who will help you.

The first thing to know: You need a competent lawyer specializing in workers' comp. or personal injury.

Dealing with bureaucracies is difficult when you are injured and not thinking clearly. I genuinely feel there is not more outrage at the system because those victimized by it are hurt and cannot fight. They say no one can understand another's suffering until they experience it. Unfortunately, even the most well-intentioned employer or insurance representative may not be able to fathom your suffering from a largely invisible injury.

"I genuinely feel there is not more outrage at the system because those victimized by it are hurt and cannot fight."

The second thing to know: The IME. What is an IME? IME stands for Independent Medical Exam, but there is nothing independent about an independent medical exam. Workers' compensation or the insurance company pay these doctors. Their reports tend to favor the entities that are paying them. It is possible to find a fair IME doctor. Still, it is also possible to find one that will be more than willing to state you are fine regardless of whether this is so. In my opinion, the IME is the most flawed, harmful part of workers' comp. and insurance compensation. Some IMEs go quickly. My first IME

doctor was in the room with me for five minutes, asked few questions, then wrote a detailed, scathing six-page report. He called me a liar and said that I was fine to return to work! My lawyer was unsurprised. “Yeah, he says that all the time,” she stated.

There are Facebook groups that document the damage such reports do. I did not think that doctors lied for money. Was I naïve? Perhaps, but after the appointment, I just wanted to go home and lie down. Most of us with brain injuries know an appointment will stress your brain and put you down for days, if not weeks. After the IME exam, you wait.

The third thing to know: Workers’ comp. and insurance is a hurry up and wait system. The paperwork for my IME said to report immediately and cautioned me not to be late to my appointment like I was an irresponsible teenager who had never worked a day in my life. I then waited six weeks before I received my report. My report stated that I was lying, that I had made up my injury because there was no video evidence. The report stated that I could return to work without restrictions. At the time, I was unable to get out of bed and could not sustain an upright position for more than an hour. My medical report was badly written with grammatical errors and contradictions. I would have been reprimanded at work if I had submitted such an erroneous report. Even my concussed brain picked up the glaring errors.

As I read the report, I noticed that on one page, it said that I had speech difficulties and, on another page, it stated that I had no speech difficulties, the hospital that I went to, and the one listed on the report were wrong. I had never been to the hospital listed on the report. I was angry after reading this report. After this IME report was submitted to workers comp, they cut my benefits because I was “just fine.” I had panic attacks at three in the morning.



The report also stated that I might have mental problems. According to my research, this is very common. Instead of injury, the IME blames anxiety and depression. Next, I had to go to court. My only other choice was to return to work, something of which I was incapable. I wonder how many people, without any financial or emotional support, go back to work. I had to wait for a court date, then wait to see a court-appointed doctor. These appointments took months, not weeks, to complete. After the doctor appointed by the court did his assessment, submitted it, it came back saying that I did have a traumatic brain injury and needed several therapies. I had to wait for the therapies to be approved.

I sustained my injuries in September, and my speech and physical therapies were approved in June, nine months later. It would be nice to say that this was the end, and I rode happily into the sunset with my therapists. While I was fortunate to begin receiving speech, physical, and vision therapies, workers' comp required me to have another independent medical exam which was again reversed by the court and overturned in my favor. Then, sadly, my doctors concluded that I would not be able to return to my teaching career. I had to go through three more independent medical exams to receive my disability retirement. One of these doctors believed me and appeared competent. The other one told me that everyone benefited by returning to work no matter what. The third doctor had been publicly accused of sexual impropriety with patients, so I refused to see him without my husband attached to my side. After more months, I received approval.

The war is not over. The battle still must be waged because I refuse to give up trying to recover, but the first hill has been crested. I have a group of professionals who believe me and want me to get better. Finally, I am coming out of the tunnel, and though the light can still be distant and murky, I am coming out of the dark. I am a survivor, and you can be, too

Meet Donna Cramer



Donna Cramer is a retired special education teacher who lives in Massachusetts. She worked with special needs students for over 20 years. She was injured at school. She stays busy doing yoga, pursuing therapies, and writing.

Donna discovered a love for writing after her injury, particularly when she had difficulty expressing herself through speech. She is currently writing a novel and is in the beginning stages of publishing her children's book about a lion who sustains a concussion. She lives with her husband and three cats all of who facilitate her recovery with lots of love.

Enjoying Life...



Allison B. Survivor Since 1999!

*Ethan P.
13 Year Survivor!*

"My thirteen year old son Ethan. He received his TBI at five months old when he was shaken."



Never Underestimate a Survivor

By Sarah Deberry



I am one of 53 million Americans living with a permanent brain-injury-related disability, and I've fought to overcome every roadblock to living a full and rewarding life. While I've coped with guilt, anger, bullying, and frustration, my mission is to share my message of hope and tenacity.

I was only eight years old when I dashed across a street toward an ice cream shop and was hit by a car, suffering major trauma. I was paralyzed and in a coma for eight days. No one thought I'd make it, let alone be able to do anything with my life. I recall seeing a huge light immediately after my accident, and someone, a guardian angel perhaps, telling me it wasn't my time yet. I took that message to heart.

"I recall seeing a huge light immediately after my accident, and someone, a guardian angel perhaps, telling me it wasn't my time yet."

If not for that one mistake, I would not be who I am today, and I would not have the ambition to instill hope in those facing challenges – for them to accept who they are and to embrace their differences.

I spent months relearning how to talk, walk and eat. My mother tempted me with favorite foods such as macaroni and cheese. The accident damaged the right side of my brain, causing involuntary movements of my left arm. I also have short-term memory loss, as well as impairments to my speech and mobility.

The ensuing years were filled with roadblocks, often created by those closest to me. Even strong people have battles. I had so many people telling me I couldn't do this or that. They wanted to hold me back. My twin sister Nicole helped her through. She became like a mother figure to me.

Unable to cope after the accident, my mother developed substance abuse issues that eventually led to our father gaining custody of us. My father was constantly telling me I couldn't do anything with my



life. He kept me on a tight leash and wouldn't let me live up to my potential. He enrolled me in special education classes when I knew I could handle general education courses. I was constantly having to prove, even to my father, that I could succeed in life.

The people closest to someone with a traumatic brain injury should know that he or she has the motivation and the drive to push through it. Let them do it! Don't try to pull them back. Except for my sister, I didn't have anyone but myself telling me that I could overcome this. I had no one to talk with, to back me up.

Five or six years ago, I realized that I'd stopped making progress with my physical and speech therapies. I researched deep brain stimulation and decided to try it, even though the odds of me making it out alive were only 50/50. I was up the whole night before surgery making a deal with God: If He made this surgery work for me, I would finish [my book](#) and inspire the world with my story.

Surviving the surgery, I felt peace. I'm not going to get any better. And I am okay with that. Being different is special. I'm not a regular person. I don't do much that's regular. But who cares? I am smart. And I know I'm strong.

I want to change how people see those with traumatic brain injuries. Yes, we talk and look a little different. So what? We're still people too." But my biggest motivation is to inspire everyone to go after their dreams, no matter how giant their setbacks might be. Friends and family: Tell your loved ones to keep on trying. If you're the one with the injury, believe in yourself. Because when you don't believe in yourself and give up hope,

that's when things don't work out. I have a firm grasp of who I am and what I can accomplish. I don't give up easily. God recreated me for a reason. Even though I have a crazy arm, and messed up speech, I wouldn't change a thing because that's how He wants me to be.

Whether you have sustained a brain injury or care about someone who has, I hope that sharing my story will make a profound difference. It's a message that doesn't get out there often enough. Find a way to get through the hard times because you don't want to wake up one day wondering what could have happened. You might not get a second chance at life as I did.

And while much in my life changed permanently after my accident, some things remain constant. I will laughingly admit that ice cream and macaroni and cheese are still two of my favorite foods.

I am donating 10% of proceeds for each copy of "My Second Chance at Life" sold to the hospital that saved my life: Children's Hospital of Oakland, CA.

Meet Sarah Deberry



Sarah Deberry, author of "[My Second Chance at Life](#)," has earned a college degree and holds a Certificate of Medical Administration as well as a security guard license.

She currently holds down seven jobs and is writing her second book. Her many accomplishments are even more remarkable considering Sarah is one of 53 million Americans living with a permanent brain-injury-related disability.

Join our Facebook Family

What do over 30,000 people from 60 countries and five continents all have in common? They are all members of our vibrant Facebook family at [f/TBIHopeandInspiration](#)



Embracing Gratitude...



Cathi N., Survivor Since 2003!

"I was in a car wreck in 2003 that changed my life, but thank God I'm alive!"

Tamara P., 11 Year Survivor!



"I am an eleven year survivor after being struck by lightning."



The Flip Side

By Rachel Dombeck



There is a flip side to everything in life and living with a TBI/ABI is no exception. As the last week, weeks, and days have been particularly hard, I started to ask myself how I could get a handle on my thoughts, emotions, and how I am viewing this. How can I see things differently so that I can rise above and not sink further down into the black, dark thoughts of discouragement?

And then it hit me: - you can focus on the flip side of the struggle.

And so, here is the flip side...

I was the girl who fell (literally, I got a TBI from a fall in the shower). I am also the girl who stood back up.

I was the girl who lost her job, over and over. I am also the girl who keeps trying new things, new jobs, and different types of work to find out what is the better fit for me now.

I was the girl who said things out of hurt and anger with my situation, probably causing more hurt to others than I realized. I am also the girl who learned to be humble and say, "I'm sorry," and keep working on having healthy relationships.

I was the girl who exhausted all her resources on treatments, doctors, and therapists to get better. I am also the girl who never gives up on finding more answers, better treatments, and supplements to keep healing my brain and improving my lifestyle.

"I started to ask myself how I could get a handle on my thoughts, emotions, and how I am viewing this."

I was the girl who was too afraid to be out around people, with major social anxiety. I am also the girl who now keeps going out around people and finding ways to choose a healthy environment to do so.

I was the girl who would let a setback take me out for days at a time, in discouragement and defeat. I am also the girl who bounces back quicker now because I am learning how to navigate a challenging situation with poise and grace.

I was the girl who let her emotions take over and vent without a thought of who I hurt. I am also the girl who has learned to process, channel and find healthy ways to vent and healthy people to vent to.

I was the girl who... (I could go on).

So, yes, I know the hurt is real. The moments of feeling helpless, hopeless, and desperate are real. But so is the overcoming of these things. And if you are reading this, wherever you are in your journey, then you have made it this far, and THAT is something to celebrate and be proud of because that alone is an accomplishment. Most will have no idea how hard we work for what we have, where we are, and to be functioning as well as we are. And that needs to be okay.

I know how strong I am to be here, now, and I can either recognize and celebrate my strength, or I can devalue it and pass over it. But that will not help me. I must remember the flip side. Every day, every step, every time I start to feel the waves engulfing me, I can choose which side I will focus on.

And so can you.

Meet Rachel Dombeck



Rachel is a TBI survivor from an in-home accident over five years ago. She is about inspiring and empowering others in their journey while spreading awareness for brain injury and how to live a healthier life in all areas.

She is learning to rebuild her life every day and finding peace in accepting the past, embracing the present, and starting to dream again for the future, trusting God for the unknown.

Moving Forward...



Melanie W., Survivor Since 1997!

"My son Tristan who suffered a severe TBI from a car accident 11/28/19."

-Beth M.



Inside my TBI

Exhaustion on a good day.
Trying to keep up with the world around me.
Not wanting to fall behind.
Fulfilling “missed opportunities” I like to say.
Trying to be the person unaffected,
Trying to be the one untouched.
Overwhelmed, on a bad day.
The point where structure and routine no longer have bearing,
Because the ability to do so would require too much effort.
Treading water/keeping afloat,
And I’m alone in my world.
Making the splash/diving deeper,
And I’m set free.
Releasing my fears, doubts, and uncertainties,
Consuming me with pride, power, and character.

Meet Sarah Jackson



Sarah suffered a serious Traumatic Brain Injury at the age of 15 after getting into a car with a drunken driver. She has shared her experiences on her website www.sarahjspeaks.com, schools, and organizations around the nation and in her book, [You’re Getting Better Every Day](#).



Contributors Wanted!



Got A Story To Tell?

We are accepting stories for the Winter 2021 issue of HOPE Magazine!

Your story has the power to help others.

The Winter 2021 issue of HOPE Magazine will be available in December.

Your Story has Value!

And now the details...

- We prefer an article length of 800-1,000 words. Longer or shorter pieces will be considered.
- When submitting, please include a photo and short bio to be included with your piece.

Please email your submission to info@tbihopeandinspiration.com.



In a Flash

By Isaac Peterson



The Moment I Realized I was Recovering from a Stroke

Maybe you could call it a flash of insight, an epiphany, or a sudden realization. Whatever you want to call it, I just had one, about my recovery, and I want to tell you about it.

I have to kind of build-up to it, though.

The other day I was out walking, minding my own business, lost in thought. Then for some reason, out of the blue, I started thinking about something I did in fifth grade I haven't thought about in many years. I was living in Wyoming at the time, a state that's big on hunting. My father only hunted a handful of times, but one time he did and brought home ducks.

After my mom did all the things you have to do to get the ducks all ready for cooking, I snagged a couple of duck feet from the trash. I was curious; I thought it was just so cool that when you pulled on the tendons (or whatever they were) that stuck out, the feet would move and kind of clench.

I was like a kid with a new toy - well, I was a kid, and I did have something new to play with, so I guess it's an apt analogy. I didn't tell my parents I had those duck feet. I held on to them the rest of the weekend and put those feet in my pocket and took them to school with me to wow the other kids. They all thought it was one of the super coolest things they'd ever seen. Not everybody felt that way, though: my teacher thought I was weird, and my mother thought I was nuts. I thought it was funny. That was a fond memory, one I hadn't thought of in decades, but it triggered another memory. I told

you all of that to tell you about the other memory, one directly related to recovering from my brain injury.

When I was released at the end of the month I spent in the hospital after my stroke, I felt a little down; I had always been told by people they thought I had a fantastic memory and a pretty sharp mind. Now it occurred to me my greatest asset had been damaged. I was dazed and in a mental fog that wouldn't go away—I was afraid that was how things would be the rest of my life.

One night, about four months after the stroke, I had an electrifying experience that didn't involve actual electricity but was still very shocking.

I was lying in bed, on the edge of falling asleep and I felt a kind of *jolt* in my head. Memories from all phases of my entire life came to me in a cascade that was so quick I don't think it could be measured in terms of time. It was very similar to the flash that brought the memory of those duck feet.

But suddenly here I was, with a flash flood of memories that I could see and feel, almost as vividly as when I first lived them. I could remember my first day of kindergarten; the name of the kid that sat behind me in first grade and a girl in that class that was my first crush; the first book I ever read. I could even remember events from the time before I could talk. I've spoken with my mom about some of those things and she verified that they actually happened.

The fog had lifted; my mind was suddenly crystal clear. I didn't get smarter; it was just that my mind was more of an *open book*.

But I soon noticed that some of the aftereffects of the stroke had started to lessen as well. For the previous few months, I could barely speak above a whisper—now I had the full power and range of my voice again. My sense of balance had improved a lot, and other parts of my post-stroke existence and awareness had improved.

Although my long-term memory was phenomenal again, I still have short-term memory issues that continue to bug me, but my short-term memory still improved a bit that night. One of the most important things that improved was my confidence that I could still write. This was a huge deal for me, as it was later in the same month I started contributing writing to this blog.

But suddenly here I was, with a flash flood of memories that I could see and feel, almost as vividly as when I first lived them.

I think I know what happened to me that night: *that was the real beginning of my recovery* from the traumatic brain injury that stroke had left me with. I still struggle with some things, but I have fewer challenges than I did before.

Yet, I recognize that I still have a good way to go in my recovery.

The brain of every brain injury survivor works overtime to bring the person back, as much as possible, to what he or she was before brain injury. I guess my brain *really* wanted me to get better, and get better soon, so we could be friends again. Before that moment, I could look, but now I could see. But I didn't even realize how much I had improved. It was only after that night I realized how lost in the fog I had been.

But I did wonder if the improvement was *all in my head*, so to speak. I didn't need to worry; my rate of recovery was visible to the people around me. Everybody commented that I had just improved so much so fast. The other members of my brain injury support group would tell me how much better they could see that I was doing, meeting after meeting. I keep getting better, but not in any dramatic way that I can see or feel, I can just tell I'm getting better in smaller ways all the time. I know it will still take a long time, if ever, that I am done progressing, but I am still making progress, nonetheless.

Even during some of the toughest times of my life I always somehow felt I was the luckiest man in the world; now I feel I'm the luckiest stroke survivor.

I wish I could tell you how to make something like that happen for you, but sadly, I don't know how it happened to *me*. All I know is my brain was really rooting for me to come out on top, and it really came through for me when it mattered most.

Meet Isaac Peterson

Isaac Peterson grew up on an Air Force base near Cheyenne, Wyoming. After graduating from the University of Wyoming, he embarked on a career as an award-winning investigative journalist and as a semi-professional musician in the Twin Cities, the place he called home on and off for 35 years. He now resides in Tacoma, Washington, and doesn't mind it at all if someone offers to pick up his restaurant tab.

[Read more articles by Isaac here.](#)



Continuing to Serve...

Jay W., Survivor Since 2012!



“I was struck by a drunk driver’s car while on duty and able to return to full duty after eighteen months.”



Hope Against All Odds

By Patrick Ricke



I was a member of a motorcycle club called Steel Militia in Moline, Illinois. My name was Poe. Myself, my brother Gamble, and my girlfriend at the time were out celebrating Gamble's birthday. We went to the Smoking Dog in Rock Island. Gamble got out of control and started dancing on tables. The bouncer was very aggressive in getting him to stop so I tried to diffuse the situation, never expecting my life to change forever that very moment.

The bouncer wrongly assumed that I was fighting him and threw me out of the bar horizontally. When I came up to defend myself, he hit me in the head with a weapon and I hit my head on the concrete. It took ten minutes for the ambulance to arrive. The first responders reported my eyes were completely dilated and I had no gag reflex. Since I was completely brain dead, I was sent to Peoria OSF with no lights or sirens. They wrongly assumed that they were transporting a dead body.

“When I came up to defend myself, he hit me in the head with a weapon and I hit my head on the concrete. It took ten minutes for the ambulance to arrive.”

Blood was coming out of my nose and ears, and a craniotomy followed. After the craniotomy surgery, there was no expectation of me waking up. Against all odds, I woke up less than two days later. I then had a second craniotomy to put my skull piece back. The doctors said that they had never treated anyone with a TBI as severe as the one that I had sustained. While my physical deficits are minor, since my injury, I now have many mental illnesses.

I suffer from severe depression and insomnia. Short-term memory loss and emotion control are now problems that I live with daily. My injury left me with no emotions. In almost two years I haven't been

hungry, tired, sad, happy, nervous, or anxious. I drank heavily at the beginning of my recovery because my club did not help me. Since then, I left my future fiancé, have been in a car accident and a motorcycle accident. I broke a finger at work, was kicked out of my motorcycle club on bad terms, and been terminated from my employment. It's been a tough road.

I am currently on antidepressants and doing neurofeedback therapy twice a week. In the end, I have realized that what I will be suffering from for the rest of my life and living with ambiguous loss. I am mourning the death of somebody who is standing right in front of me, but in my case, I am the person that is dead. The person that I miss most is me.

Meet Patrick Ricke

Patrick sustained his traumatic brain injury in October of 2019. He shares his story with the hope that others can see that life after brain injury is indeed possible and hopes that others will find that they are not unique in their challenges.



Healing trauma involves tears. The tears release our pain. The tears are part of our recovery.

-Dana Arcuri

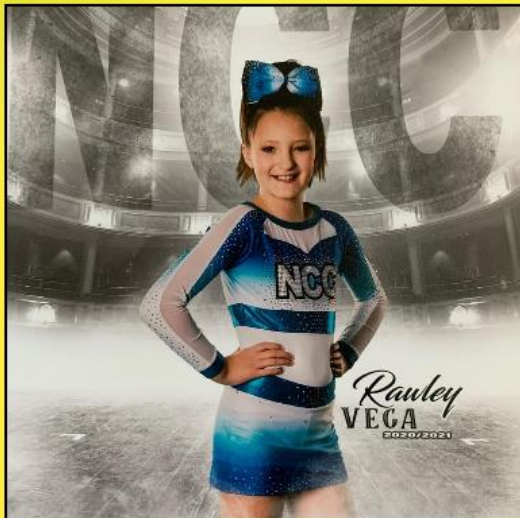
Making Strides...



Marcelo V., Survivor Since 2015!



*"Severe TBI five years ago.
Still making strides in his recovery!"
-Tuffie V.*



*"Her TBI was in February
of 2021 from a cheer accident.
Still on the recovery journey."
-Jennifer O.*



Rowing

By Ellen Shaughnessy



In a previous life, I was on an eight-woman rowing team and have also skulled alone and kayaked. I loved all of these activities for many reasons. The perspective of seeing a river or lake from the water is so different from the shoreline view, you feel closer to nature, appreciate more the calm and beauty. What people who haven't done any of these water sports don't know is, you are rowing forward but always looking back.

I did that for a long time after the assault that led to my TBI. I could not seem to go forward without looking back and seeing all I felt I had lost. My thought processes could not accept that I was not going to be fine. I am very stubborn. I also could not alter a thought or fact that I got into my head that was wrong or not perceived correctly.

Lack of short and long-term memory also played a huge factor. These and many other issues became a stumbling block on my way to progress. I have come a long way in six years, but honestly, have only started in the past year to give myself credit for my advances.

My symptoms of post-concussion syndrome have not gone away, but I have developed strategies to deal with them. Setting up routines, leaving notes at the door to remember what to bring when I go out, eye exercises that I learned from a functional neurology visit, eating gluten-free, and getting enough sleep (naps are my favorite), have all helped me to go forward.

The people in my life have also made this transition to the new me possible. Looking up and getting dizzy is still a thing, as are memory issues. Stress is not my friend either as it makes all my symptoms worse, but life moves forward, and I am still rowing.

“I have come a long way in six years, but honestly, have only started in the past year to give myself credit for my advances.”

Possibly, one of the hardest obstacles, when I look back with regret, is to not let that overwhelm me. Everyone has those days or moments when we struggle with the ‘then and now’ aspects of our journey, but I make myself or try to put a limit on that.

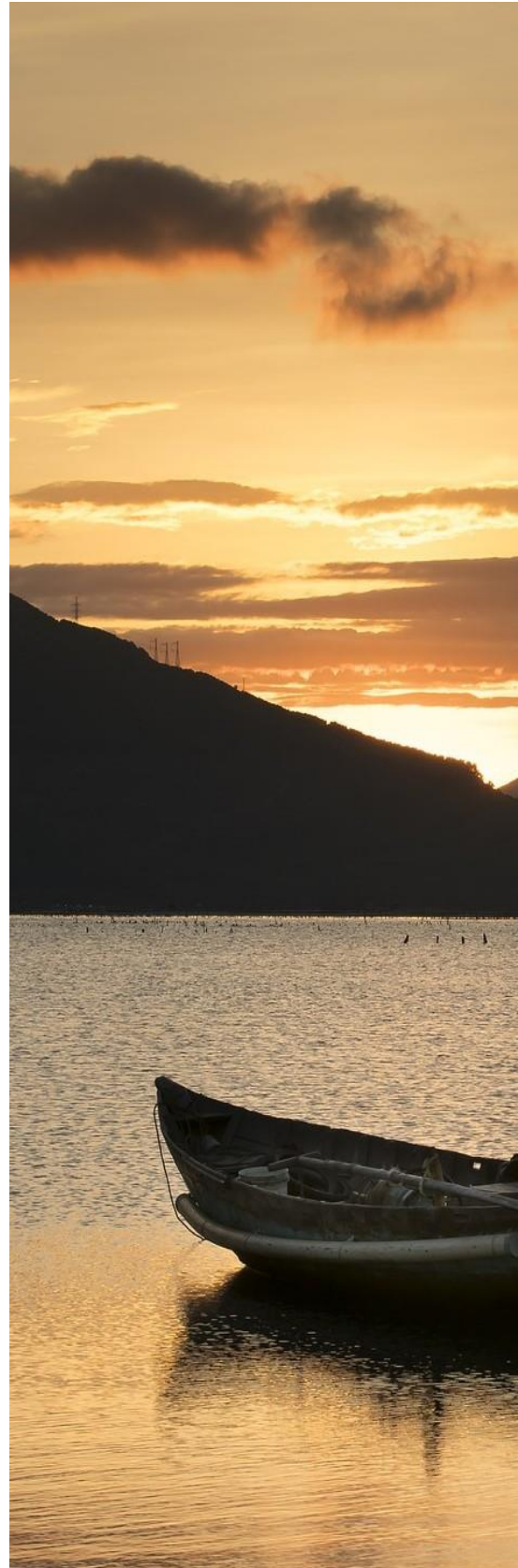
Worries about nothing important can overwhelm me and the resulting anxiety can throw me water off course. Sometimes what works the best is calling another member of my TBI tribe and just venting, because they get it with no judgment. Then they make me laugh and whatever is frustrating me gets put in perspective.

Believe me when I say all this is not as easy as these words make it sound. Never a star soccer player, I can no longer play it with my grandkids or even really run after them now. Following a recipe is tricky because I forget the directions or sometimes forget a step in the process, but the good news is I have not poisoned anyone yet!

One of the hardest aspects of looking backward is not having my career any longer. Nursing, for me, was so extremely fulfilling and I still miss it every day. I can drive now but have to plan my destination with my ever faithful GPS and sometimes have to cut errands short because of cognitive fatigue. Long road trips have to be planned with early morning start times and rest stops, packing is a weeklong decision-making process and costs me at least a day of exhaustion when I get there.

I know this now and with the help of my husband, decide if it is worth it. Usually, it is because not moving forward and living life is not an option for me. If I don’t have some memories of old trips, so it is time to make new ones and hope they stay in the file of my brain.

Occasionally, I will still kayak, rarely row, due to balance issues, but I have. The motion of these activities will cause dizziness at times, so have to be clear-headed and well-rested to do them. Life is not all positive or filled with Pollyanna-type days. That would be boring, exhausting, and really out of character for me. I am not a negative person by nature but having a TBI can certainly challenge that.



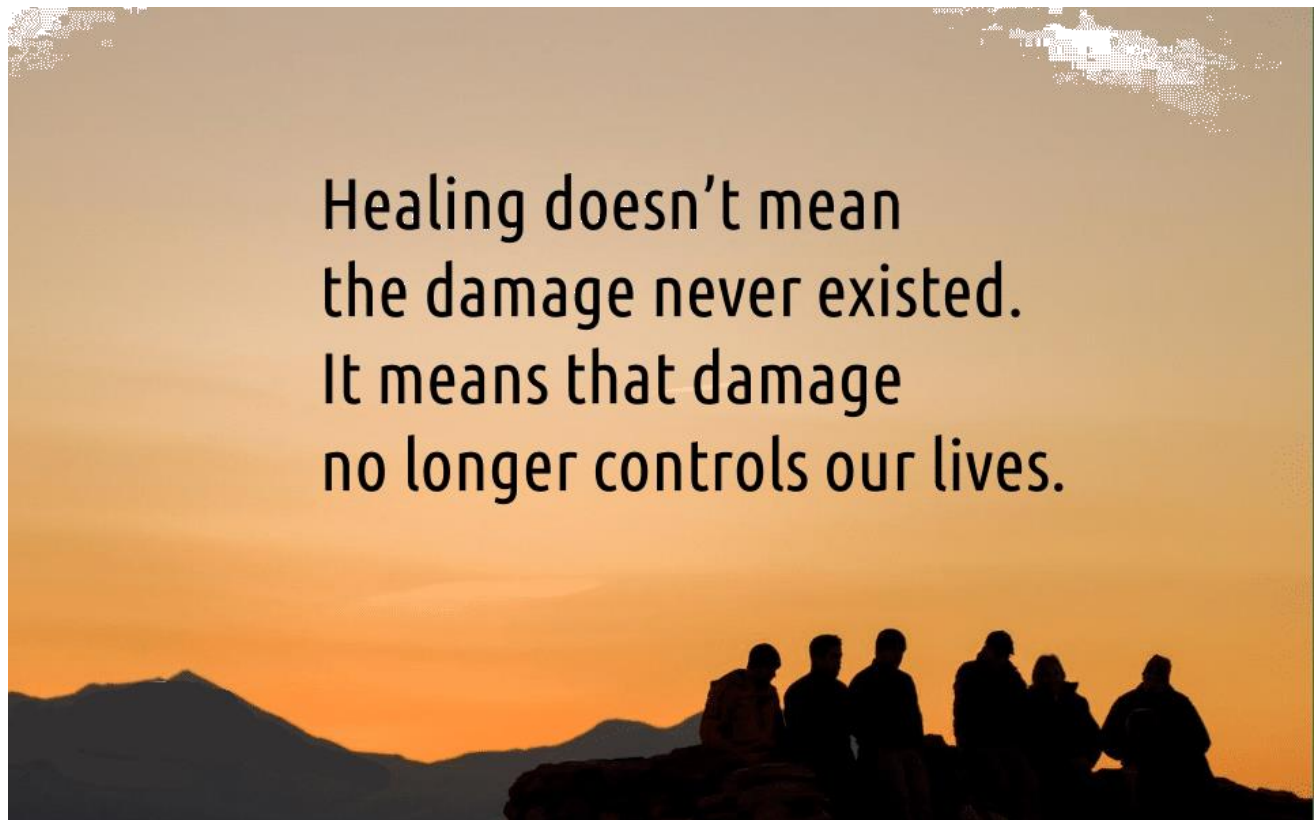
These changes in my life and the lives of those in my family have had many ups and downs, but rowing forward is where my head and goals are now. More often, I can, with help of those that hold my memories, look backward and appreciate the road that has led me here. It luckily was often filled with laughter, love, and gratefulness, even in the hard times. Looking back mostly now is reflective and allows me to remember the basic foundation that has me still rowing forward.

Meet Ellen Shaughnessy

Ellen is a TBI survivor of almost six years due to an assault by a patient. More importantly, she considers herself lucky to be a wife, mother of five, and grandmother to eight fabulous grandkids.



Healing doesn't mean
the damage never existed.
It means that damage
no longer controls our lives.



News & Views

By David & Sarah Grant



HOPE Magazine has seen many changes since our 2015 launch. Initially named TBI HOPE Magazine, several years ago we rebranded our publication to a simpler HOPE Magazine. It became clear as more and more members of the stroke and acquired brain injury (ABI) community reached out to ask if they could become members of the HOPE family.

In our naiveté, we learned that brain injuries go well beyond traumatic brain injuries. And mindful of our mission to serve as many affected by brain injury as possible, it was a natural and very smooth transition.

When this month's issue started to take form, the new photo sections that are part of this month's issue were intended to be a one-time event. However, as the layout process continued, the addition of so many members of the brain injury family breathed new life into our publication. After all, we are people and not merely statistics.



Moving forward, our readers can now expect this wonderful “humanization” of our publication to continue every month. Our stories are alike in many ways, yet so diverse at the same time. Every life has value, every life should be respected and treasured.

One thing is for certain – as we continue to evolve and change, you can expect changes, hopefully, changes that help us to better honor the journey that so many of us share.

Be safe on your journey.

-David & Sarah