

MARCH 2015

# TBI HOPE & INSPIRATION

Magazine

## the POWER of Perspective

Life After Brain Injury is Easier  
if You Look Where You Want to Go

At Times Unexpected, Tony Called  
Sometimes help comes from  
the most unexpected people

# PLUS

Meet Hope, our new  
comic strip character



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TBI Hope &  
Inspiration  
MAGAZINE

*Serving All Impacted by  
Traumatic Brain Injury*

**March 2015**

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# Welcome

I am pleased to welcome you to the premier issue of TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine. This new and exciting publication is a brain injury community effort with contributions from brain injury survivors, members of the professional and support community, caregivers and more.

It is my hope that this, as well as future issues of TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine will offer helpful information and insight about what life is like with a traumatic brain injury as well as helpful information to help navigate life after brain injury.

More importantly, I hope that you find the information and articles here helpful in letting you know that you are not alone and that compensatory and life strategies can make your life - whether you have a brain injury, or love someone who does - just a bit easier.

Brain injury has long been called a silent epidemic. Worldwide, there are millions of people, people just like you, who have seen their lives forever changed by TBI.

Your contribution is welcome. If you would like to write about your own experiences as they relate to brain injury, whether you are a survivor, caregiver, family member or a member of the support community, please email your contribution to [mystory@tbihopeandinspiration.com](mailto:mystory@tbihopeandinspiration.com).

Please join me in thanking our contributing writers. This is as much their publication as it is yours.

I sincerely hope that you find your own Hope and Inspiration within our publication.



David A. Grant

*Publisher*



# Contents

What's Inside



## REGULARS

### **2 Publishers Introduction**

A brief word about this month's issue, a word of thanks and a note of appreciation to those who made this new publication possible.

### **6 Compensatory Corner**

Where survivors share tips and tricks that have helped them to navigate the waters of life after brain injury. Lives affected by brain injury can and are rebuilt every day.

### **10 A Survivors Perspective**

A monthly column by TBI survivor, author and brain injury advocate Jeff Sebell. Jeff shares his experiences and hopes as he dares to live life at its fullest after brain injury.

### **12 Living With Hope**

Meet Hope, our cartoon feature. Hope is a true survivor in the very sense of the word. Magic happens when one survivor shares with another. Who says the sharing survivor can't be three inches tall and colorful? Prepare to smile.

## FEATURES

### **4 At Times Unexpected, Tony Called**

Sometimes we meet friends and advocates in unexpected places. New friends can take most any form – even a water company employee.

### **7 Look Where You Want to Go**

Spending too much time looking at the challenges faced after a brain injury means that we lose sight of where we really can go.

### **13 Extra Birthdays**

Her family was told she would not survive. Tears were shed with final goodbyes. But this survivor wasn't ready to give up the fight.

### **16 After the Crash**

Rebuilding a life takes time. Effective compensatory strategies can make all the difference.

### **20 Looking for a Sign**

An artist's brush and a bit of kindness mixed with compassion forever changed this survivor's life.

# At Times Unexpected, Tony Called

By Janice Tindle

Let's talk about the utility company. We've all had our bad experiences with rudeness, long hold times, and waiting for service people to show up, to turn the service on or off, or perhaps there was a dispute over a bill. We take our utility services for granted and we fall completely apart and start complaining when we lose them.

We are the public consumer. Some are ungrateful, impatient and irate. Based upon the news, at least, this is how many people perceive the utility company.

But I have a different story to tell. It is about the water company and a kind man named Tony. Last summer, the water company decided it was time that the neighborhood had its water lines replaced.

This meant ripping up our street with huge, extremely loud machines. It was going to take the spring and all summer. For most of my neighbors, this was an annoyance. For me, as a brain injury survivor, it was pure agony.

As a brain injury survivor, I suffer from constant migraine pain. I have a sensitivity to sound. No, let me correct that. Sound, like that from construction equipment is nothing short of torture. I go into spasms, and my head feels like it is going to explode. I have had to endure noise in my neighborhood that actually made me feel I was going to die from the pain-inducing sound of motors.



I've hidden in closets, cowered in the basement, and huddled in the bathtub. I've used all manner of earplugs and headphones and taped pillows around my head. When I knew it was coming, I left and went to my mother's house. But once there, it offered no guarantee I would escape the professional lawnmower service.

When the water company representative showed up, my husband and I became greatly concerned. What were we going to do? My husband decided to call the water company to find out what their schedule was, and more importantly, how to deal with the noise. We were prepared to get little concern and even less help. But that was not the response we received.

My husband talked to a man named Tony, who immediately got on board with our situation. Not only did he have sympathy, he was empathetic. He made arrangements to call my husband every step of the way to keep him informed as to where they would be and when and for how long. He also called all the contractors involved in the project, and told them they were to keep us informed. They did.

When he went on vacation, he had his replacement call. Whenever they pulled off the job to go work somewhere else, Tony called. When they had problems, Tony called. Whenever there was any news of any kind, Tony called. We have a water treatment system in our house, so when they flushed the lines, we had to put in all new filters. He knew this, so when the time came, Tony called.

*“I spent most of the time laying on my mother’s couch with ice bags on my head.”*

They started work at 7 AM, so this required us to get up at 5 AM, get me packed and ready with everything I needed for the long fourteen hour day until my husband could pick me up and take me home, where I would collapse into bed, to do it all over again the next day. Every day, my husband would call and say, “Tony called,” and give me the update.

I spent most of the time laying on my mother's couch with ice bags on my head. Sometimes, I would sit in the chair. And since I am also sensitive to light, she had the curtains closed and blankets over them. She had to awaken

at 7 AM, so this required much adjustment on her part as well. We have great love between us, so she was happy to help.

It took a long time and finally came to an end. And Tony stopped calling. How do you thank a man for going to such great lengths? Had he not called, we never would have known when or if they were coming and our life would have been well beyond the threshold of how much I could endure. Even with all the calls, I had many trips to the headache doctor. It was no easy task for any of us.

And yet, I ask myself, “How many Tony’s are there in the world who would take so much of their time and go out of their way just to ease the suffering of one individual?” He was always professional, he never complained, and was always ready to go above and beyond the call of duty. Just one brain injured woman, no one important enough to warrant such celebrity-status treatment. And yet, even so, Tony called.

### **About the Author**

Janice Tindle is a freelance writer and brain injury survivor. To read more of her work, visit her blog at [www.JaniceTindle.com](http://www.JaniceTindle.com)



# Compensatory Corner

What Works for you?

*Recovery from brain injury is lifelong. No one understands this better than survivors and those who love them. Compensatory Corner offers practical tips from those who live it...*

“Number One: don't be so hard on yourself! Whether one day you take one step and the next day you take a hundred steps, allow yourself time as long as you continue to move forward.”  
~Angie T.

“Up to 25% more blood flows to the brain during and following a workout. My daily workouts are my most effective TBI therapy.” ~ Heather S.

“Trying to keep to a regular schedule has made a BIG DIFFERENCE for me. I get up at the same time, eat at the same time, and try to get to bed at the same time each day.” ~Eddie C.



# Look Where You Want to Go

By Rosemary Rawlins

I wasn't always so fearful. There was a time when I felt secure in the world, when I thought I had control over my own destiny. That time ended on April 13, 2002.



Before then, I didn't know that one moment could change the course of many lives, that a hard knock on the head could erase precious memories or alter a person's personality, that our brain alone programs who we are by speeding up or slowing down our mental power, determining our behavior, and how well our body functions in the world.

I used to think the heart was in charge. I was a romantic. It was the brain all along. The brain alone can stop the heart.

Since the day my husband's head smacked the hard pavement after a fast car hit him, I've worked long and hard to let go of fear. Just yesterday, as Hugh drove me along Interstate 64 in a downpour, my right foot pressed into the floor hard enough to cramp my thigh when another car cut us off. I stopped breathing when the brakes hesitated for a moment as my husband hit the brakes. As I lurched forward, I saw myself fly through the windshield like I have a thousand times since the day he was hit. It's not only the crash that haunts me. My deepest fear lies in knowing the months and years of devastation that can follow one horrific split second.

Because of my book and work on BrainLine.org, many caregivers contact me personally about their unrelenting fear of the future. Many say they keep

reliving the day their loved one almost died. They are relieved when I suggest they may have secondary stress—something concrete with a name. A caregiver’s personality can change pretty drastically and understandably after he or she witnesses a loved one’s brush with death. Secondary stress might look like insomnia and hypervigilance or the inability to separate from a loved one’s pain. A caregiver might morph from a relatively carefree person into an anxiety-ridden, overprotective, and controlling person.

We read articles all the time with headlines like: “Ten Tips for a Better Life” or “How to Stop Stressing for Good.” But the truth is, getting over the life-changing injury of a loved one is impossible—we don’t get over it, but we can learn to live with it and find peace and meaning for ourselves. This healing requires a commitment to our own neglected health, visits to the doctor, following orders, and counseling. We need to take the medicine we are so used to giving! I know because it took me fifteen months to figure this out, and even then, I wasn’t really taking care of myself—I was putting out fires. I would say, “It’s time I slow down and make time for myself,” but I didn’t always do it. I made excuses.

I didn’t realize that I had to stop seeing the accident everywhere I looked before I could see the life that was going on around me. My husband, Hugh, once coached a mountain biker, “Look where you want to go. If you look at the tree, you’ll hit the tree.” I kept looking at the accident as if I could find a way to rewind it, to undo it, to figure it out. It loomed like an obstacle I could not get around.

When I got sick and tired of being me, of feeling angry, bitter, sad, sleepless, and worried all the time, I searched day and night for a space between the trees where the sunlight found a path, and one day it was there. I walked away from one life and created another. When you feel desperate, please keep looking until you can see beyond the wreckage of that one moment in time. Because when you do, you’ll create an opening in your life where you can begin to live and like yourself again.

### **Meet Rosemary**

Rosemary Rawlins is the author of *Learning by Accident, A Caregiver's True Story of Fear, Family, and Hope*. She is also Editor of BrainLine blogs and a national speaker on caregiving topics. You can learn more about her at: [www.rosemaryrawlins.com](http://www.rosemaryrawlins.com)



## Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors Prayer

God, I come before you as one whose injury cannot be seen by your other children.

While others see me, they know not that my wounds are invisible.

I come before you as a Traumatic brain injury survivor.

You alone know the depth of my pain, of my despair, of my confusion, of my aloneness, and of my overwhelming loss of self.

*Humbly, I ask of You...*

When exhaustion strikes, please grant me the strength I need to continue.

When others leave my life, help me to remember that you are always there with me.

When unsteadiness causes me to stumble, please take my hand and lead me safely forward.

When my memory so often fails me, help me to never forget what is really important.

God, so many of your children walk daily with challenges that dwarf my own.

By understanding this, I can see my own life in a better perspective.

Help me for today to accept my fate in this life, knowing that if I trust in you, all will be well.

Amen.

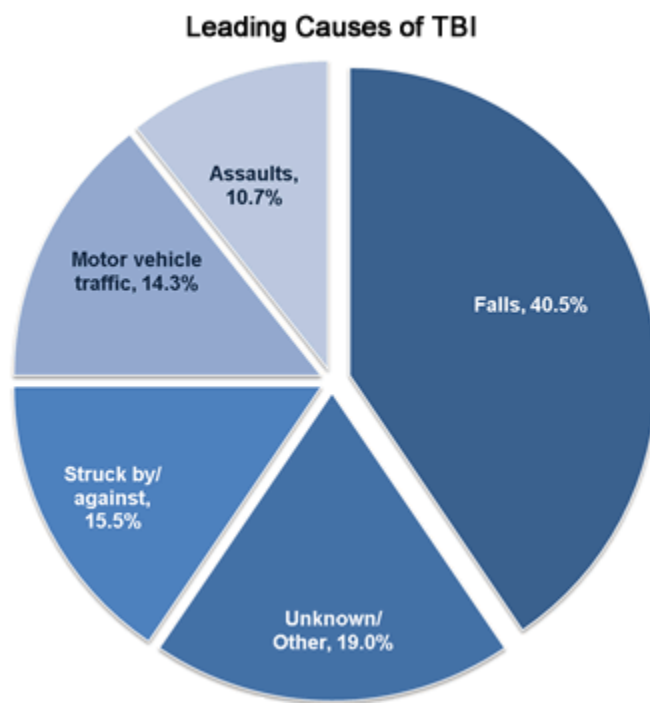
## Traumatic Brain Injury Facts, Figures & Statistics

How many people have TBI?

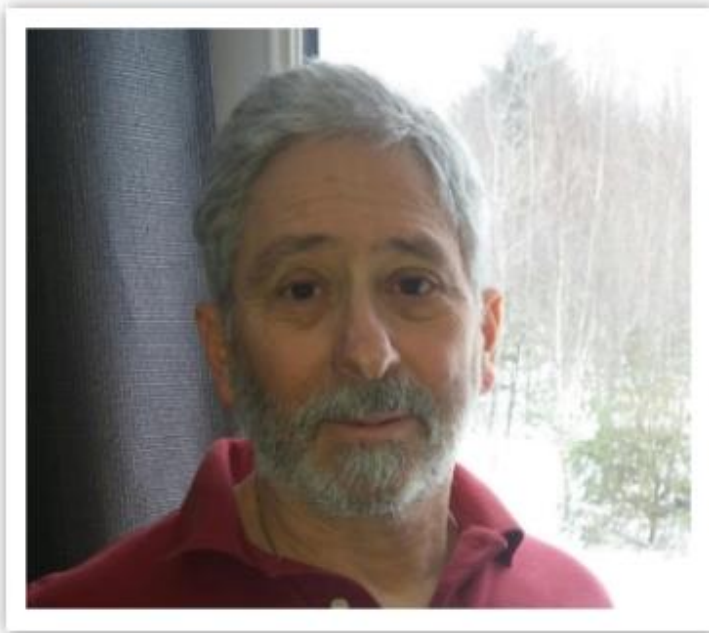
Of the 1.7 million people who sustain a TBI each year in the United States:

- 52,000 die;
- 275,000 are hospitalized; and
- 1.365 million are treated and released from an emergency department

The number of people with TBI who are not seen in an emergency department or who receive no care is unknown.



\*Data Source: Centers for Disease Control



## **A Survivors Perspective**

### **Dealing with Success and Failure after Brain Injury**

By Jeff Sebell

Those of us who have experienced a Traumatic Brain Injury are always looking for some sort of advantage; some way we can get a jump start on the road to living a fulfilled life.

One thing that is not obvious to us which does have a great impact on our lives, is the way we deal with both success and failure. This is a great example of how we can use how we think to help us.

After a Traumatic Brain Injury, failure seems to become a common theme, as we go about trying to reclaim our lives by trial and error. On top of that, we seem to derive meaning from every failure, sometimes greatly exaggerated meaning, about our abilities and future, and we sometimes live in a world where our failures run our lives. This has an effect on the quality of our lives and on our efforts to live a fulfilled life.

Success, on the other hand, doesn't come as often or as easily as it used to, and means something quite different to us than it did before our TBI. Many times, a major success for us is simply performing a task that used to come easily and while we think it's a big deal or great accomplishment, others don't see it that way.

For me, it was very important, when living my life after brain injury, that I learned how to "get something positive" from failing. Similarly, I had to look beyond the euphoric feeling success gave me in order to see if there was anything I could take away that would benefit me beyond the success I experienced.

What probably helps me learn is the peculiar way that I react when I'm excited.

Although I do get excited when I succeed at something, especially when it is something I am not sure I would be able to do, I tend to keep that excitement low key and to myself. I have always been this way, maybe more so since my brain injury, but I have managed to turn it into a tool I can use for my benefit.

One way to look at the way I am is that I've always tried to keep my life on an even keel, so that the highs weren't so high, and the lows weren't so low.

That's my way of helping to manage the ups and downs of my life, and it applies to failure as well as success. This is especially important after brain injury when we attempt things and seem to fail so much, and can make every failure into something bigger than it should be.

What I have been able to see is that success and failure are really the same; they are both just outcomes. Of course, that is very simplified, and, it goes without saying that we would rather succeed than fail, but it's a good starting point.

I must acknowledge that success or failure are not to be taken lightly; failure can have far reaching, ugly implications, while some successes can be life changing. Those times aside, however, I look generally at success and failure as tools: when we try something we either succeed or we fail. By nature, success brings its own reward. Failures, though, don't bring rewards, and would be a complete waste if we didn't learn and grow from them.

*“Both success and failure provide lessons that stay with us our entire lives.”*

Both success and failure provide lessons that stay with us our entire lives, and I do my best to avoid judging them as good or bad. I don't want to have my ego inflated by success, and similarly, I don't want to be sunk in a "culture of failure" which can happen when we constantly lament what society calls "failures", and allow them to drag us down

and set the tone for our lives.

Those of us who have experienced a TBI need to learn or re-learn a lot of things based on trial and error, and we are going to fail at some things. That's



the way these things work. By having a healthy relationship with failure, and looking at failure in a productive way, we don't have to get caught up in a "culture of failure". Being caught in a "culture of failure" makes it that much harder to have any successes and live a fulfilled life.

This is work, thinking positively about our lives, and it's not easy work.

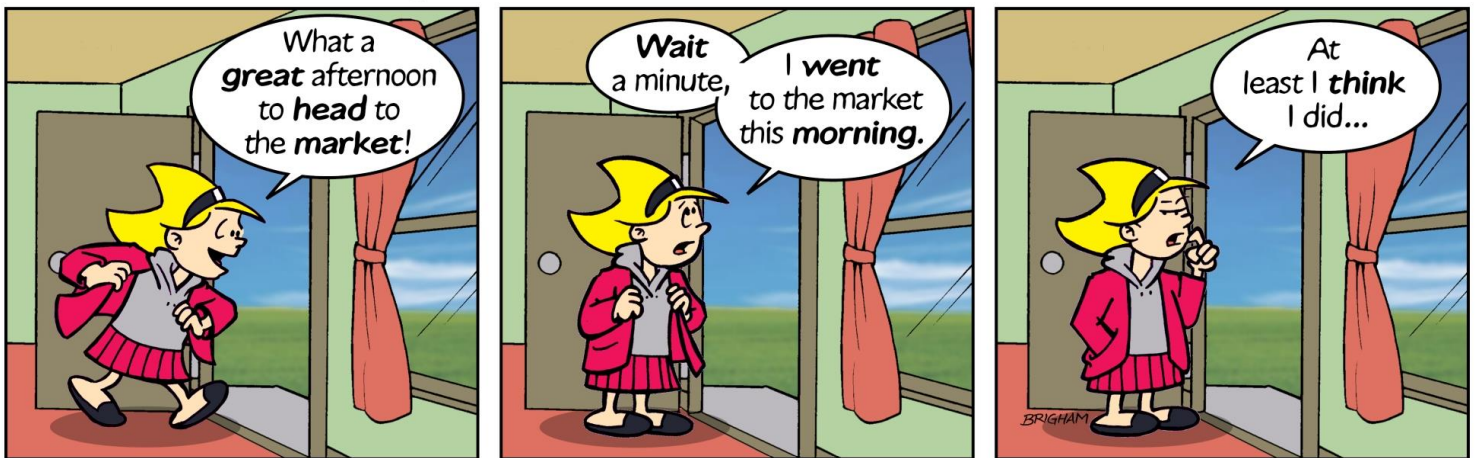
However, the power of our mind is strong, and by looking at failure constructively, it's possible to live in a "positive zone", where we are not always down on ourselves for what we see as a failure, but we are more accepting of ourselves and our circumstances; experiencing life and learning about it as we succeed and fail.

### More About Jeff

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

### Living With Hope

By Patrick Brigham



### Welcome to the Wacky World of Patrick Brigham

Patrick Brigham is our Cartoonist in Residence for TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine. Patrick hails from a self-described dimension of untamed nuttiness. And while Patrick does not have a brain injury (*or at least denies having one to those closest to him*) his off-beat humor is sure to resound in our TBI community. Hope will grace every issue of our publication.

Please take a moment to support Patrick and give his [Facebook Page](#) a like.

# Extra Birthdays

By Donna Hafner

Another year has passed and with it another birthday. I turned fifty-four. It was the fourth birthday that I was not expected to see. I don't know why, but it hit me hard this year. It's a pretty safe bet that if you are reading this now, you probably have an extra birthday or two under your belt. Perhaps a couple of extra Christmases as well. Maybe you love someone with a brain injury and you have been able to experience the joy of sharing an additional birthday or special event that no one had expected them to live to see.

In November 2011, I was just fifty years old when I had an unexpected and massive heart attack.

My heart attack was immediately followed by multiple strokes that left me in a coma for two weeks at the University of Washington Hospital in Seattle. ICU and hospital experiences are shared by many survivors and their families. My family was not immune to spending nearly two months in them before I was eventually released.

They said I tried my best to die and had to be resuscitated thirty-one different times. My poor ticker was determined to give up the ghost. But the medical team kept finding ways to bring me back to life. In the course of those episodes, I suffered many strokes throughout various areas of my brain. My prognosis was very poor. The medical staff said that if I were to survive, my cognitive abilities were expected to be minimal at best. The doctor said I might be able to gossip or possibly even watch a baseball game on TV. Rest assured, this is not exactly the type of life that I was leading prior to my injuries.



Thankfully, my family chose to roll the dice and decided that heroic measures would continue. And so they did.

Heroic measures continued until my family was told that there was no hope left. I wasn't going to come out of the coma. The images of my brain looked ominous with all of the white blobs showing up quite distinctively against the dark MRI scans. My family was told it was finally time to let me go. It was time for me to pass.

I can't begin to imagine that conversation and cringe to think of their pain in that final moment of decision. "Should we or shouldn't we?" Eventually, they came to a consensus and a conclusion. It was time to pull the plug. Excruciating goodbyes were said at my bedside, with tears streaming. All the while, I lay motionless, just as I had since the moment that my heart attack hit.

It was fortunate that I was an organ donor and had signed the donor card over three decades earlier. My family had agreed to allow them to harvest my organs, per my wishes. This turned out to be a lucky stroke of luck for me.

The Organ Harvesting Team was running a bit late, so I was still on full life-support when my heart unexpectedly started racing. This required three more good shocks to get it stabilized again in order for my organs to be viable. YAY for me. Those three good shocks apparently jump-started my brain too. Somewhere in the next ninety minutes, I fought my way back from the near dead.

My family had returned to my bedside. I suddenly moved a toe, ever so slightly. You can imagine their disbelief. I had been motionless for all of this time, literally on the chopping block. Suddenly and against all odds, I was showing signs of life. The Do Not Resuscitate notice was immediately pulled off of the wall above my head. My doctors rushed in to see the miracle in progress. My intubation was pulled out within the hour. Miracles are another thing that many of us survivors and families have in common as well.

*“Miracles are another thing that many of us survivors and families have in common.”*

Each additional birthday or holiday that I now experience is cherished and treasured. We all only have so many. I've learned the hard way not to take any



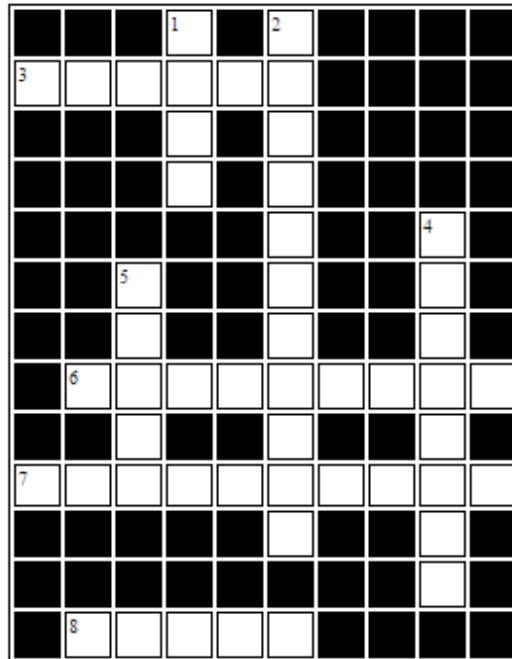
of them for granted. I think it hit harder this year because I have the gift of distance from the trauma now. Four years that I was not expected to have, four years of life. In the early days I only saw what I couldn't do, who I no longer was.

But slowly, over time, I've learned that life does continue, sometimes in spite of ourselves. No, it often isn't the same. But nonetheless, it's much better than the alternative. Are birthdays more cherished than they've ever been? You tell me.

### More About Donna

Donna is a survivor in the truest sense of the word. Coming back from near death and living life as a brain injury survivor have validated why those closest to her know her by her nickname - Resilynt.

## Test Your Brain Power... Our Brainteasers Section!



#### Across

3. This can cause an ABI (acquired brain injury).
6. Someone who loves and supports a survivor.
7. Caused by a blow or violent shake to the head or body.
8. Trust or expectation that something will happen.

#### Down

1. TBI Hope & Inspiration magazine's mascot.
2. Brain doctor
4. Friends you may never meet face to face are here.
5. Traumatic \_\_\_\_\_ Injury

ANSWERS ON PAGE 23

# After the Crash

By Carole Starr



After brain injury, we strive to get back to “normal”, to “the way life used to be”. Anything less seems like failure. However, brain injury has changed us forever and the more we compare our “new selves” to our “old selves”, the worse we feel. Keeping a portfolio of my progress and accomplishments has helped me to stop comparing, accept and even to embrace my “new self” after brain injury.

I’ve always been one to save mementos and organize them into scrapbooks. I like visual cues to remember my past and take pride in what I’ve done. In my former life as an educator, I kept a professional portfolio which included documentation of all my teaching related accomplishments.

In 1999, I sustained a brain injury in a car accident. For several years, I focused mostly on relearning basic life tasks. I completely forgot that my professional portfolio existed. One day, by chance, I re-found it. Reading through my former life was devastating. Here was documentation of all the things I used to be able to do but now couldn’t. I had been a professional educator and now I was reduced to being a professional patient. Reading the portfolio triggered the overwhelming grief I felt about my lost life. At the time, my portfolio proved to me all the harsh judgments I then believed about myself—that I was inadequate, a failure, a cracked version of my former self who would never again achieve anything worthwhile.

Every day, I would pull out my portfolio, think about all the losses and compare this unwelcome “new Carole” to the much better “old Carole”. The more I looked at my portfolio, the worse I felt. I knew it wasn’t healthy to do, but I couldn’t seem to help myself.

After about a month of this, I had an epiphany, one that changed the way I thought about myself and my brain injury. My counselor and I had been

working on a “thought stopping” technique, to rein in my tendency to judge myself so harshly. One part of the technique involved testing the truthfulness of my thoughts. I’d placed copies of the technique throughout my house, so I would remember to use it. One day, as I looked at my portfolio and sobbed over my lost life, I saw the thought stopping technique. I asked myself, “Is it true that I no longer have any accomplishments?”

With a sudden jolt of awareness, I realized that even though I could no longer do the activities documented in my portfolio, there were still multiple activities that the “new me” had accomplished. I had written a few poems, one of which had been published on a brain injury website. I had discovered a new, great satisfaction in using my hands to make crafts. I’d volunteered for about thirty minutes a week at an organization where I used to work.

*“I had discovered  
a new, great  
satisfaction in  
using my hands  
to make crafts.”*

With help from my Occupational Therapist, I had a six week menu plan, which allowed me to regain control of my cooking. While those accomplishments were quite different from my previous ones, I was indeed extremely proud of them. I realized that those successes deserved my recognition just as much as the ones from my previous life.

At that time in my recovery, compiling and categorizing those accomplishments into a put-together portfolio was beyond my organizational skills. So, I simply placed documentation of those early successes in a folder in my desk. I called it the “Stuff I’m Proud of” folder. Over time I added to it—more writing, pictures of crafts I’d made, events I’d attended, speeches I’d given—anything large or small that I was proud of and/or represented progress in my recovery. Eventually, that folder bulged with accomplishments.

A couple years later, I was asked to participate in a workshop about creativity and brain injury. I decided to put together a more formal portfolio for that workshop. I purchased a large 3-ring binder and my Recreation Therapist helped me sort and divide my Stuff I’m Proud Of folder into several categories—Writing, Crafts, Brain Injury Speaking, Volunteering and Other (for anything that didn’t fit neatly into a category). Each section was organized from earliest to most recent activities. Just seeing that Stuff I’m Proud Of folder all together



in an organized portfolio gave me tremendous feelings of pride, satisfaction and accomplishment. I named this portfolio After the Crash.

After the Crash is a visual reminder of all the progress I've made, the pride I feel in my accomplishments and the sense of purpose I have now as a brain injury speaker and leader of Brain Injury Voices. It's so rewarding to compare the early activities documented in the back of my portfolio to the more recent ones in the front. Many once challenging activities are now easy. During times when I feel sad, and all I can see is what I still cannot do, my portfolio shows me just how far I've come.

As I've documented my small successes gradually building into larger ones, I've learned to stop comparing the new Carole to who I was before my brain injury. My old portfolio's home is now a box in my attic. Instead of trying to get back to the way life used to be, I focus my energies into creating a new life, one that works within the limitations of my brain injury. "After the Crash" reminds me that the way forward after brain injury is to focus on what I CAN do and build from there.

My portfolio has played a critical role in helping me to accept and like my new self after brain injury. If you've been inspired by this essay, I hope you will think about all that you've accomplished since your brain injury and begin your own Stuff I'm Proud Of folder.

### **Meet Carole Starr**

Carole is a motivational brain injury speaker as well as both Founder and Facilitator of Brain Injury Voices. She can be contacted through the Brain Injury Voices website at [www.braininjuryvoices.org](http://www.braininjuryvoices.org)

## **Contributors Wanted!**

TBI Hope and Inspiration Magazine is always looking for stories to publish.

Submit your story by email to

[mystory@tbihopeandinspiration.com](mailto:mystory@tbihopeandinspiration.com)



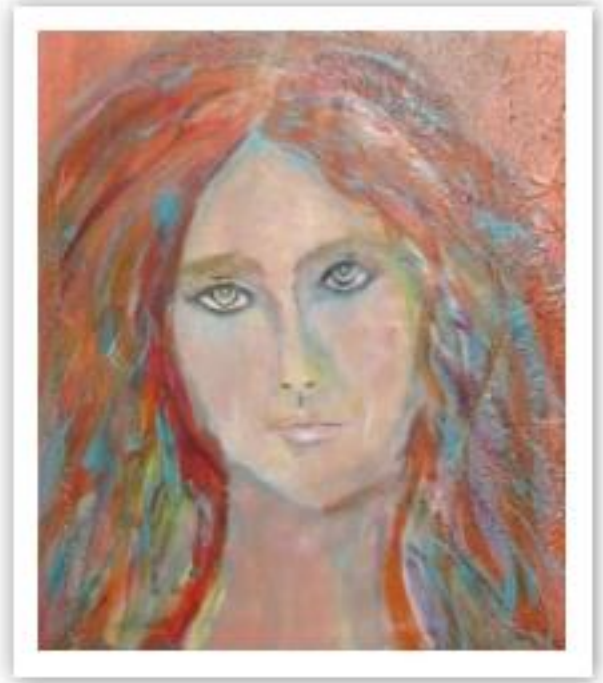




# Looking for a Sign

By Wendy Proctor

I loved my job as program director working with youth. Life was good! All that changed on July 28, 2008. While on a field trip with my students, I stepped off the school bus and was struck by a passing vehicle sustaining broken bones, lacerations and a traumatic brain injury. It happened days before my only daughter was to be married. The wedding was cancelled, and I never got the chance to see my beautiful daughter walk down the aisle, with the boy she was in love with, wearing the beautiful dress that we had spent many hours searching for.



Survivors struggle with many emotions following an injury, including sadness, hopelessness, deep loss and more. I felt all those along with a deep anger that consumed me, yet I was powerless to change how I felt.

One day, I picked up an artist's brush. I wanted to have a tangible portrait of how I felt, an expression of the anger that ate away inside me. From the canvas, emerged a reflection of how I was feeling and suddenly, something indescribable happened inside me! For the first time in many months, I actually felt happy! I felt liberated! In the days that followed, whenever I looked at that sketch, it just made me feel better.

I continued sketching, sometimes penning words on the canvas. And always, when I was creating art, I felt that same sense of accomplishment, and feeling of peace. Those days when the anger



seemed unbearable, I would pull out my art supplies, and paint, but I felt my work was not that great, so I kept it hidden. One of the common themes, with all my artwork, was the obvious reflection of deep anger and sadness and each portrait had tears falling from one eye.

I came across a posting for an art retreat and I made plans to attend. I was drawn to the beautiful colors in one particular artist's work, so I applied for her workshop, and made arrangements to attend. I was so nervous on the day of the workshop.

This was a big step for me. As fate would have it, I was the first student that she asked to share where I was from, and why I was there. I loved the beautiful work this artist had created and I knew she was accomplished in her field. She was published and well-known for her beautiful artwork that is so full of color and life. I don't really recall what I said, but I managed to mumble something.



Consultation, training, transition services, and in-school support for traumatic brain injury, concussions & strokes.

Through snippets of conversation during the workshop, I realized that there were many accomplished artists present, including the artist seated beside me who used art as therapy when working with clients in her rehabilitation program. These were clients who sounded a lot like me, who were facing challenges as a result of injuries!

I must explain, I am the type of person that always looks for a “sign” and this day was no different. Along with trying to hide my disability and blend in with the other artists in the workshop, I was also starting to feel inadequate. I gave myself a good talking to, as I was determined to see this day through. But inside, there was anxiety that was threatening to ruin the day. “If I could just have some small sign”, I said to myself....”anything to get me through this day.”

“Along with trying to hide my disability and blend in with the other artists in the workshop, I was also starting to feel inadequate.”

Suddenly, the artist announced that she often had a drawing and gave away “gifts” during her workshops. Sometimes, they would be special paints, maybe brushes, perhaps a selection from her painting portfolio. We were to place our name in a container and she would draw out a winner. Well, imagine my surprise when I was chosen first to receive a “gift!” When she presented me with the gift, I felt a mixture of elation and disappointment. Elation, because I connected with the artwork immediately, and disappointment because it was not the beautiful colors that drew me to this artist.

“I like it”, I said, “but it is not yours”. For those who don’t know, what often happens with survivors of a traumatic brain injury, we think a thought, and before we know it, we’ve blurted it out!

The artist smiled and nodded and said, "It is my artwork." I quickly blinked away my tears, but I can tell you it is the most precious piece of artwork that I own. The painting is of a young woman and you can feel the emotion in the piece. She even has a tear streaming down her face! At that moment, I knew I was right where I was supposed to be.

### About Wendy Proctor

Wendy is a traumatic brain injury survivor from Belleville, Ontario Canada and is still learning and growing through her art.

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