

“Finding Purpose after Brain Injury”

Second Chance to Live

Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

My Goal

My Goal in sharing my process and journey living with a brain injury and an invisible disability is to encourage you. Encourage you to not give up on your process, a loving God or yourself. More will be revealed with time.

In My Experience

In my experience, I needed to learn how to trust the process a loving God and myself. I needed to be willing to do the footwork, while letting go of the outcomes and timing. I needed to trust that the pieces of the puzzle of my experience and life would fit together in the right order and at the right time.

Let me share with tell you about my process and journey that led me to have these awareness’.

Car Accident August 1967 when I was 10 years old

Sustained an open skull fracture and a fractured left femur. Right frontal lobe damage, a severe brain bruise with brain stem involvement. Coma 3 weeks.

In traction to set my left femur for 6-7 weeks and then placed in a full body cast or Spica cast for 5-6 months. After being taken out of the cast I learned how to walk again. Walked with a limp for a long time.

Once I learned how to walk, I was taken to have 2 EEG's and a battery of Cognitive and Psycho Testing. The results of which were shared with my parents, but not with me. I would learn the results some 29 years later.

Moving Forward

Once my external wounds healed and I was able to learn how to walk, talk, read, write and speak in complete sentences the impact of my traumatic brain injury went invisible. The impact was no longer factored into my struggles.

I was tutored at home through my 5th grade and then was mainstreamed back into elementary school in the 6th grade. I graduated on time with my high school class. I grew up with a lot of insecurities as I experienced shame.

Shamed for Not Being Enough

Shame for not being enough or doing enough. Constantly said I was sorry. My 9th grade English teach gave me an assignment to write I am sorry 500 times, thinking the assignment would get me to stop saying sorry. Did not work.

Educational Paths

I obtained my undergraduate degree in 10 years, 2 universities and 1 college. 4 different majors. Geology, Physical Education, Nursing/Emergency Medical Technology and Theology. I obtained my graduate degree in 3 1/2 years, 2 graduate schools. 1 year at Asbury Theological Seminary and 2 1/2 years at the University of Kentucky.

Difficulties in Undergraduate and Graduate Programs Pima Community College

Asked to leave the LPN (license practical nursing program).

Oral Roberts University

Parents were asked to meet with the undergraduate program chair at Oral Roberts University.

Asbury Theological Seminary

Placed on probation for 1 year by the Asbury Theological Seminary due to a reference recommendation by one of my undergraduate teachers who I asked to write a letter of recommendation to include with my application packet to the seminar. Due to a poor evaluation by my J-term supervisor at a local hospital I was not permitted to start my second year at seminary. First had to undergo counseling for a year and then be reconsidered to continue my graduate studies with Asbury Theological Seminary.

University of Kentucky — Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling

After not being able to complete my 1st practicums in the university graduate program, the program chair told me that he would remove me from the program if I did not successfully complete a 2nd practicum. Passed that practicum, but received a poor internship evaluation. Consequently, the graduate school program chair told me that he would not let me know if I would be allowed to graduate with my master's

degree until the coffee an hour before the graduation ceremonies. I was allowed to graduate.

Employment

Was fired from my 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th professional jobs after graduate school. Became a client of the **Florida Department of Vocational Rehabilitation** (DVR) while still working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. This occurred while I was still on probation and after I disclosed to my supervisor that I sustained a traumatic brain injury when I was 10 years old. After my probational period ended, I was fired as a vocational rehab counselor, but remained as a client of DVR. After a failed job placement, I was terminated as a client of the DVR. I applied 2 times for SSDI in Florida.

Recruited to North Carolina

Recruited to North Carolina as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor by an Insurance Company (Worker's Compensation) in 1996. Was fired 4 months later. Applied for and was accepted as a client of the **North Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation**. After completing the evaluation process, I was told by my vocational rehabilitation counselor that I was unemployable in her report. I made my 3rd application for SSDI in North Carolina 1997-98. After my 3rd application and 20 years of getting fired from non-professional and professional jobs I was unemployable and disabled.

Long History of Being Fired from Traditional Employment

I had a long 20-year history of being employed and then being fired, terminated or let go from those non-professional and professional jobs.

When I Reached a Point in My Life

In my experience, I needed to get to a point in my life when I realized that I was powerless to change how my life was being impacted by circumstances that were out of my control. When I reached this point in my life I was able to begin to confront my denial. By confronting my denial, I was able to begin to grieve my reality. The reality of how my traumatic brain injury and invisible disability impacts my life and well-being. I needed to grieve my reality, to be able to accept my reality, so that I could get on with my ability to use what works for me.

Could no Longer Deny

In my experience, I had to reach a point in my life that denying my reality was more painful than my need to deny my reality in an attempt to prove that there was nothing wrong with me. In my experience, I found that I had to grieve my reality through the process of moving through the 5 stages of grieving – Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. I needed to grieve my reality so that I could begin to accept my reality. What I also discovered was that as I grew in my acceptance of my reality, I grew in awareness. My awareness helped me to take a different action.

Interest Inventories and Career Assessments

When at the university and college I took a wide battery of Interest inventories and career assessments in my pursuit of finding my purpose. In my experience, I found that all these interest inventories and career assessment tests proved to be helpful in clarifying, but not helpful in practicality. Practicality in that the results did not take into account the impact of the injury to my brain or my invisible disability. Career assessments and interest inventories pointed me in the direction, but I was the only one who could find out how to use my gifts, talents and abilities.

Told that I was Unemployable and declared Disabled

Because I was conditioned to believe that my purpose was tied to a job I felt at a loss after being told that I was unemployable by my department of vocational rehabilitation counselor and declared disabled by the social security administration in December 1999. Nevertheless, I still had desire to find and use my purpose. In my quest to find and use my purpose I wrote poems, an autobiography and a book that I attempted to get published. After a friend, told me my material would be “ripe for a blog”.

I created **Second Chance to Live** on February 6, 2007.

Since that time, I have written 1888 articles, created 423 video presentations, 12 e Books, 20 slide show presentations and 33 inspirational posters. To view these resources, click [here](#).

Second Chance to Live gave me a medium to share what I have learned in ways that work for me, for people who want what I have to give to fulfill my purpose.

What I Discovered

“Purpose is about a process and a journey, not a destination. I cannot know until I know and knowing just takes what it takes. There are no shortcuts, “silver bullets” or “magic potions”. By accepting that reality, I am given the gift of knowing by not giving up. I am given the gift of knowing by trusting the process, a loving God and myself.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

The Process after Our Brain Injury

Questions that I Needed to Ask Myself

Questions that I needed to ask and resolve after being told that I was unemployable and began receiving SSDI,
What does normal look like to me after being told that I could not work in traditional employment?

“What is my Destiny?”, “When will I find my Destiny?” “How will I find my Destiny?”

Questions that You May Also be Asking Yourself

Questions if you are not able to work in traditional employment.

Questions if you are no longer able to accomplish what you were able to do before your brain injury.

When will I feel Normal?

What is my Destiny?

When will I Find my Destiny?

How will I Find my Destiny?

So where do I go from Here?

**What I have found that is VERY IMPORTANT to Remember
– Because there are Voices that Want me to Agree with
their Assessment of Who I Am**

You and I are not our brain injuries.

You and I are not defined by labels and societal stigmatization.

Our brain injuries were only an event that occurred in our
lives.

Our brain injuries do not have to define who we are as
individuals.

We are not our deficits or limitations

**What I have Found that We as Individual Living with Brain
Injuries Can Do to Empower our Lives**

Grieve the impact of our brain injuries. Grieve the impact of
what I am powerless to change.

**“Confront our Denial”, “Face our Anger”, “Work through
our Bargaining”, “Embrace. our Depression”, “Accept our
Reality”**

Awareness, Acceptance, and Action

Rail Roads — Brain injury was a switch on the railroad of life, pointing me in a different direction. A direction in which I get to learn how to use my gifts, talent, and abilities in ways that work for me.

Quotes that Inspire You and I to Not Give Up

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.” Helen Keller

“Regardless of your lot in life, you can build something beautiful on it.” Zig Ziglar

“It is not as important what happens to us, as how we respond to what happens to us.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

“It is not that I am so smart, it is just that I stay with problems longer.” Albert Einstein

“Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb trees, it will live it’s whole life believing that it is stupid.”
Albert Einstein

Concepts that Empower the Process of Finding and Living our Destiny

Learning Styles / Strategies — How we learn may have changed after we sustained our brain injuries. Get tested to find out how you learn –Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic or a combination of these learning styles.

Jigsaw Puzzle — Learning from one circumstance (puzzle piece) to be able to step on another puzzle piece. Puzzle pieces will connect as I learn each lesson.

Baking Cakes — learning to combine ingredients — Sensei gives me ingredients to put together to become a black belt

Tapestries — Each thread (combined threads) look like jumbled threads on one side of the tapestry, on the other side combined create a beautiful story.

Elephant Riddle — Question — How do you eat an elephant? **Answer** — One bite at a Time

Light Bulbs — Thomas Edison

Strike Outs — Babe Ruth

Circumstances — lessons, opportunities, more lessons and opportunities

The Fable of the “Tortoise and the Hare

The Story of the Crack Pot

Bruce Lee’s Philosophy — Research your own experience, absorb what is useful, reject what is useless. And add specifically your own creation.