

**"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." Alice Walker**

**"There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self." Aldous Huxley**

**"As long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way." Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**"Success isn't a result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire." Arnold Glasgow**

**"You are as amazing as you let yourself be. Let me repeat that. You are as amazing as you let yourself be." Elizabeth Alraune**

**Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA  
Second Chance to Live  
[secondchancetolive.org](http://secondchancetolive.org)**

# **“I Am More Than My Brain Injury” Zoom Presentation**

**Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA**

**Second Chance to Live**

**Fayetteville Brain Injury Support Group**

**April 13, 2021**

**Living with a Brain Injury can be likened to a box of jigsaw puzzle pieces that are dumped out onto the table of life. Individually the puzzle pieces make little sense, however when put together bring clarity.**

**In this presentation I will share what I discovered about these individual puzzle pieces. I will share what helped me to learn how to live and thrive with the conundrum of a brain injury jigsaw puzzle.**

- 1. How my brain injury happened:** Car Accident in 1967 at the age 10 (open skull fracture, right frontal lobe damage, severe brain bruise with brain stem involvement. Coma 3 weeks)
- 2. Greatest Challenge:** For many years, buying into my denial (lack of awareness) and the denial (lack of awareness) of family members. Breaking free from my denial.
- 3. Greatest Achievement:** That I have persevered and not given up along the way, when doing so would have

been much easier. That I kept looking for a way that worked.

**4. One Word or Sentence that Describe you:**

Tenacious; “Research your own experience, absorb what is useful, reject what is useless and add specifically your own creation”. Bruce Lee philosophy of Jeet Kune Do applied to my journey.

**My Process and Journey Living with a Brain Injury and an Invisible Disability**

**Mainstreamed** into elementary school 6th grade.

**Graduated** on time with my high school class 1975.

**University of Arizona:** Geology then Physical Ed.

**Transferred to Pima Community College** to take prerequisites. Applied to the Licensed Practical Nursing program. Obtained my Nursing Assistant Certification. Eight weeks before graduating with my LPN was asked to leave the LPN program.

**Transferred to Oral Robert’s University** – parents asked to meet with undergraduate program chair due to unknown difficulties on campus?

**Graduate School** – Asbury Theological Seminary. On probation. Difficulties as a student chaplain during a J-term. Asked to meet with Department chair at the Seminary. Not admit for my 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

**Graduate School** – University of Kentucky. Difficulties with 1<sup>st</sup> practicum, met with Department Chair Graduate program. Was given 1 more practicum, Internship difficulties. 1 hour before graduation was told.

**Passed the exam** and obtained my credentials as a certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC). Worked in Worker's Comp out of Graduate School.

### **Florida**

**Employment** – fired from 4 professional jobs.

Applied 2 times for SSDI in Florida and then 1 time in North Carolina.

**Client of the Department** of Vocational Rehabilitation in Florida, while I was still working as counselor on probation and then terminated as a counselor. Later terminated as a client due to an unsuccessful job placement.

### **North Carolina**

Recruited Insurance Company as a CRC – Fired 4 months later. Could not find other employment.

Applied for SSDI for the **3<sup>rd</sup> time**. Applied to the North Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation as a client. After the evaluation process, my Vocational Rehab Counselor determined that I was unemployable.

**Felt like someone all dressed up with nowhere to Go although I diligently applied myself both academically and vocationally.**

Shortly after being told I was unemployable, my 3<sup>rd</sup> application for SSDI was approved. Still had a desire to use my gifts, talents and abilities to be of service.

Got a computer with back pay. Wrote poems, an autobiography, a book and then started a blog, Second Chance to Live on Feb 6, 2007.

### **Since February 6, 2007**

1895 articles, 423 video presentations, 12 e Books, 20 slide show presentations, 34 inspirational posters – body, soul, spirit, mind and emotions approach to an ongoing brain injury recovery process.

### **Could no longer Deny**

### **When I reach a point in my life**

### **I Discovered that Interest Inventories and Career Assessments do not Factor in Brain Injuries or Invisible Disabilities**

### **What I Discovered about Purpose**

“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

**What is VERY IMPORTANT to Remember**  
**Because there are Voices that Want you and I to**  
**Agree with their Assessment of Who we Are as**  
**Individuals living with Brain Injuries.**

**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 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.

**My Brain Injury was Merely an Event that Happened in My Life.**

The event of my brain injury does not define who I am, no more than does a diagnosis, prognosis, label, stereotype or a societal stigmatization.

**What I Discovered that is VERY IMPORTANT to Remember**

Because there are voices that want you and I to agree with their assessment of who we are as individuals living with brain injuries.



## **You and I are not our brain injuries.**

We are not defined by a diagnosis, prognosis, label, stereotype or 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 Discovered that I Needed to Do as an Individual Living with a Brain Injury**

I needed to grieve the impact of my brain injury

I needed to grieve what I was powerless to change

I needed to confront my denial and the denial of family and friends

I needed to work through my anger at what I was powerless to change

I needed to allow myself to try to bargain my way out of...

I needed to be gentle with myself as I worked through depression

I needed to have people to help me through this grieving process

I needed to get to a place of acceptance to be able to accept my reality when other people couldn't.

I needed to let go of what no longer worked for me.

## **Understanding the Impact of Invisible Disabilities**

### **My Interest is Sharing this Presentation**

1. Not to fix blame on anyone – as that does no one any good
2. Empower individuals living with brain injuries and other kinds of invisible disabilities to pursue their hopes and dreams.
3. Encourage individuals living with brain Injuries and invisible disabilities to love and accept themselves.
4. Motivate individuals living with brain injuries and invisible disabilities to move forward with their lives.

**I do not like to Label or Stereotype Individuals, however in this instance doing so has helped me to Understand what I was Experiencing.**

Experiencing as an individual living with a brain Injury and an invisible disability.

### **Four Groups of Individuals**

4 Groups of People we Interact with as Individuals living with Brain Injuries and Invisible Disabilities

#### **First Group**

People are oblivious and do not care one way or another whether we have invisible disabilities

## **Second Group**

Hear that I am a living with an invisible disability, but believe that I am using my invisibility as an excuse.

Treat me with contempt, either overtly or covertly, because I am unable to meet or satisfy their expectations.

## **Third Group**

Understand that I am an individual living with an invisible disability, but still want me to function without an invisible disability.

Believe that I am making an excuse when I am unable to fulfill their expectations.

Refuse to believe that I have legitimate limitations and deficits. Blame me for reminding them that I have an invisible disability.

## **Fourth Group**

Thankfully realize that I am living with an invisible disability and that my invisible disability interferes with my ability to work.

## **Second and Third Groups**

Tell me they understand and accept that I have an invisible disability. Nevertheless, I am blamed when I cannot measure up to their expectation (s).

Nothing I can say or do can convince them of my predicament and conundrum – that I am disabled although I look normal.

Feel like I am between a proverbial “Rock and a Hard Place”.

### **Treat me with Disdain and Ridicule**

Want me to Give more than I am able to Give

Want me to buy back into their denial system to believe that if I just...

### **Denial Systems**

Denial System includes manipulation through shame, guilt and emotional coercion.

Want me to believe that my invisible disability is all up in my head.

That if I just tried harder that I would not be affected by my invisible disability.

### **In My Experience**

I have spent countless hours attempting to disprove the reality of my disability. For many years I had no idea that I was living with an invisible disability. As a result, I internalized the impact of my invisible disability as a reflection of my being.

### **In Response**

I shamed, blamed, berated and criticized who I was because of my inability to perform as an individual who was not impacted by a traumatic brain injury. In the process, I bought into the belief that I deserved to be blamed, berated, shamed and criticized.

## **I Did So Because**

I did not know the significance of my acquired brain injury or my invisible disability.

## **Trying to Figure Things Out After Our Brain Injuries Being Vulnerable**

Living with a brain injury and an invisible disability can lead us to believe that we deserve to be bullied.

## **The Consequence**

As a result, we may be led to believe that we cannot trust ourselves or our judgement. By not trusting ourselves we can be led to believe. Believe what other people want us to believe about ourselves.

## **A Faulty Belief**

Through buying into these beliefs, we may find that we deserve to be limited. In the process we may find ourselves being mistreated, exploited and taken advantage of for personal gain.

## **Learned Helplessness**

In the process we can develop a learned helplessness. A learned helplessness can lead us to believe that we don't deserve to be more than we are led to believe about ourselves.

In the process we may find ourselves intimidated by those individuals who seek use us for their gain.

## **Intimidation Defined**

**Merriam Webster** defines intimidation as: to make timid or fearful: frighten; especially: to compel or deter by or as if by threats.

**Dictionary.com** defines intimidation as: to make timid; fill with fear, to overawe or cow, at through force of personality or by superior display of wealth, talent, etc., to force into or deter from action by inducing fear.

**Vocabulary.com** defines intimidation as: You can see “timid” in the middle of intimidating, and to be timid is to be frightened or to pull back from something. When you intimidate, you frighten or make someone afraid. To “frighten” or “make fearful” is at the root of the verb intimidate. Intimidation can be mental, emotional, spiritual and physical or a combination of one or more ways.

### **Challenged**

As a traumatic brain injury survivor, I struggled and can continue to struggle with a sense of inadequacy. A sense of inadequacy when I listen to messages that tell me that I am not enough, because I don't do enough

### **Controlled**

Unconsciously, shame seeks to discredit my desire to succeed in life through minimizing and marginalizing, dismissing and discounting. Shame seeks to undercut my effort through patronization.

Shame seeks to keep me distracted by a faulty notion that tells me that what I do and who I am is not enough.

Shame seeks to rob my energy.

**Shame seeks to keep me in denial.**

Shame seeks to silence my voice and efforts through criticism, minimization, marginalization, dismissing and discounting.

### **Voice of the Bully**

As an individual with a brain injury and an invisible disability, I allowed the message of shame to bully me for many years. The shame bully sought to control and manipulate my every move. When I attempted to justify, answer, defend and explain myself to the bully, the bully would mock me.

**Mock me through patronization, minimization, marginalization, dismissing and discounting.**

In my experience, the more I attempted to satisfy the bully through striving to do more, the more the bully would remind of the reasons why I felt inadequate and insecure. With time and through my process I began to realize that no matter how much I did to appease the bully, the bully would still mock me.

### **Essential**

With time and through my ongoing pain I began to realize what the bully was doing to me.

With time and when I got tired of being bullied, I realized that if nothing changed, it would remain the same. After much anguish, I made the decision to examine why I believed that I deserved to be bullied. In my anguish, I realized that I needed to examine how I could limit and stop the bully's distraction.

## **I Needed to Examine**

Why I believed that I was a mistake?

Why I believed that my best efforts were never quite good enough?

Why I felt a need to justify, defend, answer and explain myself to the bully?

Why I had such a difficult time living in my own skin?

Through my recovery process and my pain, I found the motivation to confront the "shame bully".

## **Through My Process**

Through my recovery process I discovered the origins of the lies and how I had been set up to be bullied.

Through my pain and my recovery process I discovered why I had so readily accepted what I was being told by the bully.

**Through my recovery process I discovered why I felt minimized and marginalized by the bully.**



Through my recovery process I discovered how the bully used shame to keep me in denial.

Through my process, I discovered that the shame bully echoed the voice of perfectionism — at my every move.

The voice of perfectionism crippled, devalued, minimized and marginalized who I was and what I had to contribute.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that my ability to heal and grow in my mind, body and spirit were hindered by the voice of fear of failure.

### **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism cut with a two-edge sword — telling me my efforts were not good enough and that I should not try because I would probably fail.

Shame also stymied my efforts by threatening me with the fear that I would be abandoned physically and emotionally if I did not do things perfectly.

### **The Bully created Drama**

At the core of my being the fear of abandonment kept me enslaved by the bully.

Because the bully was unrelenting, I had no idea that there was life beyond the drama.

I had no idea how much energy I was using to avoid being attacked by the bully.

## **Energy Drained**

Through my recovery process and pain, I began to recognize that my internal energy was being drained in my attempt to avoid being attacked by the bully.

Through recognizing how shame was draining my life, I was motivated to look for solutions.

These solutions helped me to begin to heal emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

## **Three Rules**

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that there were three rules that enforced the power of the bully.

As I began to talk, trust and feel my eyes slowly opened. Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered how the bully gained access to my life and to my world. I discovered how the bully perpetuated the lie.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I became aware of what was blocking the peace that I longed for in my life.

I found that I needed to work through the pain to get beyond the pain.

I had to do the work to gain the awareness, to move beyond the awareness to a place of acceptance. A place of acceptance where I could stop losing myself.

## **Not Blaming Anyone – Including Myself**

With my awareness, I realized that I had to move beyond the pain through the pain before I could accept what had occurred to me — without blaming anyone.

I discovered that I had to do the work to gain acceptance before I could take the action to stop being bullied.

### **Awareness, Acceptance and Action**

I discovered that I had to do the work before I could break free of the denial systems that contained the lie.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I began to realize that I had been living my life through vicarious demands.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that – over the years — I had willingly discarded parts of myself in an attempt to comply with the demands of the bully.

**In my attempt (s) to not feel inadequate because of my brain injury.**

### **Finding Freedom**

In my experience, I had to begin healing from the effects of shame that the bully foisted upon me.

I had to break free from the illusion of power that the shame bully had over me before I could hope to live life on life's terms.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I have discovered that I am still susceptible and vulnerable to being exploited by the “shame bully”.

### **Exploited to Buying back into Denial.**

I am susceptible and vulnerable to the “shame bully” when I am hungry, angry, lonely, tired or sick.

**With this awareness, I need to take care of myself when I am angry, lonely, tired or sick.**

Through recognizing when I am more susceptible and vulnerable to the “shame bully”, I am able to take the necessary steps to take care of myself.

Through being aware of the lies, distortions and illusion of power purported by the shame bully I was able to address a vital part of my recovery process — denial.

A vital part of my recovery process evolved because of my emotional, mental and spiritual pain.

Because of my pain and anguish. I was motivated to address both my denial and the denial of family and friends.

In my experience, I found that as I addressed my denial and the denial systems of family and friends, I experienced a new freedom. The freedom to accept my limitations, while not beating up on myself for them.

## **No Longer have to be Held Hostage by the ‘Shame Bully’**

The good news is that I no longer need or have to be held hostage by the bully to prove anything.

I no longer need to believe that I deserve to be bullied because I have an invisible disability.

I no longer need to internalize the lie that I am not enough and that I do not do enough.

I no longer need to live in denial or defend other people’s denial so that they will not abandon me.

I no longer need or have to discard parts of myself in order to go along to get along to be OK.

I no longer need to stoop to the vicarious demands of other people’s expectations to live their truth.

I no longer need to carry other people’s shame or guilt for being unable or unwilling to process pain.

I no longer need to be bullied by a fear of people going away because I don’t live up to expectations

I no longer need to be bullied by a fear of people going away because I don’t meet their expectations.

I no longer need to be bullied through minimization or marginalization because for lack of seeing value.

## **Change in Perspective**

By accepting that I am a work in progress — not a work in perfection — I have changed the way that I look at my process. Consequently, I have had a change of perspective. I now look at myself and my experience in a different way.

**I now realize that I no longer have to answer, defend, justify or explain myself to the bully.**

### **KEY**

I now realize that I no longer have to be accountable to the “shame bully”. With my change of perspective, I now see my circumstances and experiences as learning opportunities. As opportunities to build me up, not to be used to devalue and shame me.

**I now realize — as Eleanor Roosevelt poignantly stated — that no one can make me feel inferior without my consent.**

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”  
Eleanor Roosevelt

### **In Conclusion**

In my experience, I had to address how the bully (shame) crippled my life and my relationships. In my experience, I knew that something needed to change.

In my experience, I became willing to do whatever was necessary, because I no longer wanted to be bullied.

Because I no longer wanted to be bullied, I looked for solutions.

Because I no longer wanted to be crippled by the “shame bully” I reached out for help. In my reaching out for help I found a new way of living. I found solutions for living life on life’s terms. I found solutions that gave me the ability to succeed.

### **A Book that Helped Me**

In my experience, I discovered solutions that helped and continue to help me to live life on life’s terms. A book that helped me understand and find solutions is **Shame and Guilt – Masters of Disguise by Jane Middleton Moz.**

This book helped me to understand why I abused myself and allowed other people to abuse me through the “shame bully”.

### **A Distinction**

For many years I did not know how to distinguish between guilt and shame. Through my recovery process I learned something that changed my life and my world. Guilt, is different than shame.

**If you made a mistake you can make an amends and thus resolve the guilt.**

Shame on the other hand is a being wound which leads the person to believe that they just don’t make mistakes, but believe that they are a mistake. Shame motivates the individual to compensate.

## **Compensating for a Sense of Shame**

Shame can lead the individual to compensate by over achieving (develop a sense of grandiosity) or compensate by underachieving (leading to a learned helplessness).

### **Grandiosity and Learned Helplessness**

Grandiosity (striving to be more than so as to not feel less than) and a Learned Helplessness (that I cannot do anything to change my situation and circumstances so why try)

### **Illustration – The Pike Syndrome**

Tank of water with a big fish at one end of the tank. Little fish at the other end of the tank. Pane of glass separating the big fish with the little fish. Big fish hits the pane of glass attempting to get to the little fish (food). Over time the big fish begins to associate pain with getting to the little fish. After a period of such conditioning the pane of glass is removed. Although the big fish can now readily get to the little fish, because of the learned pain associated with the little fish, the big fish gives up. The little fish can then swim around the big fish without a fear of being eaten. The learned helplessness results in the big fish going without food and starving to death.

### **Grandiosity and Learned Helplessness**

Being bullied by shame can lead the individual to develop a learned helplessness, which can in turn undermine the individual's desire, ability and their motivation to succeed.



**Both grandiosity and a learned helplessness perpetuates and gives power to the “shame bully”.**

“Learned helplessness is behavior exhibited by a subject after enduring repeated aversive stimuli beyond their control. It was initially thought to be caused from the subject's acceptance of their powerlessness: discontinuing attempts to escape or avoid the aversive stimulus, even when such alternatives are unambiguously presented. Upon exhibiting such behavior, the subject was said to have acquired learned helplessness”. Wikipedia

### **What I Discovered that Motivated Me**

What I shared with a professional working with people living with brain injuries when asked about the term “new normal”

**We are Not Our Brain Injuries – They Do Not Define Us**

### **A New Normal**

I believe that life is likened to being on a train. The train runs down what I envision as the track of life.

Along the track, I come to various places that look familiar to me.

And then the day came when I experienced a brain injury.

A Day in which a Switch was Pulled that Changed the Course of My Life.

## **Down a Different Track**

On that day, unbeknownst to me, a “switch” was pulled and my life headed down a different track of the railroad.

The track that once looked familiar no longer looks familiar to me. Although being switched to a different track wasn’t my choice,

I now find my life traveling in a different direction.

## **Accepting Something (the switch on the railroad of life) Does Not Mean I Like “IT”**

To be able to accept my “new normal” after my brain Injury I discovered that I needed to grieve that I was no longer on the same “track”.”.

What I found was that I needed to confront what I could not and was powerless to change.

## **To Begin the Re-birthing Process**

In my experience, I had to move through the stages of grieving (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, awareness and acceptance) to be able to begin the “re-birthing” process.

## **Brain Injury, Re-birth, Re-framing**

Re-birthing, re-framing and seeing my life’s experience in a new way after my brain injury

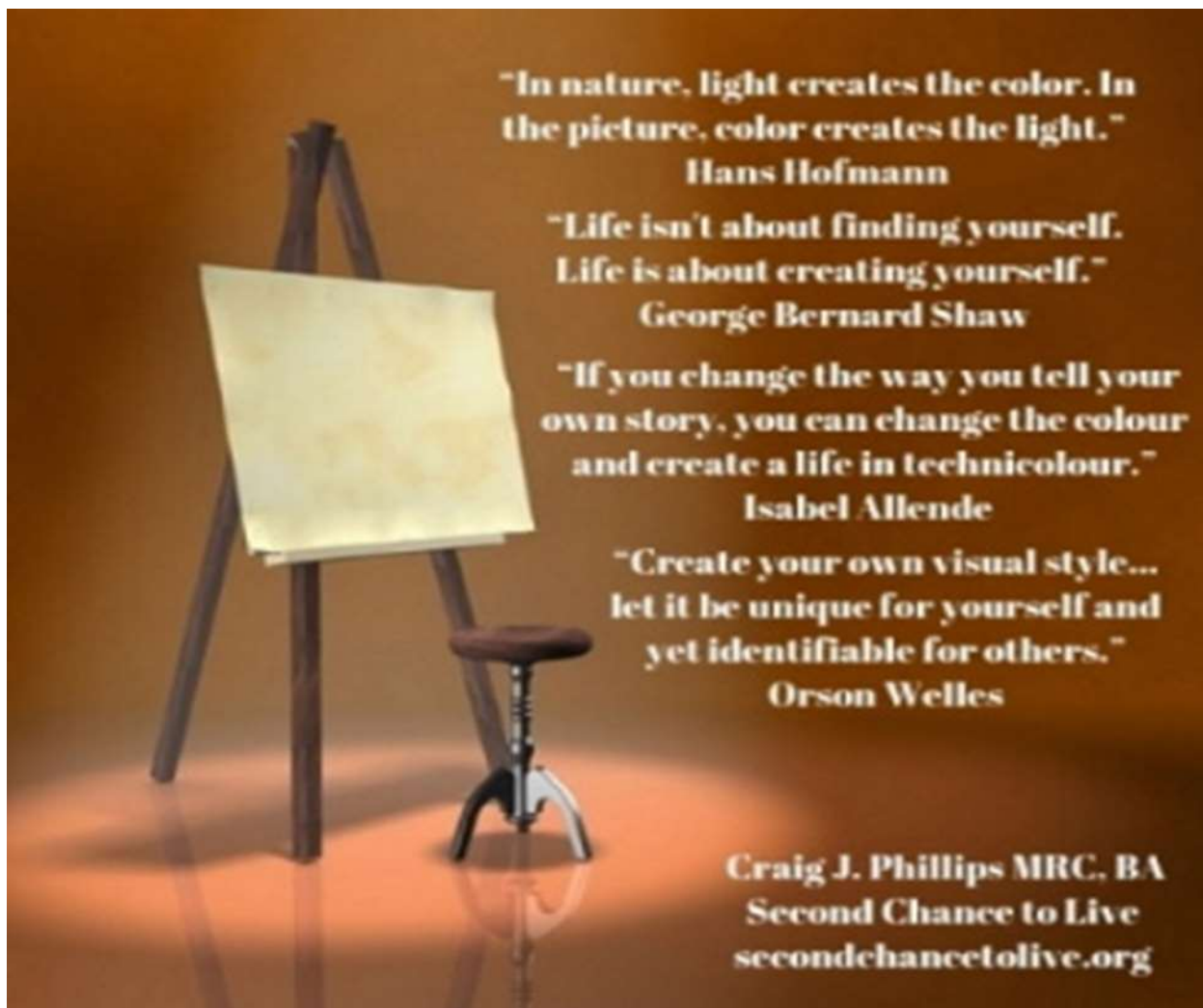
Re-birth in place of the term “a new normal”.

I use the term “re-birth” to illustrate the need to own our power.

## **Own our Power after Experiencing a Brain Injury**

I shared the term “rebirth” with him because I believe new opportunities exist apart from the “old me”.

**By framing my experience as a “rebirth” I am able to start to start with a clean “canvas”.**



**Not “Why Me?” but “Why Not Me?”**

I am able to create in ways that work for me. Create in ways that work for me instead of being distracted by the “Why Me?”

### **Owning Our Power**

Owning our power instead of feeling like we have been “cheated” out of something because of my brain Injury and invisible disability.

“Why not me” gets me out of a mindset of merely being a “survivor” to accepting “what is” to be a “THRIVOR” in my life.

### **Freedom from Having to Prove Myself**

**Not “Why Me?” but “Why not Me?” gives me the ability to move beyond a learned helplessness.**

To THRIVE in my Life, instead of Surviving in my Life.  
“What Is” instead of “What is Not”

**“Why Not Me?” and “What is?” helps me build on my lot in life without having to prove my...**

### **Free to Run my Own Race**

Through owning my power, I am able to move forward with my life, instead of being stuck by comparing the “old me” with the “new” me.

**By re-framing or looking at “what is” instead of looking at “what is not” I gain hope.**

Instead of comparing the “old me” with the “new me” I am able to see my experience “what is” as an opportunity to create anew.

By owning my power and accepting what no longer “works” for me (after my brain injury) I no longer have to see myself as limited.

### **No Longer Limited by what No Longer Works**

By re-framing, my experience and letting go of what cannot be changed I am able to move forward with my life. Through seeing my experience as a “re-birthing” I am able to create with “what is”, instead of looking back to “what could have been”.

By building on “what is” I am able to create hope and my dreams in ways that work for me.

### **Quotes that Inspire**

“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

“If you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams and endeavor to live the life that you have imagined...You will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

Henry David Thoreau

## **Strategies that Have Helped Me in my Re-birthing Process to Discover my New Normal**

Through my recovery process, I became aware that I am much more than my brain injury. I am made up of a mind, body, soul, spirit, and emotions.

With this realization, I became aware that I needed to include my mind, body, spirit, soul, and emotions in my ongoing brain injury recovery process.

By examining how to involve my mind, body, spirit, soul, and, emotions in my ongoing brain injury recovery process I developed strategies.

## **Strategies that have Given me the Ability to Own My Power and Discover a New Normal in my Ongoing Brain Injury Recovery Process**

### **How We Learn**

Understanding ourselves and how we learn after our brain injury. How we learned before our brain injury may now be different. As a result, we may find ourselves frustrated with learning. Consequently, the way people (teachers) may be trying to teach us may not be the way we learn.

Get tested to determine how you now learn.

**Visually, Auditorily, Kinesthetically or a combination of these learning styles.**

## **Connections that Make us Who we Are**

**Mind** – Growing in wisdom and understanding of how to relate to ourselves, other people and the world around us.

**Body** – Using the principles of neuroplasticity to improve your hand-eye coordination, balance, body awareness, coordination, focus, and agility. Create new neural pathways and brain reorganization through repetitive mirrored movements using both the dominant and non-dominant sides of our bodies.

**Spirit** – My connection to God. My connection to myself. The importance of making peace with God so that I can learn to trust Him and His guidance. The importance of making peace with my past is so that my past does not spoil my present.

**Soul** – Growing in knowledge and wisdom of how to accomplish what I discovered through my process of acceptance. Learning to use my gifts, talents as I tap into my ability to live my purpose through my being.

**Emotions** – Learning how to talk, trust and feel with safe people. The power of identification. Coming out of the shadows of isolation and breaking free from feelings of alienation.

## **Give Yourself Permission**

**Give yourself permission** to look at your life and your experience in a new way. In a way that empowers your process.

**Begin to “paint”** (if you have not already begun) on the canvas with your gifts, talents, and abilities in ways that work for you.

**Begin to** build on your lot in life (if you have not already begun to build) and don't compare your lot to anyone else's lot.

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

## **Brain Injury “Re-Birthing” is an Ongoing Process**

Develop an Ongoing Recovery Process Strategy

Develop an ongoing recovery strategy to include your body, soul, spirit, mind, and emotions in your ongoing recovery process.

### **To Own Your Power**

Below is a link to several tools that have helped me to own my power in my ongoing “re-birthing” brain Injury recovery process. You may find these tools to be helpful in the process of owning your power.

### **Comment and Question**



Recently I received a comment and a question. As an individual living with the impact of a brain injury and an invisible disability, I have asked myself the question many times.

The question I received was

**“Why do I feel so misunderstood and shunned?”**

**Became Apparent**

In my experience and through many struggles the answer to the question became apparent to me.

What became apparent to me helped me to have peace in my life when misunderstood and shunned.

**What became apparent to me helped me to grow in self-acceptance, despite being dismissed, discounted, misunderstood and shunned.**

What became apparent to me helped me to let go of the people who dismiss, discount misunderstand and shun me.



**What became apparent to me helped me to move across the bridge called hope to create a good life.**

### **What Became Apparent to Me**

That I could not wait for people to break free from their denial to accept my reality.

**That I could not wait for people to accept my reality and walk across the bridge of acceptance.**

In my experience and through my own recovery process, I became aware of two realities.

### **Two Realities**

The **first reality** is that many people do not want or do not know how to process their feelings.

The **second reality** that helped me to begin to have more peace in my life was that many people either do not know how to or do not want to change.

### **Too Painful**

To face the reality that our lives have been forever changed because of our brain injury may be too painful.

Too painful for them to accept. Because accepting our reality may be too painful, individuals may stay in and defend their denial.

### **Justify**

As a result, and because of the lack of acceptance, they may justify, in their minds, the way they treat us.

### **I Need to Remember**

Defending their denial for what they do not want to accept is not our fault.

Justifying the way, they treat us, because of their lack of acceptance; is not our fault.

### **Did Not Work**

In my experience and for many years once I began to come out of my own denial, I attempted to get family members and friends to understand and accept my reality.

I tried to explain to them in many different ways that I was not “fudging” or “making excuses”.

I tried to convince them otherwise, but the more I tried the more I felt frustrated.

What was conveyed to me was, that if I just tried harder then, I would not be affected by my brain injury or by my reality.

But the reality was that I had tried “every which what way”.

Every way possible to prove that I was not affected or impacted by the open skull fracture and brain injury that occurred when I was 10.

### **Created Ongoing Conflicts**

**Conflicts in them** instead of helping them to understand and convincing them of my reality, my efforts only created ongoing conflicts.

**Conflicts in them** because of what they could not accept and conflict in me for feeling that there was something wrong with me.

**Conflicts in me** for not being able to not be impacted by a brain injury. Conflicts in me by attempting to disprove my reality.

**Conflicts in them** that would leave them angry. Conflicts in me that would leave me frustrated.

**Conflicts in me** that left me with a sense of shame. A sense of shame for not being able to overcome the impact of my brain injury and my invisible disability.

## **Awakening**

After much toil and cycles through the above-mentioned conflicts, I had a spiritual awakening.

A realization that I needed to do something different. A realization that I needed to do something to be able to accept myself to get different results.

A realization that what I was trying to change, was not changing the impact of my brain injury or helping my relationships...

**Insanity** – doing the same things over and over again expecting to get different results.

## **Making Choices**

When I reached a point when I could no longer deny and defend my reality, I made some life changing choices.

### **I began to grieve my reality.**

Grieving my reality helped me to get to a place of acceptance.

Acceptance provided the “bridge” to taking a different course of action. A course of action to create hope in my life.

## **A Bridge of Acceptance to Cross Over to Create Hope in My Life**

### **To Own Your Power**

Through my grieving process, I discovered that as I was able to face, confront and address my own denial. By facing, confronting and addressing my denial I started to walk across the bridge.

### **Finding Freedom from the Struggle**

What I discovered was that by confronting my own lack of acceptance, I was able to let go of the struggle.

The struggle to get them to be OK with me, so that we could be OK, so that I could hope to be OK with me.

The struggle that convinced me that I needed to get “them” to understand and accept what I could not change.

The struggle that led me to believe that I needed them to accept my reality before I could get on with my life.

## **I Realized that I Could Not Wait for Them to Cross the Bridge called Acceptance**

Several years ago, I wrote an article and created a video presentation of the article to illustrate our great value. Our great value because of our reality.

**In the process of our Awareness, Acceptance and by taking Action we become wounded Healers.**

### **The Song**



Click on the links to read or watch the presentation

[Living with a Disability and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer](#)

[Living with a disability and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer Video Presentation](#)

### **Acceptance**

In my experience, as I grew in acceptance, I found a new freedom. A freedom to run my own race and stay in my

own lane. A freedom to realize and use my great worth and value.

## **Hope**

My experience may help you to let go of the people who dismiss, discount, misunderstand and shun you because of what they are unable to accept.

My experience may help you to find more peace in your life by accepting who you are as an individual living with a brain injury and an invisible disability.

### **[Second Chance to Live Author's Autobiography in Bullet Points](#)**

Below is a link to several tools that have helped me to own my power in my ongoing “re-birthing” brain Injury recovery process.

**For national and international resources to empower the re-birthing process.**

**[Global Brain Injury Peer Support Network – Empowering the Individual, Not the Brain Injury](#)**