

"Purpose is about a process and a journey, not a destination. I can not 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

**Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA
Second Chance to Live
secondchancetolive.org**

“Finding Purpose after Brain Injury”

Brain Injury Association of North Carolina Support Group Zoom Presentation

Second Chance to Live

Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

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.

Car accident at age 10 in 1967 – right frontal lobe damage, severe brain bruise, brain stem involvement, coma for 3 weeks. Fractured left femur.

Traction for 6-7 weeks to set the fractured femur, placed in a full body or Spica cast for 5-6 months. Transferred to another hospital, brain and skull surgery. Transferred back to the other hospital in Newton, New Jersey.

Released from the hospital a week or so later to home. Tutored at home in the 5th grade. Taken out of the Spica cast. Physical therapy and then on my own to learn how to walk again.

Had several EEG's and Cognitive and Psychosocial Testing. Results shared with my Mom and Dad, but not with me.

Once my external wounds healed the impact of my traumatic brain injury went invisible.

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 pre-requisites. 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 admitted for my 2nd year.

Graduate School – University of Kentucky. Difficulties with 1st 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 **3rd 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 3rd 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.

When I reach a point in my life

Could no longer Deny

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

The below quotes encourage me to not focus on my brain injury, but on the possibilities.

“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 accept my reality

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 realized that I am living with an invisible disability and that my invisible disability interferes with my ability to work

To work with individuals, especially with individuals in the 2nd and 3rd groups

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 spent countless hours attempting to disprove the reality of my invisible disability. In the process, I bought into the notion that I deserved to be treated with contempt and criticism

In the process, I became vulnerable to being bullied, as I bought into the notion that I deserved to be bullied

In the process, I bought into the notion that I could not trust myself

In the process I bought into what other people wanted or needed me to believe about myself.

In the process, I allowed myself to be taken advantage of as I bought into the notion that I could not trust myself.

That I needed to believe what other people needed or wanted me to believe about myself.

In the Process, I found myself Intimidated

Intimidation can be mental, emotional, spiritual and physical or a combination of one or more ways.

At times I listen to messages that seem to challenge me for not being more than I am today.

The “innuendos” of shame that trigger the notion that I am not enough, that I do not do enough and therefore not lovable.

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

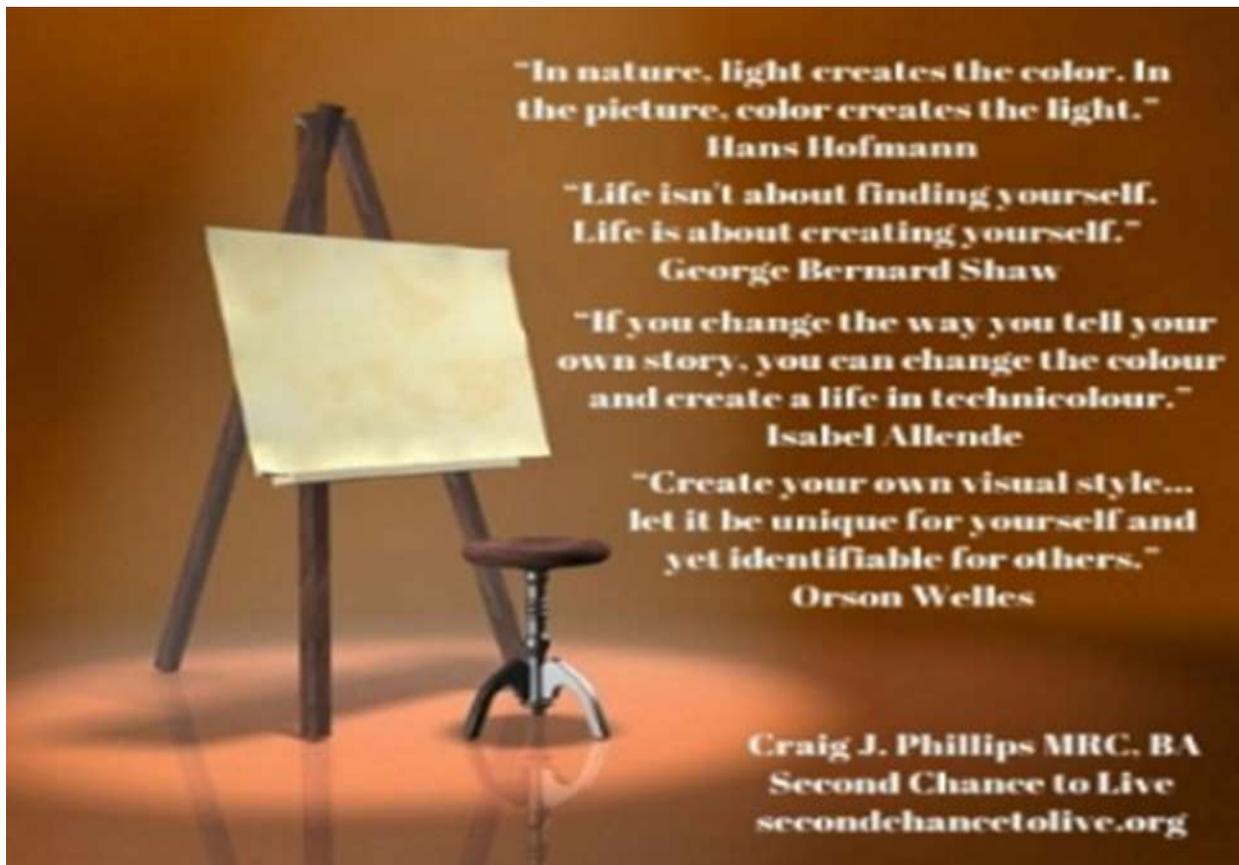
Re-birth in place of the term "a new normal".

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.

Distracted by the “Why Me?”

Owning Our Power

Owning my power instead of feeling like I had 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.

Not “Why Me” but “Why not Me”

To THRIVE in my Life, instead of Surviving in my Life.

“What Is” instead of “What is Not”

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 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

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.

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](#)