



**"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](http://secondchancetolive.org)**

# **“Finding Purpose after Brain Injury”**

**University of North Carolina Family Support  
Program in Chapel Hill, North Carolina**

**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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

### **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 We 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”

### **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.

## **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.