

# **Understanding the Impact of Invisible Disabilities Acceptance and Creating Our New Normal**

**Penn Medicine TBI Support Group Meeting 5-6:30 pm**

**July 26, 2021 Monday**

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**Second Chance to Live**

## **My Process and Journey living with my Brain Injury**

**Car accident** – 1967 when I was 10 years old, open skull fracture, right frontal lobe damage, severe brain bruise, brain stem involvement. Coma for 3 weeks. Fractured left femur (thigh bone). Remained in traction for 6-7 weeks and then placed in a Spica (full body) cast for the femur to heal.

**After coming home from the hospital** – Remained in the Spica cast for 5 months. After my femur healed, the cast was removed, I learned how to walk, talk, read, write and speak in complete sentences. Tutored at home in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Mainstreamed back into elementary school in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Once my external wounds healed** -- Underwent 2 EEG's and a battery of Psychosocial testing. Results shared with my parents, but not with me. The impact of the injury to my brain was never again factored into my various difficulties. Graduated on time with my high school class – 1975.

**Academic Paths** – 4 different majors, 2 universities, 1 College. 10 years to get my undergraduate degree (Theology/Physical Ed). 2 Graduate schools 3 ½ years to obtain my graduate degree (Rehabilitation Counseling).

**Disappointments** – Terminated from many jobs over a 20-year period (both non-professional and professional jobs). Difficulties in undergraduate and graduate degree programs. 2 Department of Vocational Rehabilitation experiences as a client. After 2nd experience, as a client -- unemployable.

**SSDI Applications** – 3 total (2 in Florida, v1 in North Carolina). My 3<sup>rd</sup> application was approved at end of 1998, beginning of 1999.

**My Journey Forward** -- Created Second Chance to Live on February 6, 2007. Articles, video and slideshow presentations, e-books and posters.

## **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*

## **Lessons that I have Learned through my Process and Journey**

**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.

**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.

## **“Acceptance and Discovering a New Normal”**

### **Accepting Something 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**”.

### **Brain Injury, Re-birth and New Normal**

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

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

### **“Re-Birth”**

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

I am able to “create in ways that work for me. Create in ways that work for me instead of being distracted.

### **Owning Our Power**

Owning my power, instead of feeling like I had been “cheated” out of something because of my brain Injury.

### **Not “Why Me” but “Why not Me”**

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.

**To THRIVE in my Life, instead of surviving in my Life.**

### **“What Is”**

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 (looking at “what is” instead of looking at “what isn’t”) 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.

### **Limited by what No Longer works for me**

### **Moving Forward with my Life after a Brain Injury**

By re-framing, my experience and letting go of what cannot be changed I am able to move forward with my life.

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

Through seeing my experience as a “re-birthing” process 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 my dreams in ways that work for me.**

“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**

### **Discovering my New Normal) after my Brain Injury**

#### **‘What Makes Me Who I Am in My Life’**

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 in my Ongoing Brain Injury Recovery Process**

### **First of All, which if Very Important**

#### **Get tested to determine how you now learn.**

Are you a Visual, Auditory or Kinesthetic Learner?

#### **How You Learn Now May Be Different**

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.

As a result, those who teach us may be frustrated and we may be discouraged. By discovering how we learn we can find the right teachers.

## **What I Discovered about Ongoing Brain Injury Recovery**

**I need to stay committed to developing every area of my life.**

**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.

## **“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**

**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.

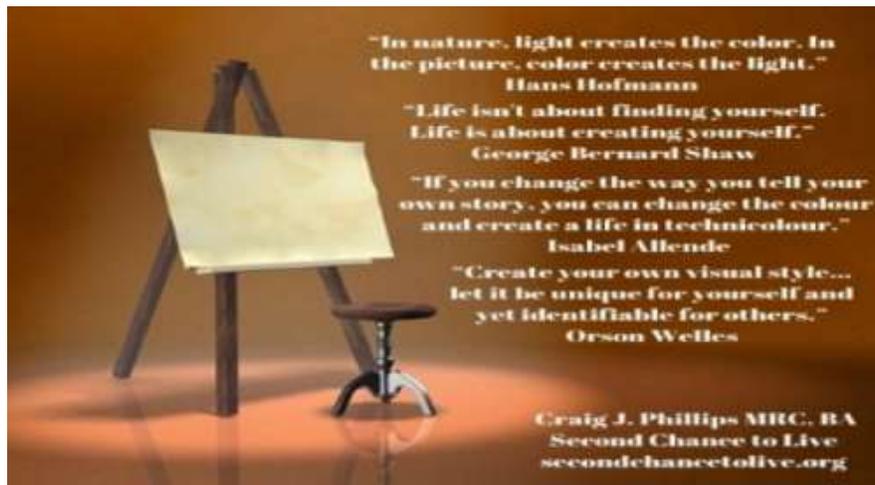
## **To Own Your Power**

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.**

Click on the link to open these resources.

### [Second Chance to Live – Empowering the Individual, not the Brain Injury Resources for Empowering Re-birthing](#)



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

