BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

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BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Creating a better future for Vermonters affected by brain injury through prevention, education, advocacy and support

Winter 2019

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT Headlines

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Helpline

Toll-Free 1-877-856-1772

A Survivor's Story

By Tom Pauza

I acquired my TBI when I was road biking in Durango Colorado, a car ran me down and it ran over my head. I had a helmet on so maybe the helmet absorbed enough of the impact to allow me to survive. More reason to wear your helmet! I do not remember any details of this incident. I only know about it through medical records and through family telling me what happened. As for details, all I know is I was road biking with a helmet on.

It has terrified friends and family because I was very close to dying, but in total, is has brought those that matter in my life closer to me. During my initial recovery period, I was a handful to interact with. I did not understand anything from appropriate comments and questions to being able to handle my own manners. I had very little understanding. Tolerant individuals stuck with me and dealt with my lack of everything to help me get to where I am now.

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Three years ago, I would not have been able to respond to BIAVT's email. I have a much deeper appreciation not only for my loving family but also for my amazing friends who are still in my life. They mean the world to me and I do anything I can to help bring them smiles as they did for me.

It is a lengthy recovery. There is no set end date. The rest of my life is my "recovery period". The people that care about you will be tested in having to deal with you and you relearning life. That goes for everything from what the difference between a fork and spoon is to relearning how to drive a car and get a job.

Learning how to manage the impacts of your injury is tough. For me it is learning to have a working memory or things I can do to alleviate my lack of such. Also, know that despite a TBI survivors need for care, there will come a point when they will be able to reflect on their recovery and recognize and truly appreciate those that have stood by them and helped them get their life back in order. Love is not lost with a TBI. It is initially blindfolded, but that blindfold will come off. The love surrounding the TBI survivor help them to be stronger than ever. Don't ever think reality is lost on someone who obtains a TBI, it is not. It is hugely distorted, but it returns in a different way than pre-TBI but nonetheless, it does come back. Patience is a virtue they say; a TBI survivor will put that to the test.

2019 Conference Recap

Thank you to those of you that attended the 31st Annual Brain Injury Conference! Your support is greatly appreciated!!

- **Silent Auction:** We had over 20 items that went up for bid and brought in over $2400 to be put right back into the BIAVT. Thank you to our donors!
- **Attendees:** We had almost 200 attendees this year
- Thank you to our **Keynote Speaker**, Amy Zellmer!

- Thank you to all of our other **speakers**!
- Congratulations to our **Governor Award Winners**: Employer of the year - CVMC, Employee of the year - Sara Lane, Caregiver of the year - Robin Hewitt, Survivor of the year - Anne Christie
- Thank you to our **Exhibitors**: Care One, Sangha Studio, Vermont Adaptive, Lenny Burke's Farm, Green Mountain Support Services, Hyperbaric Vermont, Pride TBI
- Thank you to our **Sponsors**: Courtney & Victoria Buffum Family Foundation, Green Mountain Support Services, Lenny Burke's Farm, Pride TBI, UVM Med Center

31st Annual

Conference Photos

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Save the Date!!

Walk & Roll
-FOR-
BRAIN INJURY

Join us for our annual Walk & Roll on May 9, 2020 in Montpelier, Vermont. Keep your eyes out for more details to come!

Caregivers' Corner

You are Not a Burden

A letter from one caregiver to another- by Abby Maslin

Dear Caregiver,

I've been thinking about something you said recently. About the way you imagine the world looks at you now. About the "burden" your journey has become. Brain injury has changed your life. This much is certainly true. But I can see that it has also changed *you*.

You didn't ask for this injury or its cataclysmic aftermath. If there was an exit anywhere, I'm sure you'd be clamoring for the door. At first, it felt as if everyone was in your corner. People held you up in encouragement. People prayed and thanked God and offered prophecies of great healing. *Everything happens for a reason,* they proclaimed. *Your family is a miracle,* they exhorted. But time passes. People continue living their lives. Yours continues to be glued to The After.

Sometimes I see you apologize for things that are outside your control and I wish I could tell you never to say those words, *I'm sorry*. With your struggle, you are teaching the rest of us how to live. How to ask for help. How to live in honesty. How to love boldly, heartbreakingly, unconditionally. I know it doesn't feel that way to you. I know the insider's view is messy, exhausting, unending. I know there are days you truly do feel it will break you. But please never apologize. Your life is not an inconvenience.

There is so much about you that I admire, beginning with your capacity to nurture. You give to everyone in your life with such tremendous force; I wonder if you are reserving any of it for yourself.

I see you – doctor appointments to hospitalizations, traditional therapies to innovative therapies – doing everything in your power to restore quality to the life of the person you love. You have become an advocate for others in this world. And even though your own life is piled high with responsibilities, you always find the time to share your voice with others.

Over the past few years, you've been knocked off your feet more times than I count. I don't always know what to say, so overpowering is the sense of injustice I feel in witnessing your prolonged struggle. And yet, you rise. Maya Angelou's fierce words come to mind, "Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise. Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise."

Brain injury has changed you. It has broken you, rebuilt you, strengthened you, and humbled you. Sometimes it does all of this in the span of one day. I don't know that I have the words to make this journey easier for you, but I can offer this: *thank you.* Not everyone can do the job you do. Not everyone can do it with compassion, grace, and laughter. Not everyone has the strength to ask for help or the wisdom to recognize their own human limitations.

As far as caregiving goes, perfection is not the goal. You don't have to be a superhero, a brave warrior, or any other glorified figure. You can simply just be you, willing to carry on – a remarkable person, indeed. Trust me when I say, friend, there is nothing about you or your journey that will ever be a burden.

In admiration,
Another Caregiver

Support Groups

Living with a brain injury can feel isolating. A group of people that share similar challenges can be a way of once again feeling connected to those around you and not so alone in your journey. Gathering with people that are experiencing similar challenges can help you find ways of adapting that are practical and empowering. Insight from others that face a common problem can help you heal and grow.

BIAVT Support Groups
More Information: www.biavt.org

Bristol
Howden Hall
19 West St, Bristol
3rd Monday
5:30 - 7:00 PM

Burlington
Department of Labor
63 Pearl St, Burlington
Last Friday
12:00 - 1:00 PM

Non-BIAVT Affiliated Support Groups
More Information: www.vcil.org

Rutland
Rutland Free Library
3rd Friday
2:00 - 3:30 PM

St. Johnsbury
Grace Methodist Church
36 Central St,
St. Johnsbury
3rd Wednesday
1:00 - 2:00 PM

Colchester
Fanny Allen Hospital
790 College Pkwy
1st Wednesday
5:30-7:30 PM

New Hampshire (Border) Support Groups
More Information: www.bianh.org

Manchester
Catholic Medical Center
100 McGregor St
4th Tuesday
4:30 - 5:30pm

Lebanon
Dartmouth Hitchcock
Medical Center
2nd & 4th Wednesdays
6:00 - 7:30pm

Keene
Monadnock Pacers
63 Community Way
4th Tuesday
6:00pm-7:30pm

BIAVT will provide assistance in forming support groups in areas that are not currently being served. For more information or to facilitate a group contact ***support@biavt.org.***

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Survivors' Segment

According to synapse.org, fatigue is a common and very disabling symptom experienced by people with a brain injury. It may be a continual sense of mental fatigue or it can happen when a person is trying to do too much and the brain is overloaded, often resulting in mind-numbing fatigue that can last for several days.

- **Contingency plans**: Fatigue may occur at the least convenient times - on public transport or during a meeting. You need to negotiate ways of coping when this happens. You can use specific strategies or call in extra support. Work out contingency plans with your family member. Your rehab team, occupational therapist or physiotherapist can help with suggestions.
- **Assess best hours**: Some people function best in the mornings, so complete demanding tasks then. Others function better in the afternoon or the evening. Organize your routine accordingly. Don't drive when you are tired.
- **Assess your environment**: Provide an uncluttered environment that is easy to move around and work in. Think about how and where things are stored; bench heights, entrances, types of furnishing and lighting. For example, some people may find fluorescent lighting or dim lighting more tiring.
- **Schedule rest periods**: Make a daily or weekly schedule, and include regular rest periods. "Rest" means do nothing at all. If you have a nap, don't oversleep in case this affects your normal sleep cycle.
- **Break it down**: Break down activities into a series of smaller tasks. This provides opportunities to rest while allowing the person to complete the task. Encourage sensible shortcuts.
- **Set priorities**: Focus on things that must be done and let the others go.
- **Healthy lifestyle:** with virtually every aspect of a traumatic brain injury and similar brain disorders, fatigue will be less of a problem if you focus on a healthy lifestyle.

Coming Soon!

Brain Injury Association of Vermont Membership!

Do you actively serve people with brain injuries? Do you understand that brain injuries are unique?

Become a **Recognized Brain Injury Aware Professional** on our website!

Your membership is an investment in our mission and in the people we help everyday.

If you would like to become a member or want more information, please visit: www.biavt.org/membership, call 1 (802) 856-1772, or email us at support@biavt.org.

All members receive the following benefits:

- Recognized status in our upcoming resource directory
- Discounts on conference registrations
- Quarterly newsletters
- Free Trainings

You can make a difference in the quality of life for people with brain injuries in Vermont. Sign up today!