

Journey of Hope: A Story of Recovery

By Laura A. Burns, MBA

“I looked the same. I felt the same. No one said I was different,” says Brian K., who survived a traumatic brain injury in 2001. Brian’s story is not unusual. He was unrestrained when his car hit a patch of black ice and skidded into a tree. He had no memory of the accident and spent one week recovering in the hospital. When Brian returned home with no visual scars of his injury, his real struggle began.

Prior to the accident, Brian was an Advertising Sales Manager for the *Real Estate Journal*. After the accident, he returned to his job and went back to life as “usual.” It took everything Brian had to hold it together all day to accomplish his job. As a result, when he returned home, the previously caring, easy going and carefree man was agitated and short-tempered. According to Brian, “It felt normal to be angry and aggressive.”

In retrospect, Brian cannot believe that no one said a word to him about his dramatically changed behavior – not family members, not longtime friends, no one. According to Brian’s long-time friend Scott, the changes in Brian’s personality were not immediate. As events occurred in his life, such as marrying his wife Tammy, moving, and changing jobs, Brian began to shut himself off from family and friends. He was moody. “I thought all of this was due to dramatic changes in his life. I never thought it could be related to his injury from all those years ago,” says Scott.

Brian and his wife Tammy had met just a short time before his accident. After his accident, she admits she took a lot on herself to help Brian manage the rest of his life – his calendar, daily home schedule, etc.

Brian lost several other sales jobs because he could not juggle the many responsibilities required for the position. Simple tasks were daunting to him. He struggled for a long time and did not realize that what was happening was directly related to the TBI that he had sustained years ago.

The situation became so unbearable that in 2008 Brian was referred by a family friend to a physician at Massachusetts General Hospital. He diagnosed Brian with a traumatic brain injury (sustained in 2001).

Brian was also referred to a psychologist at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston who specializes in traumatic brain injury. “I struggled for so long and lost a lot of time that could have been so much better. Nobody should have to lose so much time in their life,” says Brian.

In the fall of 2009, Brian participated in a TBI Research study at Spaulding. The study is investigating the effects of an FDA approved medication, Amantidine, on TBI related irritability and aggression. Scott has seen great improvements in Brian’s behavior over the last two to three years. “He’s more like his old self,” says Scott. “I am so proud of him.”

Tammy says that Brian still hits his “maximum capacity” and starts to feel overwhelmed. But, it takes him longer to get there and a shorter time to recover now. “The study at Spaulding was healing for both of us. It’s therapeutic to look at past behavior and then look forward to new avenues for working through things,” says Tammy.

In 2010, Brian returned to the workforce as a landscaper at a small local college. He and Tammy are looking forward to celebrating their son Parker’s fourth birthday and the birth of their second child in May 2011. Today, Brian believes that he was fortunate to receive the help he needed that “saved his life *again*.”

