

TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM

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A Home Memory Center Takes A Load Off Your Mind

by Michael Cerreto

After your traumatic brain injury (TBI), have you more frequently lost things around the house, forgotten important dates, or missed appointments? Do you spend time each day frantically searching for your car keys, glasses, or that slip of paper with a phone number you need? Do you wish it wasn't so hard to keep track of the small things in your life?

People with TBI often have difficulty remembering daily life information and objects throughout the day such as appointment times, tasks, and the location of possessions. They may also have difficulty remembering what they did earlier in the day such as eating breakfast or taking their medication. They can become frustrated and irritated by these frequent memory lapses.

Family members and caregivers are often enlisted to search the house for lost items, and experience their own frustration. A search for a pair of glasses can turn into a scavenger hunt that involves the whole family. But there is hope for this daily frustration.

Adjustment and Resilience Brain Injury Study

If you have had a TBI, you may qualify for a research study at VCU. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help people adjust to having a brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in seven education sessions. Study volunteers will be given information on brain injury, local resources, skills development, and positive coping strategies. Topics will include setting goals, problem solving, managing emotions and stress, and communicating well.

If you are interested in participating and are 18 or older, please call Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704, or toll free at 1-866-296-6904, or by email at jhmarwit@vcu.edu.

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**Spring / Earth Day
Word Search**

See if you can locate all of the words in the word search above. They can be listed horizontally, vertically, diagonally, and backwards.

If you get stumped, answers are on page 7. Good luck!



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|----------|----------------|--------------|
| SPRING | SHOWERS | ENVIRONMENT |
| MARCH | RAIN | FOREST |
| APRIL | BIRDS | FUTURE |
| MAY | RECYCLE | GLOBAL |
| FLOWERS | RENEWAL | COMMUNITY |
| GREEN | RESOURCE | CONSERVATION |
| GRASS | RESPECT | EARTH |
| SUNSHINE | RESPONSIBILITY | |
| MELT | ENERGY | |

(Memory Center, contd.)

One solution is to create a Memory Center in your home. A Memory Center is one location in which you keep everything you need during a typical day. It should ideally be located near the door you use to enter and leave your home.

You can keep items in your Memory Center such as: calendars, car keys, clock, pen and paper, important phone numbers, chore list, extra pair of glasses, medication checklist and medication, mail basket, coats and hats, shoes, whiteboard and bulletin board, cell phone and recharger.

The secret is to always return items to your Memory Center after you use them and not remove other items from that location. So, the next time you need your glasses, an important date or your car keys, you only have to look in one place instead of searching the entire house and asking "Where did I see it last?" A home Memory Center will take a load off of your mind.

Michael Cerreto, MS, CPCRT, CSC, LDR is a Certified Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist with A Talented Mind Clinic in Midlothian, Virginia. He helps children, adolescents, and adults with TBI improve the quality of their daily lives. He is also the coauthor of the book Journey Back From Chemobrain that is now available on Amazon Kindle. If you have an idea for a future article about cognitive rehabilitation, please contact him at cerreto@atalentedmind.com.

Mark Your Calendar!



Supportive Survivors

- ◆ **When:** Tuesdays 6-8pm
- ◆ **Location:** Usually at the Regency Mall Food Court (Richmond)
- ◆ **Contact:** Contact Ted Taylor at (804) 852-6644 or taylorted58@yahoo.com

Richmond Area Support Groups

- ◆ **Location:** 2nd Monday every month at 6:30pm, Woodlake Methodist United Church, 15640 Hampton Park Drive in Chesterfield
- ◆ **Contact:** Liz Perry-Varner at 804-276-5761
- ◆ **Location:** 3rd Monday every month at 6 pm, Children's Hospital Auditorium, 2924 Brook Rd.
- ◆ **Contact:** Call the Richmond BIAV at 804-355-5748 for more info!

May 17-30, 2015

- ◆ **Event:** Camp Bruce McCoy
- ◆ **Location:** To Be Announced
- ◆ **Contact:** Call 1-800-444-6443 for more info!

June 6, 2015

- ◆ **Event:** Bags For Brain Injury Fundraiser
- ◆ **Location:** Richmond Volley Ball Club
- ◆ **Contact:** Email sheela@biav.net or call the Brain Injury Association of VA for more info. Participants are encouraged to register in advance for fundraising!

If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider including it here. Please contact Matthew Wetsel at 804-828-3703 or wetselme@vcu.edu

Calling All Couples! There's an intervention for couples after brain injury! Often, spouses or romantic partners take on a care-giving role when their partner suffers a brain injury. The Therapeutic Couples Intervention (TCI) is designed to assist couples after TBI with communication, stress management, goal-setting, renewing intimacy, and for some couples—parenting post-injury.

Participation is free, and study volunteers will be compensated. Please contact Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704, or call toll free at 1-866-296-6904. Or, send an email to jhmarwit@vcu.edu.

My Survivor Story: Neuroplasticity and Hope

by Jeff Sebell

When I had my TBI in 1975, they had just opened the Brain Injury Unit at New England Rehab Hospital and I was lucky enough to get a spot in there. The rehab was a unique (for the time) facility, run by Buddy Leroux, longtime trainer for the Boston Red Sox.

After I was discharged from rehab, I spent about a week hanging around my house, exercising and trying to read my way through the double vision I had. Then I went to see my neurologist. He asked me some questions about what my plans were, and I told him that I wanted to go back to college in two months for the spring semester.

I remember him looking at me very seriously from across his desk and handing me a piece of paper. He asked me to write some things. I realized I couldn't really hold the pen, but scribbled out some words. He picked up the paper, looked at what I had written, and said, "If you think you're going back to school, you better learn to write."

He followed that up with these words which I will never forget: "Your brain is a muscle. You need to exercise it."

Just as I exercised the muscles in my legs and I read to correct my double vision, I was going to have to find a way to exercise the way I processed information and used my brain.

My neurologist was semi-retired, and had been born in approximately 1905. That seems almost prehistoric. It's amazing that this man, born during the Teddy Roosevelt era, told me to exercise my brain because he had an idea about treatment that would, one day, be a simplified

version of something we call neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity? Yes, it just wasn't called that forty years ago.

We talk about neuroplasticity as an important, new breakthrough in treating brain injury. Well, it is important, but maybe it's not so new. Science has advanced to the point where we are able to understand some of how the brain works. Since we have the modern tools necessary to quantify the benefits of neuroplasticity, we think it's a new idea. However, giving something a fancy sounding, fifteen letter name doesn't mean it's a completely new discovery.

Understanding the nuts and bolts of neuroplasticity may not be simple, but understanding that, "Your brain is a muscle, you need to exercise it," is the most basic form of neuroplasticity.

In reality, we all know that your brain is definitely not a muscle. However, we can treat it like one.

From the beginning, it made perfect sense to me that I should find ways to exercise my brain, to stretch it in an attempt to relearn everything I needed to know; much like one would expose a toddler to the new world. When my doctor reinforced that belief with his words, I made it a point of seeking to re-absorb the world by participating as much as I could, knowing I would benefit by every success and failure I had.

Little did I know that, by following my doctor's instructions, I would be building new pathways in my brain so that I would be able to perform at a higher level. Little did my doctor know that what he told me to (contd, pg5)

Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult. Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from other survivors who have gone through recovery and faced the same challenges. Are you a survivor with a story you'd like to share? If so, then we'd like to hear it, and it might get into a future issue of TBI Today!

Submit to: jhmarwit@vcu.edu

or

TBI Today, VCU P.O. Box 980542
Richmond, VA 23298-0542



(contd) do, "exercise my brain," could possibly be the building blocks for what would be called neuroplasticity in about 40 years.

For me, an important side effect of buying into this notion was that, in many ways, it gave me a new lease on life. Just the idea that I could improve simply by doing things, by living my life and even by failing, instilled in me the notion that I was in charge of my own fate.

Neuroplasticity gave me power. It gave me hope.

My neurologist's words gave me the impetus I needed to start the process of reclaiming my life, and they gave me hope that there was a path to follow which would not only fill me with the feeling of being alive, but provide me with

forward momentum as I sought to overcome the effects of my TBI.

Being active, proactive, and feeling as though I had an effect on my own life put me in a new sphere. I was in action, and my attitude became an important ally, one I could count on to pull me out of the depths of depression and get me moving.

With my brain a muscle, and the world my gym, I could exercise all the time. Everything I did; every breath and step I took, every success and failure I had, helped, as I worked to live a fulfilled life back following my TBI.

Jeff Sebell is the author of "Learning How to Live with Yourself after Brain Injury." For more, visit www.tbisurvivor.com.

JUST THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FAQ IS INTENDED TO FAMILIARIZE THE PUBLIC WITH ISSUES RELATED TO TBI. NO INFORMATION PROVIDED HEREIN SHOULD BE CONSTRUED AS THERAPEUTIC ADVICE OR AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH A COMPETENT MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

Q: My best friend was in a bad car accident from drinking and driving. Even though his brain injury doctor advised him to stop, Joe won't quit drinking because he doesn't think he has a problem. I feel so helpless. What can I do?

A: There are a number of things you can do to help your friend:

- Talk to him about your concerns.
- Help him make a list of good reasons for cutting down or stopping.
- Encourage him to keep a diary of how much he is drinking.
- Recognize that drinking is a choice. Encourage your friend to take responsibility for helping himself.
- Try to offer support and encouragement instead of getting angry at your friend.
- Don't drink around him.
- Help your friend find activities that don't involve alcohol and introduce him to people who don't drink alcohol.
- Offer to attend a local AA support group with your friend.
- Attend Al-Anon meetings or support group for family and friends of alcohol abusers. Learn from others who have dealt with similar problems.



Questions for Pat or the FAQ column are welcomed.

Send them to: "ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"

P.O. BOX 980542. RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542

or e-mail: jhmarwit@vcu.edu



My Survivor Story: Becoming an Advocate

by Ted Huffman

Just over seven years ago, I suffered a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), which dramatically changed my life forever. I was working on renovations to my house, preparing for the arrival of my first child. While working in the attic, I slipped and fell 20 feet to the floor of the room below. I was flown by the medevac helicopter to VCU Health Systems (VCUHS), and remained in a coma for several days. [Editor's note: Many people still call VCUHS by its old name, MCV].

Once I awoke from the coma, I had no idea where I was, but fortunately recognized my loved ones who were in the room with me. During the next couple of weeks, I learned again how to talk, walk and feed myself. While I made significant recoveries in my motor skills, I still could not form any short term memories. I had a member of my family with me in my room in the hospital at all times. Every hour they would ask me if I knew where I was, and each time I would answer that I was somewhere else – most frequently, I thought I was at home.

This went on for about four weeks, then one day the information finally stuck. They told me where I was and what had happened, and I finally comprehended. I was in a state of shock and began to cry. The hemorrhage had receded enough to allow my hippocampus to retain information and I was recalling it. I had been functioning for about a month and remembered nothing. The last thing I could remember was standing on a truss in my attic and then, poof, there I was at VCUHS one month later.

I was released the day before Thanksgiving, 2007, and thought the worst was over. I was wrong. While I was able to form new memories and recall them, I was far from functioning cognitively at the level before my accident. I began the TBI recovery program and was fortunate to be at VCUHS since they are one of the best hospitals in the country for treating TBIs and are at the forefront in the field of TBI recovery. I was also lucky that my family was there for me and spared no expense in finding me the best treatment available.

Even with my good fortune, the road to recovery was the most difficult thing I have ever experienced in my life. I could not function as a normal person in my day-to-day life. I could not remember new infor-

mation for very long and felt as if I was annoying people by saying the same thing to them over and over since I couldn't remember telling them the first time - even if it was just 5 minutes ago.

On the one-year anniversary of my accident, I had my annual review with Dr. Jeffrey Kreutzer, Director of Neuropsychology and Rehabilitation at VCUHS. Dr. Kreutzer told me that if he was asked to predict my condition based on the admittance report from a year ago he would have said that I would be in an assisted living facility.

My recovery was hard on my marriage which resulted in a drastic change in the relationship with my wife. Within three years, my marriage of 10 years was over. I was asked to move out of the home where I had lived with my wife and 2 children. At the age of 33 I was left to find a place to live by myself.

Before my accident I ran my own business renovating houses in Downtown Richmond, but I was unable to continue its operation and participate in my rehabilitation at the same time.

I moved into one of the properties I had renovated and found work as a security guard. During this time I did not know what I wanted to do with my life. What's more, I didn't know what I was capable of doing. It was at this time a friend of mine convinced me to join the Richmond Jaycees, a local nonprofit community organization.

I volunteered to assist with a pizza party the Jaycees held at the McGuire Veteran's Affairs (VA) hospital once a month. The function was held in the Trauma Center where there were about twenty young men and women who had just returned from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan after suffering TBIs. When I walked in to the VA's Trauma Center for the first time, I had an eerie feeling that I had been there before. The sights and smells reminded me of my time at the VCUHS Trauma Unit after my TBI.

The veterans were glad to see me and (contd p7)



Ted Huffman

(contd) the other Jaycees. Most of them were from out of state and had no family present during their stay. I sat down with a few of the Veterans and we started talking. After the formalities, I let them know that I too had suffered a TBI four years ago. Soon I found myself fielding questions from the patients there. While I was asked a variety of questions all pertaining to recovery from a TBI, the resounding underlying question was “when will I get back to normal?”

That very question was the same one I had been asking all of the doctors assisting me in my recovery. I was never given a definitive answer.

This was the first time I had been asked that question and it made me think about exactly what it was I was being asked: What was normal? Normal was one’s life returning to the way it was the moment before their accident. Okay, then when will that happen? It was then I realized that it would never happen. In that moment I understood that I needed to focus my attention on something other than what is not possible. It took me more than four years to understand that reality. If I had known and had the time to accept that fact, I may very well have been in a different place than I was.

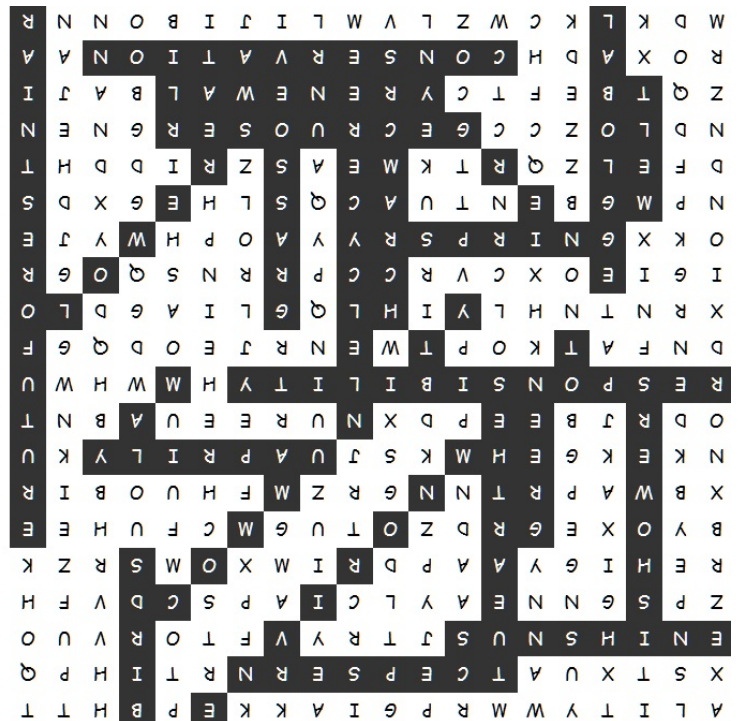
After the pizza party, I had an indescribably good feeling. Then I realized what it was. I had figured out what I wanted to do going forward with my life: to help those who had suffered TBIs while in service of our country. Having firsthand experience with the TBI recovery process that these veterans have before them, I believe that I have something more to offer than many already in the field. Helping these veterans in their recovery from TBI will also help me in my own recovery.

I went to VCU in the spring of 2011 in pursuit of my Bachelors of Science in Psychology. Upon my return, I was concerned that college might be beyond my abilities post-TBI. I thought that if I could succeed in college, it would set an example for those I am hoping to help by demonstrating that they, too, can improve their own lives despite their disabilities.

It has been over seven years since the accident and over those years my life has changed in many ways. At the beginning of my recovery, I felt as if I were broken and that I would never return to the man I was before. I struggled for years with the idea that I may never again have the ability to live a hap-

py and productive life. All of the worry and fear about my future seemed to disappear the day I met those veterans at the VA hospital, and realized that I could be of great assistance to them in navigating the difficult path to recovery from a TBI. My time and success at VCU helped to restore my confidence in my abilities.

I graduated from VCU in the summer of 2014 and I plan on attending graduate school in the near future to obtain my masters in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. In the meantime, I am volunteering while seeking employment in the field of TBI recovery to expand my working knowledge and be of help to others who have suffered a TBI. I am in the process of making my life into one which my kids, parents, sister and, most importantly, I myself can be proud.



Word Search Key

Here are the answers for the word search on page 2. How did you do?

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Founded in 1983 by families and concerned professionals, the Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the only statewide non-profit organization in Virginia exclusively devoted to serving individuals with brain injury, their families, and those that care for and about them. Over 10,000 people find help from BIAV each year.

BIAV is a chartered state affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America and exists to be the voice of brain injury through help, hope and healing for Virginians with brain injury and their families. We educate human service professionals and the community on the risks and impact of brain injury and advocate for improved medical and community-based services. Many of our staff members are Certified Brain Injury Specialists (CBIS Certified).

To find out more information about BIAV, contact us at 1-800-444-6443 or 804-355-5748. Or visit our website at www.biav.net.



The Voice of Brain Injury: *Help, Hope & Healing*