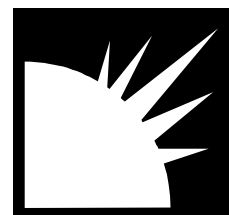


# TBI TODAY

NEWS, IDEAS, AND RESOURCES FROM THE VIRGINIA TBI MODEL SYSTEM



## THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM

### EDITOR

Laura Albert, B.A.

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Ronald T. Seel, Ph.D.

### CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

David Cifu, M.D.

William Walker, M.D.

### BIOSTATISTICIAN

Robert Perera, Ph.D.

### DISSEMINATION COORDINATOR

Kelli Gary, Ph.D.

### RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Laura Albert, B.S.

Mark Bender, Ph.D.

Karen Brooke, M.T.

Nancy Hsu, Psy.D.

Ana Mills, Psy.D.

David Rothman, Ph.D. LCP

Katherine Walker, M.A.

### DIRECT CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Laura Albert

P.O. Box 980542

Richmond, VA 23298-0542

(804) 828-2377

Email:

[Laura.Albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:Laura.Albert@vcuhealth.org)

### WEBSITE:

[tbims.vcu.edu](http://tbims.vcu.edu)

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## REMINISCE TO STIMULATE YOUR MEMORY

By Michael Cerreto

REPRINT OF ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOUND IN ISSUE 14-1 OF TBI TODAY

There's nothing like sitting down with good friends and family and telling your life stories. Reminiscing is not only fun and emotionally satisfying but it's good for your memory and self-esteem. Reminiscing about your life with others can help you feel more socially connected during a time when you may feel isolated after a traumatic brain injury.

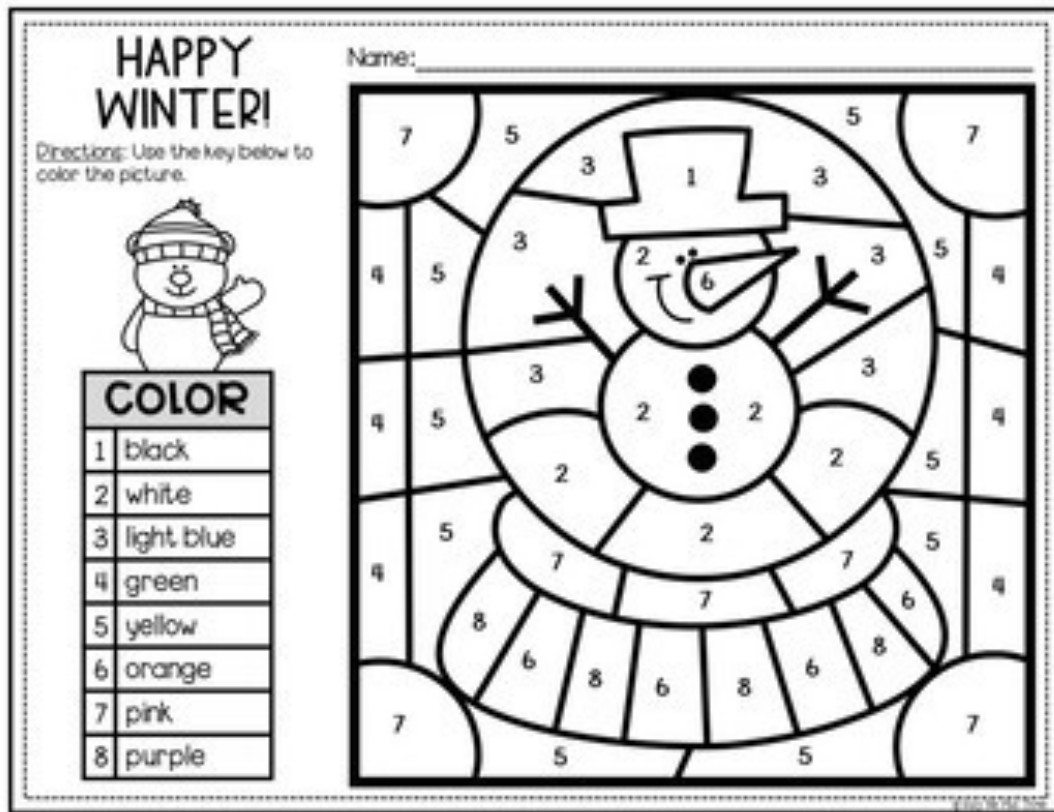
When you reminisce with friends or family, you can use prompts to spark memories. Pull out old scrap books. Put on some old music. Open up that memory box. Dust off your photo albums. Pull out the old trophies. Get antiques and old toys from the attic. These objects can help surface small memories you have long forgotten, and make the story telling fun and hands-on for everyone.

Another form of reminiscing involves creating something with others using fragments of your life together. You can create a group quilt using fabric from clothing and objects that have important significance, and share your stories while sewing and stitching. You can make a theme collage with family members of photos from different times of your life together. You can make a compilation of important songs from each family member's life and post them online or burn them to a CD for everyone to enjoy and remember.

Ideas for reminiscing about your life are endless but they can all lead to the same place. Telling your life stories can spark memories, improve verbal expression and listening skills, enhance positive emotions, and increase intimacy. It can make you feel proud of the challenges you overcame and the life you created with others.



Michael Cerreto, MS, CPCRT, CSC, LDR is a Certified Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist with A Talented Mind Clinic in Richmond, Virginia. He helps children, adolescents, and adults with a traumatic brain injury improve the quality of their lives. He is also the author of three books, *Journey Back From Chemobrain*, *Mental Toughness In Athletes*, and *University of YOU*, that are available on Amazon. Learn more about Michael at [www.atalentedmind.com](http://www.atalentedmind.com).



## TO ROOT & TO RISE BOOK REVIEW

**Title:** To Root & To Rise: Accepting Brain Injury

**Author:** Carol J Starr

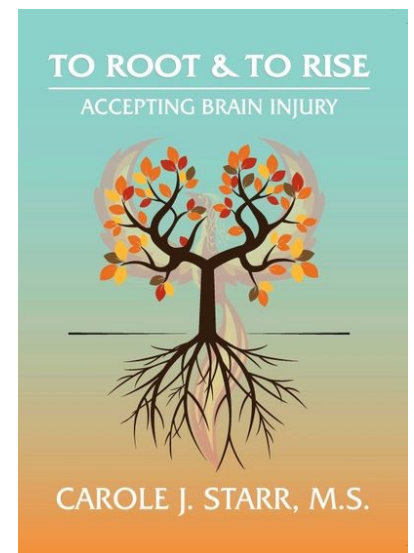
**ISBN:** 978-0998652108

In her book, *To Root & To Rise*, Carole J. Starr, M.S., begins with a quote by John Dewey: "We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience."



Ms. Starr proceeds to share her story with readers in the hopes of contributing to the greater good of those who also start on a new path following a TBI. In this relatable, true story, Ms. Starr takes the reader on a journey from the time of her accident, through medical follow-ups where she wished she had advocated more for herself, to daily struggles that encapsulate her difficulty acclimating to a new way of thinking, navigating, and emoting after her unexpected injury. The writer provides her readers with a constructive tool for venturing on their new path with the inclusion of a thorough workbook. Activities within are aimed at celebrating small victories, daily planning, constructing long term goals, and providing helpful strategies along the way.

To read more about Carole, read an excerpt, or purchase her book, visit [starrspeakerauthor.com](http://starrspeakerauthor.com). *To Root & To Rise* may also be purchased at Amazon.com as a paperback, audiobook, or for Kindle readers.



## What is the MSKTC?

The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC) is a national center that helps to make the knowledge gained from research more accessible and meaningful to those with Spinal Cord Injury, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Burn Injury. The MSKTC works closely with researchers in the 16 Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Model Systems to develop resources for people living with traumatic brain injuries and their supporters. They have developed a number of evidence-based materials for those with TBI and their caregivers and/or loved ones that are available in a variety of formats (i.e. printable PDF documents, videos and slideshows). These topics include:

- ◇ Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation
- ◇ Alcohol & TBI
- ◇ Balance Problems & TBI
- ◇ Change in Memory after TBI
- ◇ Chronic Pain & TBI
- ◇ Cognitive Problems
- ◇ Concussion Recovery
- ◇ Driving
- ◇ Emotional Problems after TBI
- ◇ Fatigue & TBI
- ◇ Headaches
- ◇ Irritability, Anger, and Aggression after TBI
- ◇ Loss of Smell or Taste after TBI
- ◇ Relationships after TBI
- ◇ Returning to School/Work
- ◇ Seizures
- ◇ Severe TBI
- ◇ Sexuality after TBI
- ◇ Sleep & TBI
- ◇ Social Skills after TBI
- ◇ Spasticity & TBI
- ◇ Stress Management for TBI Caregivers
- ◇ TBI & Depression
- ◇ Understanding Behavior Changes after TBI
- ◇ Understanding TBI
- ◇ Vegetative States
- ◇ Vision Problems
- ◇ Voting Tips after TBI

For all this and more, please visit <https://msktc.org/tbi>.

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## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU



Your needs matter to us and we want to know how we can do better. Our TBIMS Team would like to know what resources you would like more of or what resources you're having difficulty finding.

Please let us know using the survey below:

<https://forms.gle/HmktEGXeo6iFHqmk9>

# DEAR PAT,

I had my concussion about two years ago when I slipped and fell down the steps at my apartment building. I was in a hurry to leave for work that I didn't pay attention to the water on the stairs from the rain. I must have blacked out because when I woke up I was laying on the bottom of the steps and I don't know what happened. My head was throbbing really bad, but all I could think about was that I'm late for work! I tried to drive to work, I really thought I would be OK if I could just get there.

Well, thank God my mom was there for me. I always call her on my way to work so when I didn't call her, she showed up at my apartment. She saw me driving around the parking lot – I guess I couldn't figure out how to drive to work! She took me to the hospital where they told me I had a concussion. The doctor said I would be fine but need to rest for a few days. She didn't want me to go back to work until the following week.

When I went back to work, something wasn't right. I became really forgetful and that's not like me. I was only 25! I would forget to take my medications and vitamins. I didn't have that problem before. Yeah, I have bad genes and had to start taking blood pressure medicine and other stuff in my 20s.

Anyway, I am frustrated because my life has become such a mess. Although I was able to keep my job, it's hard to get to work on time and get through the day. I'm exhausted by the end of the day that I have no energy to do anything. I'm constantly looking for my keys and wallet. I'm not organized and always rushing to get somewhere. I have sticky notes all over the apartment to help me. My mom and my family have been really supportive too. I have tried to make my life easier, but nothing has worked.

I need help, Pat! Please tell me how to get my life back together. I would appreciate any advice you can give.

Sincerely, Charley

## PAT'S RESPONSE:

Dear Charley,

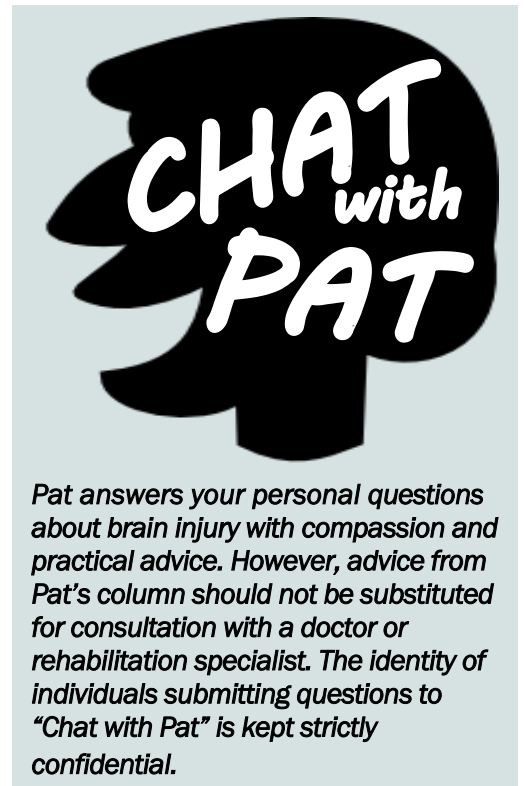
I commend you on your dedication to getting better after your injury. My sense from your letter is that the changes you described have been going on for quite some time after your concussion and dealing with those problems every day is frustrating.

Here are some things to consider that may be helpful.

In addition to a concussion, **other health conditions can make your attention and memory worse**. How are you sleeping? Do you feel rested when you wake up? High blood pressure, other health conditions (such as being overweight), high blood pressure medication, and other medications can all potentially lead to poor sleep. And a concussion, poor sleep, and some medications can all play a role in making your attention and memory much worse. If you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling rested after sleeping, please speak with your physician who can decide on the right medical course of action to improve your sleep, health and wellness, increase your energy, and improve your attention and memory skills.

**Becoming more organized and developing ways to compensate for memory problems** can bring order to your home life. I would recommend that you purchase a memory log book that contains a yearly calendar and note paper section. You can also consider a professional organizer or a digital tablet; whichever you feel more comfortable using. In the log book, write down your appointment times, create to-do lists, and track your medications. Carry the log book/tablet with you everywhere. For example, it would be helpful to take your book/tablet with you to your doctor's appointment. You can write down notes from the visit to share with your family and your scheduled future appointments. You can also use it to write down questions you may have for your doctor for your next visit. Once you utilize the tool consistently, it will become part of your routine and you do not have to think about it. Hopefully, this will eliminate all the sticky notes around your house.

**To help you better manage your medications, consider developing a routine.** Routines turn into habits, which will require less of your attention. For example, use a medication management aid (i.e., pillbox) if you are not already using one. The pillbox has a small compartment for each day of the week. On Sundays, you fill up the box for the week to help track your medications. Then set alarms as reminders or download a medication tracking app on your smartphone to help you to remember to take medi-

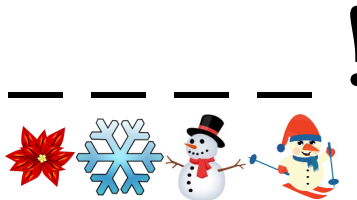
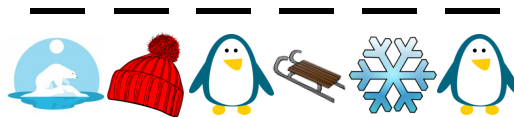


(Continued on page 7)



# Decode the Winter Message

Check your answer on page 7



## KEY:

A =

I =

P =

E =

M =

R =

F =

N =

S =

H =

O =

W =

Y =

JUST FOR FUN

# 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.

## QUESTION:

My sister was in a bad accident from driving while intoxicated. Even though her brain injury doctor advised her to stop, Holly just won't quit drinking because she doesn't think she has a problem. I really want to help her but I am at my wit's end. Is there anything I can do to help her?

## ANSWER:

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

- ⇒ Talk to her about your concerns.
- ⇒ Encourage her to keep a diary of how much she is drinking.
- ⇒ Help her make a list of good reasons for cutting down or stopping.
- ⇒ Recognize that drinking is a choice. Encourage your sister to take responsibility for helping herself.
- ⇒ Try to offer support and encouragement instead of getting angry at your sister.
- ⇒ Do not drink around her.
- ⇒ Help your sister find activities that do not involve alcohol and introduce her to people who do not drink alcohol.
- ⇒ Offer to attend a local AA support group with your sister.
- ⇒ 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: [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@vcuhealth.org)**



## VCU Outpatient Care

We provide comprehensive inpatient and outpatient brain injury rehabilitation and care at VCU Health. We strive to maximize the quality of life of persons with brain injury through the uses of rehabilitation services. Our program emphasizes the enhancement of quality of life by improving the functional independence, increasing participation in social activities, preventing further injury and providing education in health maintenance.

You can reach us at:

Outpatient Care — Ambulatory Care Center  
(804) 828 - 4097

(Continued from page 4)

cations at the right time. Some physicians and pharmacies work together to offer pre-filled pill packs as a way to improve medication adherence. If you are interested, speak with your doctor to find out if this might be an option for you.

Misplacing items occur frequently for individuals with a TBI, and even for those without! **Create a designated area for your valuables** can save time and reduce stress. For example, place a bowl by the door for your keys. Always return the keys to the bowl first thing after you enter the house. Use the same strategy for your wallet, cell phone, and your memory log book. For example, place your keys and wallet in that bowl near the front door. Then keep your phone and log book in a bowl or tray in the kitchen. Knowing where they belong will decrease time spent looking for them. Companies like Tile offer another great way to keep track of your belongings with the use of 'finder tags.' You can purchase finder tags and set up an app on your phone so that you can ping the location of your keys, wallet, and other belongings.

Lastly, **consider working with a rehabilitation psychologist or counselor who specializes in working with persons with a TBI** to help implement these and/or other strategies. You can look online for your local chapter of the Brain Injury Association for provider recommendations and other resources. For example, in Virginia the online link is <https://www.biav.net/>. In the meantime, try these strategies out to see if they work for you. You might have to modify them to fit your lifestyle and preference. I hope these tips will be a good start to organizing your life and putting your life back together.

Best wishes!

### Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult.

Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is 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: [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@vcuhealth.org)

or

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



Warm Wishes  
for a Happy  
New Year!

From page 5:

KEY



## Mark Your Calendar

### Support Group for Adults with TBI, Family, and Friends

- ◆ **When:** 3rd Monday of the month, 6:15pm-7:45pm
- ◆ **Location:** Disability Law Center of Virginia, 1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Richmond, 23230
- ◆ **Contact:** Christine Baggini at (804) 355-5748 or [christine@biav.net](mailto:christine@biav.net)

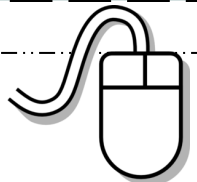
### Community Living Connection (CLC) Care Online Support Group for Caregivers and Survivors

- ◆ **When:** 2nd Tuesdays of the month, 7- 8:30 PM
- ◆ **Location:** Online (WebEx)
- ◆ **Contact:** Stacey Nichols at (540) 344-1200 or [Stacey@bisswva.org](mailto:Stacey@bisswva.org)

*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 call (804) 828-2377 or email [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@vcuhealth.org).*

**Did you Know?** You can subscribe to *TBI Today* by email and get every issue sent directly to your computer, tablet, phone, or any other device that supports PDF. Best of all, it's free! Email [Laura.Albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:Laura.Albert@vcuhealth.org) to be added to the list!

To access our archives of past issues go to [tbims.vcu.edu](http://tbims.vcu.edu) and visit the "Newsletters" section.



**VCU, PM&R**

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM**

**P.O. BOX 980542**

**RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

Go to [tbims.vcu.edu](http://tbims.vcu.edu) to access back issues!



**1-800-444-6443**

**biav.net | info@biav.net**



## **We're here for what comes next.**

The human brain is extremely complex. So, it can be difficult to know where to begin when it comes to navigating life after brain injury.

### **That's where we come in.**



We provide free and confidential resources and support to people with brain injuries, caregivers, and health and human service professionals.



We work to raise awareness, advocate at the federal, state, and local levels, and offer community connection through membership.



We offer professionals guidance for their patients and continuing education through conferences, webinars, and workshops.