

Thoughts and Strategies From Maryann

Imaging losing control of your life, not being able to plan your next step, not having any idea what was happening to you. As you can imagine it would be terrifying. This is where my story begins.



My name is Maryann Stoker. I have a brain injury which no one knew about for at least two years. It came from (in a round-about way) a work related back injury, which led to chronic pain and depression as a result. During those two years I lived my life and messed it up quite well.

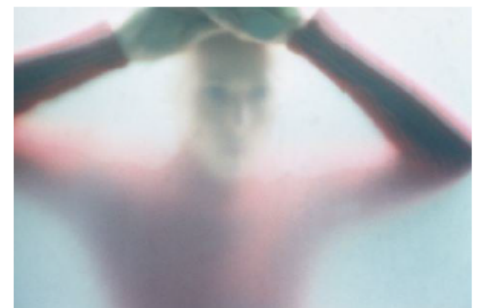
While being treated for depression I was prescribed medication, which was supposed to help with depression, but instead, it caused my brain injury. Usually we hear acquired brain injuries are caused by car accidents, high-risk activities, strokes and aneurysm but not usually from medications.

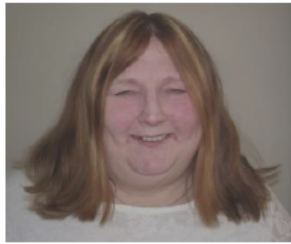
My blood tests were normal in regards to the level of medication that I was taking, so the doctor could not tell there was anything wrong. I was a Registered Practical Psychiatrist Nurse and my employer realized there was something wrong by my behaviour as I was not presenting in my usual manner. My memory was impaired as I forgot important meetings and the information presented. Eventually, my employer asked for a second opinion and the doctors found out that there was something wrong with my brain.

I survived a medically induced brain injury called Jacob Cretzfield Syndrome which is similar to mad cow disease. This was an extreme side effect. My injury is a diffused brain injury, meaning that it has affected all areas of the brain to some degree. I would compare it to a road with many cracks going all over.

There is no one to blame, as my treating physician heard what I told him and how I was doing as I saw it. I thought that I was doing quite well; I could not see the problems other people saw and did not believe what they were saying was me. I did not stay within the boundaries of an RPN, because I lost my sense of boundaries and felt that I didn't have to follow the regular rules, such as leaving in the middle of the day and going beyond my scope as a practical nurse.

I had no insight into what was happening. I lived in a fog.
It was extremely weird and I do not remember a lot about it.





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Over 17 years of work, I always received excellent work evaluations. But once the injury started to present itself, I received the most devastating evaluations that I feel a person could receive. Prior to my injury I was well liked and respected at work. Unfortunately, I feel that I left with a different opinion because no one knew what was happening to me at that time, not even myself.

I started rehab in 2001, which showed me compensatory strategies. I initially fought for about a year. My rehab therapist showed me different methods for coping such as scheduling, mood charts, problem solving work sheets, strategies for self-awareness and speech therapy. I was attempting to become the person I was prior to my ABI.

I so wanted to be me again. It is so hard to lose the self that you once knew.

My rehab therapist suggested going to Camp Dawn in its second year of operation. I was resistant to going to at first. I certainly did not want to be with people who had a brain injury. As most of us know that denial phase. In the end, I went to camp and with the help of the leaders and other campers' it helped me to accept the limitations that I was faced with.

Since then, I have been able to harness the power of wanting to do better and I have become very involved with Camp Dawn, which has become one of my passions in life.

I have tried different interests that I necessarily would not have tried before, as I am working very hard on rebuilding my life and finding my new passion and niche in life. I continue to have problems and some days are worse than others, but I have gained more insight into what acquired brain injury is.

I do not like needing my compensatory strategies as much, but I want a life so I will use them. I think that I am extremely lucky, not everyone is given a chance to rebuild their lives.

I am aware that I cannot be the person I used to be, although, with hard work and support from my friends, the camp dawn group, HBIA and my ABI team I will continue to grow into the best person I can become.

I have learned that I will continue to have my brain injury but I refuse to live as a brain injury person. The most important thing is that we all need passion in our lives to give us something to live for, and I have found mine.

