From There to Here

From Getting Back on the Bike, David A. Grant Blogs about Life after Brain Injury - June 5, 2017

Life today is nothing like I imagined it would be. My daughter-in-law just picked up our granddaughter. I watch our granddaughter Amelia every Tuesday while her mom works. Since Sarah's return to work, I watch her by myself, something I never even would have given thought to a few short years ago.

Amelia made short work of her lunch, and she lay asleep in my arms napping. Tears filled my eyes, tears of unbridled happiness.

And I again thought about my life.

Here is very often a great place these days. I have the love of cherished family members, my wife and I remain committed to each other, and we have found others who share our fate as a survivor family. We have a new circle of friends who have enriched our lives beyond measure.

How did I get *here*? How did I get to that place of being okay with life?

The year after my cycling accident was the worst years of my life – and it wasn't because I turned fifty that year. Only the lucky ones get to see fifty and beyond.

To call it a dark year would be an epic understatement. A few short months after my accident, I felt like my life was over. Any vestiges of hope were tattered. I felt alone, like things would never get any better. Suicide was an option, one that I didn't exercise.

So how exactly did I get from there to here? From complete ruination of the human will to thrive to living a life worthwhile?

The answer is complicated, and our path was a winding one, but in retrospect, a few things have proven to be game-changers.

The first big game-changer was finding a support group. Those who know me have heard me credit my very life to my support group. Finding others who share our fate, who understand, and who "get it" about life with a brain injury has virtually eliminated the feeling of aloneness. It's hard to be unique in a room full of other survivors.

Somewhere early on, I got into the habit of asking seasoned TBI'ers a simple question. "Are you still seeing measurable gains?" I reserved this question for those who have been part of the survivor family for longer than I have. With time comes experience, and with experience comes wisdom.

Almost without exception, the answer remains the same. I most always hear variants of the same answer, "Yes, I am doing things today that I never thought possible and am still seeing gains."

Candor time. If others are seeing gains years later, why shouldn't I expect the same? Now well into year seven, this has been my experience, one I now regularly share with brain injury "newbies." Things will get better. Time is your friend.

While the list of coping strategies could get rather extensive, there is one more item that tops my list. It is perhaps one of the most wondrous parts of life today. My wife, Sarah, and I have learned that our experience has value – and that we have a responsibility to share that with others new to this journey.

By living transparently, and offering our own lives as a living example that a meaningful life after brain injury can really happen, our focus has turned to helping others. We've learned that it's difficult to worry about our own challenges when we are trying to serve others.

The Prayer of Saint Francis says it all, "It is in giving that we receive."

If you are looking for a way to make sense of life after brain injury, seek out someone who needs help. Lend a hand, give of your time, and if possible, your resources. Give without expectation of any return and watch what happens. You will be amazed.

So it has come to pass for us. I will be a brain injury survivor for the rest of my life. Helping others who most need it has become our life's work. And though we have no expectations about where our path will take us, somewhere along the way, we've gone from there to here.

And here can be a pretty remarkable place.