

# NeuroConnect

*Our Executive Director's  
Personal Story*

Why he is so passionate about Brain Injury

+

*Geills Meredith*

Remembrance and Supplements Update

+

*Michael Coss*

A True Inspiration



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**NeuroConnect**

## NeuroConnect

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**Welcome to NeuroConnect!**

NeuroConnect is a growing series of resources for brain and spinal cord injury survivors, families, and professionals. Currently our ongoing resource library includes NeuroConnect magazine and NeuroConnect Internet Radio/Podcasts.

**About NeuroConnect Magazine:**

Neuroconnect magazine is an amazing resource for survivors. Inside of our magazine, you will find articles featuring rehabilitation techniques, real life stories, tips and ideas for people & families in all stages of rehab- from critical care to later years of recovery, and more.

Thanks to our supporters, we distribute magazines free of charge to any survivors and family members across Canada. Thousands of magazines are also distributed to hospitals, rehab centres, community organizations, and professionals such as occupational therapists, case managers, and psychologists across the nation.

**About our Internet Radio/ Podcast Series:**

In May 2010, NeuroConnect launched its Internet Radio/Podcast series featuring a wide variety of topics

**Survivors! NeuroConnect wants to hear from you!**

We enjoy hearing from survivors, family members, and professionals.

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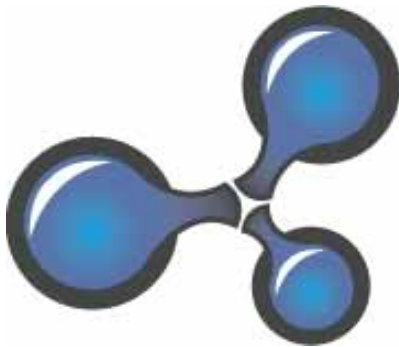
Come visit us on our new, interactive website coming in February 2011! Share information and talk about the "Hot Topics" in Brain Injury. Together we can share, support, inspire, and make a difference!

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# N NeuroConnect

## We need your help!

NeuroConnect's resources are free to any survivors, family members, hospitals and professionals! We sent over 10,000 hard copies last year.

Advertising support is what makes these resources possible. Please consider advertising with us and help give back to the community!

For advertising opportunities, please email [ads@neuroconnect.ca](mailto:ads@neuroconnect.ca). We also have space available on our new website coming out February 2011.

For a free subscription to our magazine, please email [info@neuroconnect.ca](mailto:info@neuroconnect.ca)

# Falling Through the Cracks



.....  
It was a particularly long day at work in the Spring of 2000. I entered my apartment well past dinner, walked to my bedroom, and changed into something more comfortable. The phone rang in the pocket of my jacket, draped across my bed. This was at a time when cell phones did not have call display. As I was not expecting anyone's call and was tired from the day's exertions, I debated whether or not to pick it up. Something compelled me to press the "talk" button.

"Hello...who is this?" crackles down the wire. Resisting every temptation not to hang the phone up, I respond "who is this?"

The obviously shaken voice on the phone says "I have found this phone at the scene of a car accident and dialled the last number called."

With my mind racing, the images flashed through my eyes as to who this might be. I asked the woman on the phone for a description. Quite quickly, it becomes obvious that it is my mother. I asked to speak with her and there was a long pause on the other end.

She simply replied "That won't be possible. The ambulance is on its way and she will be taken to the local hospital".


I really don't remember much of the drive to the hospital. On a normal day it would take 45 minutes to get there. I know I arrived in less than 30. I burst into the hospital at the same time they were unloading her from the ambulance. They transferred her from one stretcher to another, cut off her clothes in a flash, and quickly wheeled her into another room beyond my sight. I grabbed a nurse and blurted out who I was while wildly pointing and gesturing in the direction that the stretcher just disappeared. She gestured to me to have a seat and said that she would update me as soon as possible.

Sitting was no option as I anxiously paced back and forth- it felt like an eternity before the nurse came back to inform me that there was nothing that they could do for her there and arrangements had been made to transfer her to a major hospital in Toronto.

I asked if I could speak with her. The nurse said that she was not conscious and we must leave the medical staff alone to monitor and treat her the best they could. The nurse suggested that I go home, go to sleep, and go visit her tomorrow, as there was nothing else that could be done this evening.

I remember the drive home from the hospital much better. It was a slow and sombre experience. Eighteen hours post accident, she slowly regained consciousness in the hospital room. Extremely disorientated and extremely shaken by the events, she made little sense. Shortly after, the insurance company arrived to have her sign a series of documents and said that they would "take care of everything". I was not present for the insurance company's visit, however, I know she was in no condition to comprehend that type of information. The doctor said nothing regarding the significant trauma she sustained to her head. He instead focused the attention solely to her lower back injuries which confined her to a wheel chair and a walker for some time.

Some weeks later she was released from the hospital and sent home with me under my care. All of the instructions we received were surrounding the back injuries. The word "brain injury" was never used. The repercussions from the quick action of the insurance company resulted in no more compensation than a replacement vehicle and a short period of housing payments. In order to receive this, another document required signing to say that she was all better and that no further claims would be made against them. This document was signed while still needing a walker for mobility. It took many years to realize that something in the hospital was either missed or purposely withheld from us. My mother suffered a brain injury in that accident and our medical system swept it under the rug.



I have often asked myself why this happened. It is impossible for me to believe that they were unaware of the brain injury. How much more of a classic case can you get? Serious car accident; head injury; long coma; unable to speak when she woke up; memory loss; altered speech.

I wonder how many other Canadians have a similar story. With brain injury not in the media forefront, how many other people suffer brain injuries and are none the wiser? Since it is drilled into us, most people know that if they feel lumps they should go to the doctor and get checked for cancer. They also know that if your left arm goes numb, you could be having a heart attack. But what do Canadians know about brain injury? And why do so many cases go unchecked?

In the ten years following the accident, other serious health complications have crept up. A wide variety of doctors have been involved in treatment and diagnosis. Only one commented that these new ailments could very well have been brought on by the car accident. How does our healthcare system view brain injury? Like a terrible mess to be ignored or avoided at all costs? Like a Pandora's box that once is opened and acknowledged can never be neatly tucked away again?

The undisclosed brain injury was career ending. Never being able to return to work full time and with a continually diminishing capacity eventually resulted in my mother only being able to work a few hours per week, having to survive off of minimal government disability compensation, and a huge burden of extremely high pharmaceutical expenses needed just to carry on.

With thousands of Canadians suffering from brain injury every year, the need for heightened public awareness and medical accountability surrounding brain injury couldn't be more important. The more people who know about brain injury, the less likely there will be those who fall through the cracks. This is why I have devoted my time to volunteer for NeuroConnect, along with a passionate team of individuals who are dedicated to making the lives of people living with brain injury that much better.



# Remembrance

Geills Meredith

As much as anything, life is about making choices.

Over time what we choose defines who we are.

Life weaves itself, despite our best efforts to control it. Who we are, what choices we make, the experiences we have, what we know with our senses are the warp and weft of our life. They come together, break apart, inter-twine and overlap until the fabric of who we have become is turned out in its fullness.

Nov. 17, 2010 was the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims in Canada. It was a day of quiet reflection for me. My Day of Awe. Not just because my brain injury was the result of a car accident, but because of a man who made the choice to aid me afterward.

NOVEMBER 17, 2010

.....  
Today I'm thinking of the man who ran down the side of the mountain and pulled my daughter and me, trapped inside, out of her little old baby blue Volvo. After rolling several times the car had landed upside down, stopping abruptly at the tree-line. The roof was smashed close in to the body of the car, hugely distorted and twisted from rolling. The only way out was through a small triangular window on the driver's side. I couldn't squish myself through the space. It seemed too small. I didn't understand how it would work. I didn't understand what was happening.

I remember very little from that day—mostly sense-memory things, snippets, how surreal it all was. Most vividly what I remember is the Man in the Plaid Shirt. We heard him first. Panicked shouting. Who knows what he was saying? I heard: "Rawr rawr rawr rawr rawr!" I remember frantic arm waving. He was running toward us, almost stumbling downhill. From inside the crushed car, as I looked crookedly outside, I remember a bright flash of pink plaid careening down the embankment. "Rawr rawr rawr rawr rawr!"

Then a face I didn't recognize at the small window, peering at me. "Rawr rawr car rawr gas rawr rawr get out get out get out!"

Someone pulled my arms through the window and then my body was pulled out. I fell to the ground. Hands pulled me up. My daughter was there. Thank goodness, she was alive. And there was the Man in the Plaid Shirt. His voice was urgent. We had to runaway. Move now move now move move move! Another man appeared. They walked/carried us back up the embankment. Collapsing on the ground at the edge of the highway, I lost track of The Man in the Plaid Shirt. I understand that he stayed until things got sorted out, gave his name and number to the RCMP and continued on his journey. About an hour later he himself was killed in another car accident.

I didn't find this out until nearly five years afterward, when my lawyer was preparing witnesses during my litigation. Over the years I have thought of him; my daughter and I both often spoke of him with affection and our name for him—The Man in the Plaid Shirt—was always said with thankfulness. I wondered about him but did not pursue these thoughts.

In my own brokenness, my chronic disorientation, exhaustion and focus on making a life for myself despite my injuries, I didn't act on my questions about him. I pulled my sadness about his fate into my own accident sadness and carried on with my life as best I could.

Last March I began treating my post-brain injury difficulties differently, using supplements (adaptogenic herbs) that would address the core problems my brain was having, in order to feed my brain back to health. The results have been astounding, providing me with conscious time and the mental capacity to pay greater attention to less immediate needs.

more normalized cognitive and emotional capabilities provided me with a fresh perspective.

- When our car hit the first boulder and became airborne I reported I'd felt a massive total mind-body-spirit rush of adrenalin beyond any power I had ever felt before. Instantly I began thinking: "I will not die today! My daughter will not die today!" I repeated this for as long as I can remember. We hit another boulder as we reached the ground; the car flipped at that point and began to roll. I don't remember the rest until we stopped. We had a full spare gas tank in our trunk because we were up in the mountains in the middle of nowhere—I learned years ago (the hard way) that having extra gas when you're



November 17th rolled around and I thought not only of my accident but of the man who helped me. I didn't even know his name. Feeling finally strong enough to cope with going over it, I went back to the scene as written in my legal papers; to the day The Man in the Plaid Shirt irrevocably linked his story to mine. After eight years of struggle I felt prepared to truly open myself to this knowledge.

I found his name: Rudy Mervin. For the first time since my accident I read all of the reports. The day my life changed forever engulfed me in a new way. Time-distance with

- vacationing in the mountains is a good idea. Unfortunately, it had split open during our descent and everything in the car was covered in gasoline. Okay, so not always a good idea...

- Other witnesses reported that Rudy Mervin had said he could smell the gas all the way up at the highway and that's what made him come running down to us. At first the people on the road thought we must be dead after such a catastrophic crash, but Rudy insisted they should go to the car and make sure.

“What if someone’s alive?” he’d asked. This is where I am grabbed by his choice. Where I am shaken up and hurled around and flung down in front of the hugeness of it. At this point it hardly matters whether or not the car was in danger of exploding. Rudy had no way of knowing it was not the car’s gas tank that was leaking. What matters, what matters to me, is that this stranger, this person who had no emotional investment in me, who had never met me, acted completely selflessly on my behalf.

What matters to me is that Rudy Mervin believed the car could explode at any moment and he still came down to help. His sense of imminent danger, of life-threatening harm, was absolute and still he came. As I open myself to the enormity of this I am transformed by it.

That he died within an hour of risking himself for my daughter and me very simply floors me. It occurred to me that probably the last significant act of his life was running into the face of his own fear, of his very real sense of danger in that moment to his own life, to help a stranger. Powerful enough on its own, this fact takes on enduring significance to me. In a world that is often unkind, cruel, where people increasingly abandon their humanity and commit atrocious acts, there are still those who live their compassion. I am in awe of it.

It creates feelings of deep, all-encompassing warmth and security in me that are new. This is the greatness of who we are. This is the best we have to offer. This deep humanity is our emotional genius. Life after brain injury is often isolating. It’s a solitary journey for those of us who have experienced the trauma directly. We can only tell those of you who are whole, we cannot bring you into the broken place with us. So we are describers and you are listeners, but we are not brothers-in-arms. You who have not been injured will always be removed

from what we know, learning about it in a second-hand way.

Because of this we who have brain trauma frequently feel completely alone. Rudy Mervin cracks my aloneness and in recognition of his choice, in the deep understanding of what he was prepared to sacrifice on my behalf I have an unending feeling of connectedness to him.

So I have completely opened myself to that understanding, felt the breadth of it, let it envelop me. It is an active thing, growing and changing as I do. Something I can (and will) carry with me as long as I live. In my moment of greatest need I was not alone. This has changed how I see myself and my life. This has buoyed me; lifted me up, forced me to view my inherent self-worth in an entirely new way.

Rudy had no idea who was in the car so his effort on my behalf was unconditional. He risked himself because he felt whoever I might be was intrinsically worth it. My sense of value, simply because I exist, soars and I get to live the rest of my life with a conscious understanding of what unconditional feels like. Therein lies the profound; the crux of my awe.

Rudy Mervin will be my symbol, my visual and emotional reminder to stay open to others, reach out, ask for support when I stumble. Through all of this I have thought that being quietly thankful for Rudy’s intervention, discussing it in the kitchen with my daughter, is not enough. Other people ought to know. Often I have wondered if he had family and so decided to find out about him. To let his people know what he had done before he died.

continued on page 12





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## • A Poet

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continued from page 9

**B**orn in Saskatchewan in 1939, as an adult he lived on the west coast for two years, then Malaga, Spain for ten, where he married Emily at the Great Cathedral in Marbella. Together they owned and operated a leathercraft shop. Rudy and Emily had one son. Returning to Canada, Rudy again settled in B.C., where he lived for the next twenty years, continuing to sell the leather goods he made.

He became, by all accounts, a great astrologer. First an avocation and then his work of choice when he retired from leathercraft. He wrote epic poetry in the Medieval tradition. The final paragraph of his obituary is beautiful: “We will never forget Rudy’s zest for life, infectious laugh, quick wit, soft voice, wise counsel, kindness to everyone he met, his poetry, stories and good conversation. He was central in the lives of so many and a friend of the most remarkable kind. RUDY WILL LIVE FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS.”

I found Emily. Long divorced from Rudy, they had remained close until his death. I sent her an email, introducing myself and explaining what had happened immediately following my accident. I said I thought someone who loved him should know. I was hoping his courage and generosity of both person and spirit could be told to their son.

Emily answered me straight away. Warm, emotionally accessible, her response was lovely and touching—as much a gift for me as she had said my story was for her and their son. She sent me a wonderful collection of photographs—she and Rudy before they married, Rudy with their son, their lovely family together when they were all young...

Emily shared personal treasures, stories, filling in bits about Rudy. She confirmed the importance of my information to their son and asked that I keep in touch. I will.

Life is full of mysteries and the older I become the less I feel I understand the great eternal ‘why?’ of anything. What I know is this: I am glad for the mysteries. I am truly grateful for the unexpected treasures, like Rudy Mervin. I open myself to them and give thanks that I survived, I am here, I can go on and become more.

### UPDATE ON SUPPLEMENTS

The changes are now more subtle than they were initially and I see that as a sign of normalizing.

As it repairs itself I figure my brain will need less supplemental support. Whereas before taking the supplements I had plateaued in a place of broken, I now find myself in getting betterness. Incremental getting betterness. Inching toward consistent good brain health and capability.

The supplements haven’t eradicated the post brain injury symptoms I experience but they have made me more capable of managing them. My energy level has increased enough that I am now building reserves—it takes longer to hit a wall and crash when I am tired. Tired feels more

like what it was before my brain injury. I can accomplish many things throughout the day; am increasingly going out into the community.

Word recall and memory have improved dramatically. I become continually less dependant on lists in order to complete tasks. My executive function functions, allowing me to plan, organize, adapt to the unexpected. I am more mentally and emotionally flexible—better able to think on

my feet, be spontaneous; operate outside of the rigid infrastructure I have needed these past eight years.

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- • • •
- Strength builds on strength just as failure and loss stalled me previously. I am learning more
- about neuroanatomy, understanding the how
- and why of my broken brain—what happened
- physiologically and how to address it at the root
- of the problem.
- 
- This idea to identify what parts of my brain broke,
- based upon the difficulties I was having, and
- targeting each area specifically with relevant nutrients/supplements is proving to be beneficial.
- For now, I have finished experimenting with different supplement combinations and have found a consistent mix that works well for me: Siberian Ginseng, Rhodiola, Holy Basil (Tulsi) and LTheanine. But more on that later.

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# The Micheal Cross Story



Micheal Cross

.....  
**M**y name is Michael Coss. I am married and the proud father of twins, a son named Nathan and a daughter named Danielle. They are now 3 years old. On May 18, 2006, I was traveling from Vancouver to Kelowna with my wife Ann and then seven-month twins, when catastrophe struck on the Coquihalla and lost control of the van, which rolled over at least one and half times.

Miraculously, my wife Ann and daughter Danielle escaped with only minor injuries, but Nathan and I were not as fortunate. Nathan spent several weeks at BC children's Hospital with head injuries. When the medical services arrived at the scene of the accident, I was unresponsive, with evidence that the airbags had deployed and I was restrained by my seatbelt. Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) rating at the scene was 8 out of a possible 15, indicating a comatose state. I was subsequently transported by air to the Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, where I was assessed by neurosurgery, and bilateral ventricular shunts were inserted.

On May 30, 2006, I was transferred to Royal Columbian Hospital to be closer to my family. There, I was admitted to the critical care unit and subsequently transferred to the neurology unit where I remained comatose for several months and was unable to follow commands. Upon hearing of the accident, my parents flew from Quebec City where they were living, to be by my side. My injuries were nearly fatal and despite comprehensive treatment at two hospitals, I remained in a coma for six and half months.

Doctors told my family that my chances for recovery were remote. My wife Ann was devastated, facing the challenge of raising our two babies without a father. Recommendations were made to my family to look for a long term facility to take care of me for the rest of my life. But they did not know Michael Coss.

My family had researched Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) the medical use of oxygen at a level higher than atmospheric pressure. The treatments are used in Can-ada, more commonly used in Asia and Europe, but they are not approved by Health Canada and therefore are not covered by medical insurance. The more they learned, the more they came to believe that these treatments may work for me though they were prohibitively expensive and came with no guarantee.



My friends and coworkers saw a chance to mobilize and make a difference in my life. Within a few weeks, funds were raised by donations from friends, family and my former colleagues at Molson Breweries.

My mother accompanied me from RCH to the Richmond Hyperbaric Health Center, 5 days a week via ambulance, and for a few months, put a sponge with some water on it while I was in the chamber which would make me swallow and equalize the pressure within my ears.

It worked and on Christmas Eve 2006, the Coss family received the greatest gift they could hope for. After three HBOT treatments and half a year in a coma, I awoke and uttered my first words.

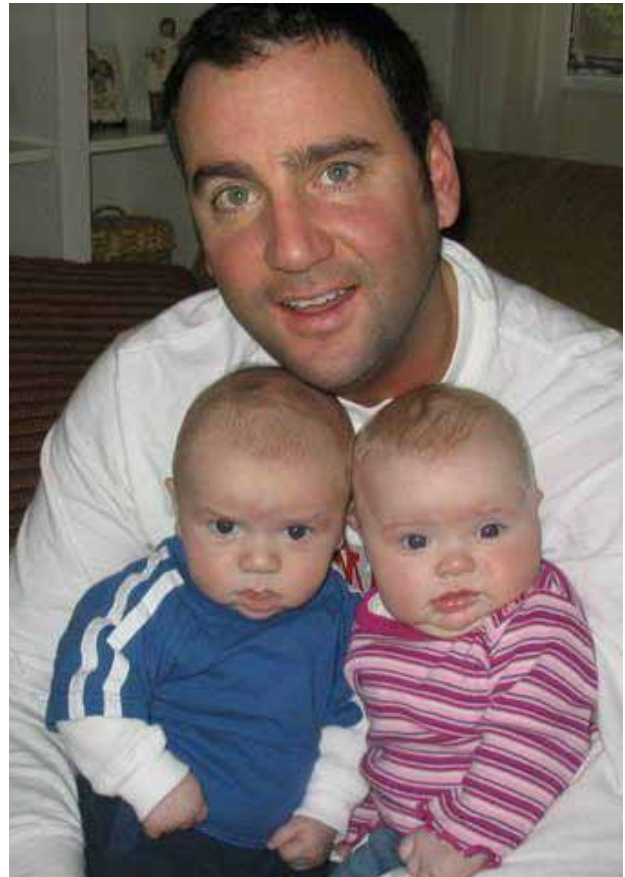
Only three months out of my coma, I learned about Rick Hansen Wheels In Motion, an annual event held in communities across Canada to raise funds for research and to improve the quality of life for people with spinal cord injury. I was truly inspired by Rick Hansen even before I was injured and I wanted to be part of it. In the midst of my rehabilitation, I canvassed my network and once again they rallied in support.

Friends, families, and Molson coworkers and other corporations helped me raise over \$22,000. My team (Team Cosco) not only won the award for the Top Fundraiser in Canada for Wheels in Motion 2007, we also set a fundraising record for the entire six-year history of the program.

From that moment on, I was on the road to recovery. Through a long, intensive and gruelling rehabilitation, I re-learned how to talk, eat again, and I am currently relearning how to walk. The old Mike Coss has died and is now gone away, the new Mike Coss is re-born and he has a renewed focus.

I currently reside in a group home near my wife and children whom I see several times a week. My long term goal is to be an able and active participant of my family's lives. I am very THANKFUL of my support network, including my family, my friends, co-workers, all of the support members, including OT/RN/Dietician and Speech and Language Pathologist and my residential care workers who provide the Activities of Daily Living support.

My family is the reason why I work so hard on my rehab each day. My wife and children, my parents and brothers and their families, my friends and my co-workers are the reason that I get up each day and work so hard.



I have begun to write a book about my experiences and have plans to speak publicly to share my inspirational story. Ultimately, like my hero Rick Hansen, I plan on raising money to provide funds to other brain injured individuals who face similar challenges and who could benefit from HBOT but are unable to pay for it. I am not ready yet to run the Boston Marathon but at least I am training for it.

I would like to acknowledge and THANK several people who have impacted and made a difference in my life. The first person that I would like to commend and THANK is my wife, Ann Coss. Not only has she found the time to come and visit me several times a week with our children, she has been very busy raising our children, paying all the bills, running a household, taking our children to preschool twice a week, taking our dog "Murphy" for a walk, entertaining our neighbours and maintaining a smile on her face, considering the circumstances; she is an amazing woman.

Next, I would like to THANK my parents who re-located to Vancouver from Quebec City the day after my injury leaving family, friends, and co-workers behind. They have been a huge support for my family and see me daily and have searched for various therapies that I should undertake to further improve my rehabilitation. THANK YOU for deciding to take the route of HBOT for me as this enabled me to awaken from my 6 ½ month COMA.

My in-laws, Mark and Jenifer Bartlett are the next people that I would like to commend and acknowledge. They have helped us out by babysitting our children, helped prepare meals, assisted Ann with household chores like take our big baby “Murphy” for a walk, and even take out the garbage and mow our lawn.

There are numerous others that I would like to THANK like Ken Endo, Rachel Dumas, Joe and Vanessa Lozinski for coming to see me while I was in the hospital and also at the group home that I reside in. I would like to mention my former boss at Molson, the person who hired and trained me, Ronnie Paterson. He was my mentor and I would go to bat for him. He organized and held numerous fundraisers for me to raise some money so that I could undergo HBOT which enabled me to awaken from my 6 ½ month COMA. The staff and manager of the Cheshire Homes Society of B.C., Larkin House, the group home that I reside in, for teaching me the skills to become independent again and all the various people that have worked with me the last 2 years, Janis Duvenstein, Francine Miller, Sue Mckrimmon, Mary-lynn Corpuz, Bonnie Ritchie, Dan Carlson, Martha Rodriguez and all the doctor’s and nurses who looked after me at Eagle Ridge and Royal Columbian Hospital. Many thanks to all of you;

I’m sure that I am going to run The Boston Marathon in the near future.

Michael Coss



# Post Concussion Syndrome

- LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

In the ocean water BOOM, CRASH  
My heart stops for a moment  
Hmmm I just got hit on the head by a boat  
Dazed and confused...  
What's going on? My body's tingling, I see stars, my hearing is distorted  
Day by day I can't hear you or see you.  
My mind goes blank every now and then, wow, what did you just say?  
I'm getting dizzy, I feel like I'm whobbling and cross eyed,  
tell me how to do that again, I hear echoes, I can't hear you,  
this is freaking me out, am I going crazy?  
Why am I crying? Tell me again how to do that again?  
Oh why can't I do this anymore?  
I can't make sense of these numbers or words, it seems so foreign.  
I can't figure out what to do first, second, or third, I'm so confused  
The more I do things, the more my head pounds, why?  
What should I wear? What take a shower? Why? Oh ya okay  
I'm sorry I swore, I don't know why I swore. I didn't know I said that  
My words are coming out wrong, it's hard to speak,  
I sound like I'm drunk Wow, why didn't I say that earlier, it's too late...  
Things are like slow mow...  
Hmmm where did that car come from? in a blink of an eye  
My house is a mess, I don't know why? How do I clean?  
Soccer, why am I chasing a ball? Where does it go?  
Why are they yelling at me?  
Downsizing my job... Hmmm okay, that sounds good,  
I'm exhausted. My neck really hurts, I don't know why  
Tell me again how to do that again and why? Why are you mad?  
What's going on? This is stressing me out,  
whoah I'm getting dizzy again, I feel sick  
Wow downsize my job, what just happened,  
I feel like crap. Like a ton of bricks just hit me, what's wrong with me?  
My soul is crushed, I want to sleep and sleep til this goes away  
Awh man, I have post concussion syndrome, why didn't anyone tell me?  
Overwhelm with excitement, crying a happy cry.  
I see there's light at the end of the tunnel,  
I now know what's wrong with me! recovery is very slow!

Susie White  
3rd year survivor of TBI/ABI

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