



Who am I? BY Geills Meredith

Re-Defining your Life After a Brain Injury

I think of my brain injury like an earthquake inside my head. After the catastrophic rumbling, the phone lines were down. Bridges... washed out. Roads... heaved and torn apart. I couldn't find my friends or family members. I couldn't find myself.

I had been disconnected. Isolated in nearly every way possible from the life I had lived before my injury.

For me, brain injury delivered myriad losses. Well-practiced skills years in development, carefully constructed coping techniques, mental and physical abilities, behaviours, preferences, interests were gone in varying degrees.

Brain injury created chaos that shook me to my core. Not only were friends and family confronted with a stranger, I was a stranger to myself.

Who am I? This was the pivotal thought that underpinned all of my rehabilitation.

For four years I searched for the familiar me, striving, always, to get back, reconnect, become myself again. Four years of failure to do so, of disappointment and frustration, resentment, anger, despair.

It was from deep within this struggle that I came to understand an enduring gift of brain injury: this "new" me, unfamiliar, awkward and incapable, was no stranger at all.

She was me before my calamitous parents got hold of me. Before schools and school yard bullies, before systems and social demands and life experiences informed my choices, molding me into the adult I had become.

I was staring down my own essence, my inherent personality, the infant inside my mind uncensored, unrestrained, unfragmented and uncompartimentalized. Pure and whole me.

I realized that there is a quiet opportunity that comes with ABI: as my brain "re-wired" itself I got to participate in, to direct, a self-makeover of monumental proportion.

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Disconnection from my pre-accident way of choosing and behaving provided me with the chance to develop new ways of relating to people. To finally get rid of childhood dysfunction and assert myself in healthy ways. To develop artistic abilities and interests I had been too insecure to explore in my previous life.

There is no compensation for the losses and difficulties created by brain injury. Nonetheless, ABI gave me a life do-over. And that is simply magnificent.

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