

God Doesn't Make Junk

Or

How D-train learned to slow his roll

Preface 5.30

This book is for those surviving through and with a traumatic brain injury, caregivers, and others interested in the injury or who just want to experience what a life changing injury it can be.

Caregivers get a special shout out. I titled one chapter to caregivers and there are a number of tests or ways to handle relatively new patients scattered throughout, but the caregivers deserve even more accolades.

I try to focus in this book but it does sway to and fro at times. One memory leads to five more and sometimes I want to share them all. I resisted quite a bit. I tried to focus on a few key rules of life that I believe or know helped me through my accident and the subsequent traumatic brain injury or TBI, and healing to my new point. It's required much healing, learning and relearning on a fairly nonstop basis to get to the point of writing a book.

Positivity is a primary focus of the book. Along with awareness, to the world. What truly is, and what can be. What is possible. It's a challenge to understand what might be obtainable and what is the worth of anything, at any point in our changing lives within a changing world. Awareness helps put light on and into the world.

These statements definitely don't preclude my/our fallibility and vulnerability and those should be evident as well. This optimism doesn't come from being high on a hill or anything.

The range of TBI's is very wide and I don't know the full range or experiences, nor do I pretend to. This is my experience from my brain injury with some of my history to show a bit of my full journey which has resulted in my injury and some of my growth beyond the injury.

My story with the accident.

Chapter 1: An incident occurred unbeknownst to me

So I was in a car crash in May 2024. Single car accident but more on that later. I easily could have perished, but somehow remain alive. I could have ended up with a far worse brain injury but was capable of remembering a good bit of my life and thinking through writing this book.

The car was largely ripped in two. I went to a local hospital and was in the ICU for much of my time there. At the hospital I spent over a week in acute rehab (in a separate part of the hospital) and after the full hospital stay was then transferred to a second place, a Skilled Nursing Facility or SNF. During my whole time at the hospital and one week at the SNF I was largely out of a fully conscious mind, for a total of about 7 weeks. I did have glimmers of memories made but they were mainly "images" captured occasionally.

Unconscious is the wrong term technically and why I didn't use it describing those 7 weeks. I'm told that I could open my eyes and recognize people. I could talk but often it didn't make sense, even if it formed words.

I wasn't really there. Largely I felt like the time was one very long dream. I was near my childhood home for a while, preparing to ride a bike with my brother along the two lane blacktop roads. I was also in a hospital with my wife but not as a patient. Much of the dream was at a funeral home preparing for a funeral and at it, or I was in a group house with many other people, one at least who was very bothersome. Every scene was in or around my hometown except the part with my wife which I placed near my current homebase for over 25 years, of Northern Virginia.

During the hospital stay I was apparently a handful. I would, I'm told, open my eyes, and interact with people, but I remember not much of that at all. I also would occasionally walk around with assistance, as my legs were largely unhurt in the accident. The assistance was because even though my legs were largely unhurt I would tend to fall over. I don't know what was in my head, but I apparently made a verbal announcement to watch me and proceeded to try and walk through a wall. Apparently in the verbal statement I claimed I could see dead people and knew where to find them, then walked into the wall. Meanwhile a physical therapist tried to righten my angle by asking me if I did see things that were there and visible.

And I either lost total track of everything - which I believe - or something else confused me. During this period of being out of my mind I answered the question of my age with both 24 and 70. I was 51 at the time of the accident and 52 upon finally going home. Upon regaining consciousness I was amazed the year was 2024. I think my wife had me guess and my guess was at least 10 years prior. Then the shock when I learned my age, though I remembered being told I was 54 so I got some minor satisfaction when I did the math and figured out I was actually 2 years younger, as if that's a major difference.

While in the largely unconscious state I apparently also tried to convince my family to sneak me some food as I was limited to Jello by mouth, though was mostly fed through a belly tube. Apparently pizza and tacos were on my mind most of those times.

I had a special knack for stirring up trouble and keeping staff on their toes. I was in the one very long dream as far as I knew, so every action I believe to be from a base level of my soul, with mischief in measure.

One notable thing that happened was where I experienced a crossover between dream and reality. I dreamed that my wife worked in a hospital building but had another job, so she didn't work for the hospital. I had gone with her one day for an unknown reason. It became lunchtime and so I ventured out into the hospital dining area. It was large and confusing and I got lost. Then I was abducted by hospital staff and dragged to a table some sort in an operating room. They put things/inserts into my body that had wires and wrapped me with a protective vest before releasing me. In the dream I found my wife, oddly in the parking lot, in her car. I got in the car. From the passenger seat I laughed and showed her the inserted plugs and protective vest. I laughed harder and took off the vest and pulled the inserted plugs out of my body. I did the laughing and removed the inserts in real life as well! Belly and penis included.

In real life, the medical team had to reinsert each device into my body again and then taped my arms to the bed railings. I caught a glimpse of my arms in real life that stayed with me. The color of the tape was red my memory tells me, and in memory of real life (I think) I wrestled to get my arms free from it.

In the largely unconscious state I was moved from the hospital to the SNF miles away, but I retain absolutely no memory of that.

Eventually I regained full consciousness mainly but was left with memories of the dream state for quite awhile. Most of it except for the inserted device portion took place in my hometown of Columbia, Missouri and that did linger over partial memories that returned, causing me to think that was where some visitors to me in real life lived, or were originally from. Basically visitors in real life had come from central Missouri in my mind, though I knew I was in Virginia.

I had another somewhat glorious episode of confabulation at the SNF after I regained my consciousness. A not medical definition of confabulation is that it's the experience of clearly remembering things that did not actually happen. I still have those experiences to this day. They're often about "minor" things but can throw me off because of my certainty.

An early doozy was this: My wife had taken to visiting me somewhat often, usually with one of our three children. All teenage children at the time. I knew that they were going to be going to North Carolina soon, as a brief summer vacation to my Mother-in-law's place, a sort of retreat for us in the North Carolina mountains. One day I knew it was coming near to that time but I thought it was a day or two off at least. I thought I had a phone conversation with her that morning. I often made calls to her since they had taken my phone away (told later), I found an often unused phone near a few staff desks that I could commandeer.

I had been itching to go home and thought my wife might have said she was coming by that day, around mid-day, to pick me up and bring me by the house for a bit.

Well, she had really loaded down my room leading up to their vacation so that I would have enough clothes and other things while they'd be gone. Bringing me things to do, activity books to work with, and clothing for changes. I put in some thought to all perceived coming events

and the shape of the room. I figured and hoped that my release was soon to come and figured it would be a chore to move me and all the stuff she had brought. I figured the clothes were probably the biggest hurdle. And there was a circular laundry basket next to the upright wardrobe.

So I cleaned out the wardrobe and put it all in the laundry basket. I put the basket in the empty seat of the wheelchair, left my room, and rolled it down the hall. It was basically a facility rule for patients, at least me, not to be out of the room without a wheelchair, so this way technically I was in compliance! Wheelchair pushed by me, but I had it. I went around one corner, past the PT/OT gym. Another right into the waiting room and past a shocked receptionist who was at a loss for words but was trying to wave at me to stop. I continued rolling on outside, stopping like a good man just beyond the front doors, by the pull-in area for cars, beneath a small roof. I started waiting and scanning for my wife to pull up, not knowing they were just then pulling into Grandma's driveway in North Carolina.

I waited a few minutes when then a lady in charge of something came out from the front doors of the SNF. She asked me what I was doing and I told her briefly. My plan was to load the laundry basket in the car but not go myself, an action I thought would be easier for my wife, and take some load off her. I also thought it was mature of me. A good action to show my progress to anyone curious. For one thing, I wasn't making even a temporary break from the SNF, I was staying gosh darn it! Didn't that earn me some cred?

Well the lady grabbed the wheelchair and tried turning it back around, to which I resisted, grabbing at the wheelchair. She won that battle and got the wheelchair back inside. I pursued her and the chair back into the building. I was confused but active. Trying to meet her halfway and call her bluff, while losing my battle over wheelchair control, I know I said something like "well, we can go to the side door instead." Praying that I had some of her intentions correct and could sway the rest of her intentions.

She ended up getting the chair with the laundry basket and me into an empty room. I don't really have a memory of the next few minutes.

Apparently she had me sit near her at a table in front of a phone. She then called Ruth, my wife, a short bit after they had gotten to their destination in North Carolina. The phone was on speakerphone. Apparently my wife talked sense into me, I gave up and went back to my room. I have some memories of getting back there, wheeling the chair to the corner, unloading the basket near the wardrobe, and getting back in bed. I thought that was the end of it. I spent the rest of the day/night in bed watching TV, and eating dinner when it was served. I took my medicine at the usual time and went to bed.

Now the next day I had a thought to get one medication delivery time changed. I had had the thought before but now I was trying to become a man of action. I had been given a sedative/muscle relaxant, Valium, at 8:30 am each day. Which of course is early in the morning, after waking, and was before PT/OT time in the gym. So I had the idea of talking with the

OT/PT staff to see if they could put the word in to change the time of that dose. I had tried making my request/case multiple times already to nurses, to no avail.

So I got up and grabbed the wheelchair again, this time without the laundry basket. I wheeled it out of the room into the hallway, and headed to the front of the building again.

However, many nurses were in the hallway, going room to room delivering meds to patients. Well they looked at me and responded as if there was an All Points Bulletin put out on me. They moved around a lot across the hall, forming a line that challenged me to get around/through them, all of them pleading for me to go back to my room and get back in bed. I didn't react vocally but tried to negotiate the line they formed, with my goal still on my mind. The wheelchair was my negotiating device. Left, right, left again, searching for a hole in the line to sneak through, like a fullback carrying the football.

Then into the hallway came one nurse who stood taller than the rest. Kingsley was his name. He had attended to me regularly. He had just re-entered the hall from another patient's room.

Upon seeing him I knew my gig was up. I turned my wheelchair around and headed back to my room, with him following me.

Kingsley was one of my first memories in the new reality, of him basically hosing me down in the hospital main shower area. So I didn't appreciate him at first, but over time, and with me calming down, I grew to appreciate his pretty tireless efforts.

If you're affected by having a loved one with a TBI you'll want to know if they're truly there, and there's at least one test you can use to see if they're back or still in la la land so to speak. Read on for that tip.

Chapter 2: Soul Shifting

In the SNF, I generally had a lot of time to myself. The mornings were generally organized chaos, meds at 5:30, 6:30 and 8:30 with breakfast around 7:30. This was partially appended after a discussion with Ruth. I wore a diaper the whole time, though I used the bathroom in a normal manner, at least after regaining consciousness. One time she visited I think I had worn the diaper the better part of a week. It felt funny or slightly problematic to me and I asked her to look at the diaper and she confirmed that it was in a state of haven been overly worn and slightly disintegrated. So she asked/said to the nursing staff that my diaper should be checked regularly/daily and changed as needed.

That went a little overboard in my mind. It turned into a daily rite of just waking me up and changing the diaper, despite my claims that the diaper was clean and didn't need to be changed. On this point I'll add information about the room temp. I had a room AC/heating unit

and before bed would crank the temperature down to about 67 degrees, so 1st thing in the morning it was cold in the room. So here I was being woken now a half hour earlier at 5am in a very cold room in order to change a clean diaper, half naked and without blanket or cover.

I could probably talk longer about that whole process and offshoots of that process but right now I'll move on.

So after the morning routine, I'd often go to Occupational and Physical Therapies. After that, lunch would usually show up, leaving the time between lunch and dinner to be quite bare of activities or distraction. Often I'd be alone with my thoughts during that time. At times I would turn suicidal. I only remember one time while in the facility but apparently there were other times that were noticed, which I've come to learn was another reason to remove the phone, so I couldn't use the cord to harm myself. A method I wouldn't consider had I thought about it.

One day I was alone and overall propped to look out the window. I had a short train of thought going, about nothing in particular.

I then entered a fast paced series of thoughts and quickly arrived at a place stirring my soul. I felt that previous actions and behaviors were not only in my past, but I wondered with honesty how I ever could've been allowed, by myself even, to behave like I had in some fashion much of my life. Much of it around drug and alcohol use/abuse and short temper sometimes plus the occasional bit of self-importance. I felt shameful deep within. From my soul. This feeling was quickly followed by a clear deduction that I had truly been saved, by something powerful and omnipresent. Because how else did I survive a tragically bad accident if I was truly a louse/scumbag. Wouldn't the crash be a perfect time to remove me? Well if I had truly been saved I thought, there must be a reason. An obtainable goal for me to reach.

So I was left wondering what that purpose was and what I should be doing. The feeling has never fully left me. I still have not found the reason.

I was lucky enough to have belonged to a very good church, and to my credit I had done audiovisual volunteer work for around 6 years. So they offered 5 free Pastoral counseling sessions. I took them up on it. We kept it to three sessions as I was going to start with a psychologist. The attending Pastor, though, had some schooling in psychology and related subjects. She was a big help to me still early in my recovery.

In the second session I relayed my feelings I previously listed here; that I felt saved, that I felt a soul shift. Those are the phrases I used but was certainly conveying the experiences as touched by the Holy. She listened and asked if I knew of the Transfiguration of Christ. I knew the term and that it applied to an event; now basically a story, but I admitted I didn't know it beyond those basics, and couldn't say anything about the story of it. So we read it from the Bible. It was fairly short and painted quite a scene. Jesus with a couple of disciples on a trek up a mountain that sounded mystical in many ways. Then an action occurred in full sight of the disciples that affected Jesus and did some action upon his face.

When it was over the disciples were overcome by the power of what they had just experienced and witnessed. They were overwhelmed to the point that one of them set out quickly, gathering tools and raw materials like wood. A booming voice spoke to them, asking the constructive one what was the reason for him scurrying around with such vim and vigor. He answered he was going to build houses on that spot so they could live in that spot of so much glory. The voice boomed again saying that that was not the place to build houses. That they should move on. They would then find and discover the right place to construct the houses.

So it was an important allegorical story for me, too. It wasn't my purpose to stay in that room, holding onto that moment, either in body or in mind. No matter how powerful it was.

So I gathered it was my purpose presently to keep moving. My purpose would later be revealed. I'm sure, for some reason, that I may not realize the moment or moments I was saved for, in current time. They will be revealed to me after they or it happens.

Move forward as possible, including mentally and soulfully. This was and remains my call and I urge the same for all people, especially souls that feel lost. May we all find our goal.

Chapter 3: Optimistic Thinking

So I learned/borrowed something my Mom taught me young, and shaped it over time. I made it my own device over time, well before the accident. She's the main spirit behind the optimism exercise, as I now refer to it. A speech therapist I had early in my recovery is responsible for the groundwork leading to the exercise regarding negative thinking. I don't intend to tell these are a panacea in any way. They work for me and make sense to me. But I do stand behind a daily optimism drill which could be a daily gratitude exercise, and looking at negatives through a scrutinous lens.

They're not a magical cure for anything, but a mindful manner to approach life and build optimism and deal with negative thoughts. The negative exercise is to be used when dealing with those. The optimistic exercise is to be used daily and its effects should build over time- try two weeks at least. And don't write them down in any manner, for one thing we're naturally lazy creatures and are likely to write down a list and just review it rather than use the brain injury an active memory exercise.

As the mind is the central location of our inner world, these are exercises made and held in the mind. It doesn't need to be firmly remembered from day to day but some items contained will become familiar with practice. There's no reason or need to break out paper and pen. The central tenet is here, trust yourself.

Before thinking positively I realize many people get stuck with negative thoughts. Those should be dealt with as well, and often it's best to deal with those before using the positive thinking exercise.

With negative thoughts, review the list and move through them with purpose. Hold up each one in your mind's bright shining light. Unwrap and unfold the complex, complete thought to the pieces that come together to build the full thought. Review it with honesty, in truth. Pull it apart to reveal the strands of logical fiber woven together to form the negative thought. Each strand builds the whole. Scrape away anything wrong with the thought, strand by strand, make note of unknowns and make a note to discover more about the unknowns, if deemed worthwhile. What often remains are negative thoughts created from ether that are filled in with facts created by you to fill in the holes. As I would later learn a technique from the speech therapist, make sure you have all the facts before responding. But that negative thought can be let go of at this point because it has become largely baseless. Lastly review the negative again and weigh your actual responsibility in that potential action. If the negative still holds weight, it's also possible to spend some time to think of possible remediations but the overall goal in this exercise is to not spend too much time with negatives.

Now it's time to move onto building a list of positives and playing with it some, so retire the list of negatives, clearing the brain for the overarching idea of a list of negatives with an optimistic list of positives. Clear your mind for possibilities to gain strength and grow.

So start then thinking about positives in or about your life. Keep the list in your mind and review it every few minutes, as a quick review. Add to the list, or prune the list. Pause and spend some time really exploring an item or two every once in awhile, but you don't do this with each item in the list.

The list can be manipulated from time to time. It can be ranked in order by some metric, such as most value monetarily or how joyful that thing or moment actually is to you. Throw parameters at the list as well, such as most valuable things between ages 10 - 20.

The list can include traits about you, or things that you've done, or both. It can be a list of fully realized things, like the car you drive or job you've had or really any recognized accomplishment. Similarly actions can be counted, such as favors performed for friends or strangers. Or making someone's day by being kind to them, witnessing them smile.

Do this exercise each day, spending about 15 to 20 good minutes on it, at least, though it's certainly possible to devote more time to it. With practice you'll be able to start the exercise with more limited time available, do it in the time available and either restart or start afresh later.

Count up your blessings! If you have trouble, keep working at it. When you've done it once you can count that ability as a positive afterwards. You'll also start remembering some of those

positives more deeply and quickly. The process will want to spread within you and you may ultimately be unable to stop it from doing so at times.

Its not something to permanently hang around. It's an exercise for your mind also, keeping it up there will cause you to recount it a few times. When you're done then the list doesn't or isn't really supposed to be reviewed on paper, reading it doesn't drive and utilize the mind so much. Some things will be there up front in your mind after a few days anyway, and I think that's where the real effectiveness starts, you start to really know some positives are have happened in your life. Writing it down and reading the list just doesn't imbed itself into your mind. It can become just a chore even.

Chapter 4: Learning the world anew

To say that living with a traumatic brain injury is different says it too lightly. Each one is different and the range of how they can affect any one person is wide, apparently incredibly wide.

The stories here are just a glimpse into the full picture. My full picture. One of the most surprising facets which seems to frustrate many victims is the ever changing nature of the specific inflictions, and how any one infliction can manifest itself at any time, often in previously unknown ways. I feel fairly set currently, I have certain disabilities or behavioral angles so those are what I have to work with. But even life without a traumatic brain injury changes and us with it, so I'll need to stay ready and willing to draw upon resources available to meet the changing challenges.

Emotions can be amped up, or the input from the environment can be muted causing the opposite effect. I hardly felt much sadness prior to the injury, but now it's something to pass through as peacefully as possible. Some of it is frankly selfish, and it's good to realize that it is in those moments, but many moments are filled with just plain sadness. Sometimes it's in losing a part of me and being the hurt one. Sometimes it's just because the sun rose again today.

Sometimes I know how to do things that were familiar. But maddingly there are other tasks I know I used to know how to perform but the steps in the process are unfamiliar completely. I might know how to begin an effort but forget how to do step 3 out of 5, sometimes forgetting there even is a step 3.

High on the frustration list looms gainful employment. For 15 to 20 years I was a project manager mainly for IT development. Before that I was a developer/programmer. I have been in certain online discussion groups by and for those similar or wanting to be a project manager. And the occasional person has a hard time even grasping how to deal with other people working

on their teams. Having a hard time knowing that for most people dealt with, there is a level of care and empathy that skirts the grasp of many of these project manager's minds. They look for magical tools to do the work for them apparently. And the additional understanding is lost that managing is bidirectional, upstream and downstream is often lacking. Then there are those who think becoming a PM straight away is feasible, without working a particular vertical and really knowing the front lines of how things work in the real world of a particular industry. But I'm sitting here realizing that reading or composing an email is a major feat. A simple one I'm likely to fail regularly. While I still feel capable of leading the teams I read about on those boards. I still feel capable in the big picture and certainly working with a team of competent individuals. But I come with a noticeable crutch.

So I'm left with no solid direction. I'm also uncertain of factors in my life. Even bank balances are vast unknown figures. And knowing which debit card to use at the grocery store is a small consistent challenge.

So I now march on, half blind to life and physically with appropriate half vision. It's hard to fully describe the vision impairment I now have. No left peripheral vision exists at all anymore. My vision has a hard cut in function as I move an object to the left in front of my face. My vision just stops as it crosses the middle vertical plane in front of my nose. It does this for both eyes. Early on I would think it was a problem only within the left eye, but if I close either eye, one at a time, I still have the hard cut in my field of vision. I was previously pretty certain that my left eye angled slightly left anyway, giving me a good full range of view. Now it's kind of like my face is pressed up against a sheet of plywood trying to look beyond, but the plywood obscures my range of vision. Another good example is that my vision is tight in range and focused on the same thing. If my left eye DID point leftwards a fraction before the accident then that's now fixed! Or even angles slightly right according to family. I certainly can't view a full face anymore and that is another thing that I've noticed. No matter if it's full sized in real life, or viewed smaller like on a screen, my eyes or my brain can only really see half the face at one time. On top of that, I've found that even looking directly in an eye to be challenging, as my eyes generally want to keep scanning left to right and back.

I did get lucky in lots of ways and am thankful for that. Largely my thinking brain remains. Large chunks of memory are gone but overall the mind is there.

On the same thread of thought I realize I came close to dying, especially in a single car accident that ripped the car in two. If that last step did happen I wouldn't know. I'd just be gone. Being close to death much of my life I've become somewhat comfortable that it is the end state. For us all. I've spent enough time around the subject to be somewhat calm about it but I'd instead call it more acceptance than just "being calm". But I realize if the end comes similarly I'll just not know about it. I realize much of death must be like that. Pain occurs a lot with and in memory, after an incident. So if the mind is gone, even to a different state, there's no pain, certainly no pain that lasts, to dwell upon. Dying will be a non-event to the deceased. Those left behind will be the ones who hurt.

Section 5: Resuming Life

Coming home for real was a long and strange process. I was returning to a place I didn't know due to memory gaps. The gaps certainly go back 5 years but the full range is very much out for debate. Obviously the things in the house were largely familiar. The furniture and pictures and things. But the house itself was completely unfamiliar. One street, a street over from our house, I recognized by name, as that street was the one where a daughter's friend lived, but I had no remembrance of moving to this neighborhood.

I was told we had moved about three years prior. I was told I did a majority of the actual moving even. I also remembered the two previous summer vacations that were of course within that time span, yet I didn't know the house.

I did, however, remember one set of neighbors and their house, including some details about them. They were older, retired, and had two dogs, and a fenced in backyard with overgrown ivy that contained worn pathways in it. The paths represented dog pathways. I even remembered their names and to some extent their personalities. But not our house. Somehow I had them in full memory adjacent to our prior house though the placement of their house next to ours would've been logistically impossible if we were in the old house of ours.

Other things have returned slowly and in bursts. The remembrances are clear in my head but don't line up fully with my memory. For instance the neighbors whose yard the car ended up in I remember they exist, and I've been able to remember some general things about them, largely thanks to their productions in the yard for Halloween and Christmas. The yard becomes filled with science fiction based blow up figures, etc. They really put on quite a display.

But the position of their house in relation to ours is completely different according to my memory. It was laid out differently in relation to ours according to my memory. It sat at a different angle. Now it sits differently than I knew.

The neighbor directly next to us on the other side from the 2 dog couple has been a trip in a unique way.

She passed away not long after my accident. She was older by a good degree than my wife and I. I figured at first that we had little interaction as neighbors and just left each other in peace. But something one day jogged some memories that were tied and bound together in my head. It started with a single word uttered by a house visitor to us one day. The word was Mahjong, the Asian tile game.

The memories and visions related were largely clear, announcing and proving themselves as real, but there was an other world aspect to them, like things from a dream.

I still don't remember her, the person or what she looked like, but I remember interacting with her. I know our conversations were the by-product of me being outside our house but relatively close to hers. That she would come out to talk with me while I worked in our yard. I've also remembered her sitting on her back, covered porch taking in the day while I worked our land. This led to at least two other interactions. Ones I know occurred but don't stick out as clear memories. One where I was invited into her basement and shown an elaborate Mahjong set of marbled figures, and a playing board spread across what I believe was a card table. I had another interaction soon after I assume, when she had friends over to play the game with her. I recall it was largely over my head. That this group played the game seriously. So I most likely just watched and enjoyed the experience and company.

Then I have remembered other things but in a spotty manner. One street over was the site of one or more night parties in a different cul de sac, where I went over at least once, meeting and talking with neighborhood folks. I have largely vague memories but know I was there at least once. I've walked around the outside of the elementary school up the street, I believe with my son, Leo, but the memory is also vague.

Many more examples I could describe but at the bottom is the realization that the world is not like I remember, when I do. These are just points that tell me it's a new world.

On the other side I remembered older friendships, and what different people really meant to me. I had the strong urge to reach out to those who mattered significantly. And I did, sometimes reconnecting with some people for the first time in years.

Section 6: Relearning life (or learning how to be older than 50)

So in my in-person rehab, starting early in the SNF, I was trying to set the record straight on some issues. For instance, by that time I was without a belly feeding tube and was on a "soft and chewy" food regimen. There was one thing that was largely inedible to me but overall the food was decent or better. So I would approach a plate with attention and determination. Not wanting the food to cool off, and just to finish the task at hand. In order to return to the bed and my primary objective, which was to rest on my back.

So I ate with determination. I was on a mission of sorts. I always ate alone in my room so I'm unsure how anyone would find out but apparently the speech therapists knew I ate with a stopwatch figuratively in hand. I was supposed to eat more slowly and with greater focus and intent, they would repeatedly say to me. I was to swallow carefully and slowly, having been at a place where swallowing was difficult to impossible. I would even have short tests given to me where they'd watch me as I would go through a small bag of chips for instance. But what I grew up with was more present on my mind. Eat as fast as possible. Growing up was basically a contest to ingest as much food as you could handle because dinner was largely it in terms of food for the evening. And outside of home, I was a teenager in the Midwest, eating was part speed competition. So that was largely in my mind, and I followed the life rule building a string

of memories through college and living on my own. That string of memories I now followed to make sense of the world. All I remembered at that time was in my bones, and that was to eat somewhat on the speedy side.

In a different aspect of life, I have to learn that I don't always have an answer or the correct answer or I can find it if I only try hard enough. But I had it in my bones to race to an answer, hopefully the winning one. This reflex was built and enforced starting of course with school but reinforced through groups of friends and other experiences. Even many jobs had that as an aspect. Who could have a correct answer first was the yardstick to be measured against.

However in much of my life I feel that in certain ways I end up finding an answer and often a new path after I've started for an original goal. I'll start on the first road heading to a goal. But along the way the goal changes and I take a turn on the road to head in that direction. For casual watchers or figurative passengers in the car it might seem I always intended to get to that second goal that was reached ultimately, when in fact I had begun the journey towards a different goal.

My original goal was to use a new opportunity to reach goal X. But then goal Y presents itself and I'm prepared internally to take it on, or at least try my best. The goal can change for many reasons; discovery about goals including a new one being considered or an existing one being too difficult to reach upon further discovery.

This in some ways stretches back to my childhood and rural years as a growing child. But there are some instances I can point to specifically.

Probably the first one of those was in High School. I had most things many people experienced in High School happening. Outside of dating that is. I had been part of the high school soccer team, at least one year. I was in an Advanced German class for my age and that led to hosting two exchange students followed by a summer in Germany splitting the time abroad with the two families in different parts of the country. Each opportunity opened up for me by doing steps in order one after the other. With no map or legend. The steps led to the next step in order. In fact the steps would reveal themselves in due time, at the right time. Largely I couldn't see step 3 for instance from step 1.

In another case I took a marketing class in High School as well. With the general idea of college coming up, and life following. I spent time thinking about what could fill that time enjoyably while earning a decent enough living. At the time I landed on developing the skills to market things, predominantly goods and services. That marketing class was fun, including outside class materials and sanctioned lessons and activities. I added to it with working for a marketing group in town, though most of what I did was to deliver - on bike - various packages to different businesses and visual artifacts to the local newspapers.

The teacher of the high school marketing class, Mr. Charles DeVore, was a realist, enmeshed in the real world as it existed. In the advanced class for instance, in my Senior year, we largely

tackled a year long project that was individual per student. Meaning we needed to have an idea and search for realistic pricing and approaches to full implementation of that idea. This often meant calling and setting up meetings with dealers of products and services to cover potential scenarios, learning about the offerings and prices, then writing a full report laying out current state, envisioned state, and mapping out what it would take to get there, including time and needs required to achieve the final vision.

But Mr. DeVore knew that teaching us in the advanced class new material would impede our momentum. He taught new material in the earlier classes leading up to advanced, but then eased up for the advanced class and that project. The advanced class was the first class each day and lasted 50 minutes, too short a time to perform much real field research. So he would come into the start of class to take attendance, and often make a mention of how much he loved a certain type of donut at a town donut shop. Then he would leave for the class period, only to re-appear just before the ending class period bell.

So a common activity for the advanced group would be to show up for class, be there for attendance, then wait until Mr. DeVore left the room. Then some of us would rise, look at each other, and leave the room also, a few minutes behind. Often a slightly different crew would leave and someone would offer to drive. After being away from school nearly an hour, the group would stop by Friesz's, the donut shop up the road from the High School. The crew would generally pull together and split the cost of that last, additional request for the teacher. Then the group would return to school and re-enter, go to the room and drop off the extra donut still in the bag.

Well I did do the actual class work. My idea was based on my real life employer which was a local grocery store. My vision was ahead of its time in that the idea then became somewhat popular in following years. It was to use a corner of the store to set up a largely self-serve copy/fax center.

So I invested my own time visiting a local wholesaler of copy machines, learning about capabilities and price. Then mere weeks before the entrees were due, I typed up the paper. The goal by Mr. DeVore but unknown or forgotten by us was all along had been to enter them into a competition in a nationwide club where competition started at the local level. Well I won my district competition and was sent on a trip to the State competition, largely paid for by school, the club, and interested parties. The club was DECA (**Distributive Education Clubs of America**). Well, state competition was hours away at The Lake of the Ozarks. In a resort setting and nice hotel. A number of girls were going also, to compete in personal relation contests, rather than written entrees like mine. The first night before the event they all partied in a single room together while I as a dude waited while passing time in my room on the bed watching TV. Well I won the State competition the next day and soon after went by air to California, and the competition in San Francisco, being there my first time.

I had a few other events happen in life that fell together in ways I can largely ascribe initially to luck. But awareness and good work always played key ingredients. Having skills, knowing what

can be done with those skills and being aware of how they can fit into the world. At times knowing I had a fairly complete skill set for a purpose but was aware of what I needed to learn and work at. Those abilities were the magical ingredients, awareness being chief.

This applies to living out my first dream in adulthood, though I'm wary of using that term. It occurred while I was in college, being interested in photography, moving my darkroom into a friend's screen print shop from my house and pulling together different life connections together to produce merchandise for popular bands. This led me to have access to bands and even got me a job photographing a band for an upcoming album and tour, including photos used on the album cover and for publicity photos used across the nation to announce a supporting tour.

This is the beginning of an era filled with incremental steps that might seem implausible on face value but did link together naturally. My photography prompted me to learn framing. At a certain point that led to a job as a framer at an art supply store, Dick Blick. I had a different job or two after that one but the skill did lead me to working at a shop selling Rock based merchandise including posters. I started as a framer but ended up managing the store. That then led me to an opportunity to build a website for the store, robustly showcasing the Music genre "RockArt" sellable around the world. So I gained experience in website design and development including target marketing to a certain audience/userbase. I really invested myself into the processes surrounding web development, the capabilities available and the limitations.

This led to an opportunity in the relative early days of the Internet being a THING. I was dating a girl originally from near DC who graduated college in town and decided to move back home. So I realized my goals in town, and with music merchandise and photography were dwindling. Even with doing work as a wedding photographer I saw no real route forward. So I prepped in short time, loaded up my dog, Clutie, and drove East from Missouri. We stayed in different rooms at her parents condominium for a couple of months. Then we sought and found an apartment on our own. Somewhere in that time I used that prior experience found in web development to get a job building a website for a large U.S. Federal Agency. Only a couple of months later the girlfriend threw a tantrum one night and ended up leaving me for good, though she left her dog and two cats behind for me to take care of.

So I lived out the full year lease there, and paid rent for a second year, found my next rental which was a sweet house, and gave her dog back during the move, keeping the cats, Goose and the ever "cool" Slick. .

Approximately six months after moving to the house I met a new girl who I hit it off with. That was around 2000. About 4 years later I married her. So that's partially how staying in tune with life can make loose connections link together to form something bigger than the parts that make up the whole.

And it doesn't even stop there. I changed jobs, becoming a developer in a company largely dedicated to visual products and the visual world. I worked there in total a little more than 10 years and had much success. Two stand out efforts I'll mention briefly. One was a multi-year

engagement with a leading Telecom Provider, programming a form that each of their clients would walk away with after starting or changing services with the company, whether they were in a store run by the company or in another store, like Best Buy.

During my time there I shifted into Project Management and was in that role during the Telecom engagement. Later I was selected for a radically different effort. This was for a nationwide seminar series supporting a U.S. Federal Agency. I was basically in charge of everything that took place during seminar production. On stage activities were included, as well as audio visual aspects including speaker recordings and posting those to a website I built supporting the series, down to room temperature and guest satisfaction. During this seminar series I handled multiple high level people, including State Governors as well as then current U.S. President (Obama).

It's worthwhile to tell a quick story of Obama, who I admired then and still. As manager of the seminar series I had already worked with Governors and their security. They each followed the same playbook. I'd meet the security team, show them the behind the scenes layout including the stage and access routes to the stage and behind curtains. So I expected similar with the President. He came to an event we held in Puerto Rico and the island knew he was coming, with posters welcoming him up everywhere, including along the streets. So quite a crowd had discovered he was appearing at our hotel and crowded out front waiting for his arrival. Well his security, The Secret Service was something else. With the large crowd out front anticipated, they recruited Latino music star Marc Anthony to be in a limo in a separate motorcade. Those cars pulled into the circle in front of the hotel and throngs of people expecting the President were excitedly waving signs and screaming. The crowd was initially disappointed when out of the limousine came the artist instead of the President. But they quickly became excited again that it was the artist who had a big hit at the time. Meanwhile the real Presidential motorcade came to the back of the hotel. I met the group inside, barely seeing the President in person. So I expected a similar drill with The Secret Service and proposed walking them through the layout. In a very kind and professional manner they just said "no bother, we'll handle it from here". And that was it.

This isn't meant to show myself off. I realize after talking about my history a bit that it might appear that way. But I wanted to share that good things are possible by ways other than prescribed and formal pathways that are popular in today's culture.

So in short:

- Be open to opportunity
- Be creative
- Work as hard/best as you can on each thing you do

Being aware of utilities available to you, like skills and connections help when chances/opportunities arise. The connections can obviously help the chances to arise. The chances and opportunities are available through awareness. It's rare to put together a life out of PURE chance. That's my educated guess, anyway.

Now before I'm accused of such, I'm not moving through memory lane with rose colored glasses only. I don't remember too much sadness from those days decades ago but any sad points also didn't claw into me deeply. I'm sure the days had anxiety and uncertainty. Especially at the first apartment I rented with the girl I moved with/for. Certainly her leaving me was sad, I remember calling my Mom in distress. But I still had to maintain my car as best as I reasonably could. I still had to make a decently long drive to work and back. Now in the drive I found another route, taking me along black 2 lane blacktop country roads that used a ferry to cross the Potomac River each way. This instead of using large highways including the "beltway" around DC. Heck I found a nice stop on the way home for beverages at home and a sandwich while I waited, run by guys who were into rare music such as bootleg recordings. Something we could talk about.

So I lived life in it's ups and downs and explored the world around me and learned to appreciate what existed around me.

It takes perseverance to maintain a positive attitude but it can be done.

Chapter 7: My new memory recalls my past or "biscuiting" is a thing

One benefit of my time healing is that past memories have been resurfacing. Memories that are clear but I haven't thought about in quite some time. I think it's a result partially of having more time on my hands but also exploring what exactly my memory holds.

So two periods in my life have come back clearly that I certainly haven't thought about in quite some time. Those are the years just after high school and the period during my second professional job.

After high school I went to college. I went to college in my hometown of Columbia, Missouri with a start at the University of Missouri. The Worley house was one of the first places I lived "on my own" even though it was with friends as roommates. That was the hatching ground of quite a few adventures undertaken largely just because. To fill the time, and probably to build memories. One such adventure was spawned from events that I had heard about but never undertaken myself. One was a somewhat regular event for many during high school called "biscuiting". I had heard of it somewhat often in high school. I knew the general mechanics but had not participated previously.

In biscuiting the group starts at the grocery store, buying a few tubes of the refrigerated biscuit dough circles that usually are pulled apart, set across a cookie sheet and baked. Each person gets a couple of tubes for the act to be undertaken.

Then the group would drive not far from the store to an area where the road was a border to a large wooded park. That particular site had been the site used for many biscuiting events in high school. The park surrounded an elementary school that also bordered the road, with the

park extending out behind the school. But the park reached up to the road, with trees alongside the road and drooping over the road, providing good cover to anyone hiding among them.

When everyone was in place and had a tube of uncooked biscuits ready and one in hand and opened the waiting commenced, largely in silence. The road was a rather somewhat quiet road in a nicer family oriented neighborhood. So cars were few and far between and could be heard and spotted from somewhat far away. The activity occurred at night so headlights preceded the car's arrivals from over the hill, that they then crested.

Victims would be determined ahead of their arrival and everyone would prepare for the upcoming attack. As a car drew near, the anticipation would build and the horizon was checked to be clear so that it was known that no other cars would be coming.

As the car became even with the group the attack commenced. Each person came out of refuge of their tree with biscuit in raised hand and advanced a few steps toward the car passing along the street. Each biscuit was launched at the car, making loud noises upon landing. Many biscuits would stick for a short time but all would eventually fall off, leaving no real damage to the car but making what had to be a surprising racket inside the car.

The group would run back to the treeline and go a little further into the woods and wait to see what reaction the driver had. Most would slow immediately but then drive on. Being the Midwest, occasionally the driver, often with passengers, would stop or pull over and resolve to beat some ass. If they knew the area they would pull down a side street also bordering the park, get out and try to find the instigators.

That was when the fun would ramp up. The group knew the woods and had the darkness of night on their side. So those victims ended up getting more grief. The group would spread through the woods safely hidden and see what the response was. It hardly ever varied. The victim would get out of the car, walk a few feet into the woods and yell obscenities and unenforceable threats. In response the members of the group would yell out taunts to the victim, escalating the fury of the moment. And afterwards those moments would be reviewed as a group and deemed as highlights of the night, amongst much laughter.

That group of people didn't do many such activities regularly, I had only the one experience but the group was often creative in ideas to fill the time. Many more activities were had by that general group of people as a way to make the most of an evening. Another one that doesn't require much explanation was changing the structure of the game "capture the flag" to one where kegs of beer replaced the flags. Another park in town was used. The park had two entrances across from each other, each atop a ridge, with an expanse of woods in between, spanning a valley nestled between the bordering ridges. The winner was the group to traverse the valley and woods in between the sides of the park, in night time, get to the opposite ridge top, and steal that team's keg of beer, getting the keg back to their base camp.

I carried the general spirit from my hometown for quite a few years. My second professional job around DC was for a consultancy based near DC but for a contract supporting RJR Tobacco in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. At their headquarters in the downtown Winston-Salem area.

Each week had the same basic configuration. Fly to North Carolina on Monday, pick up a rental car at the airport and drive 30 minutes to Winston-Salem. The operation put us up at a Residence Inn, where each of us had a single room in a larger complex of buildings; each building containing approximately 8 separate rooms, 2 floors to each building.

We worked diligently and to some degree hard but generally when the workday ended we lived life and enjoyed local offerings. Common visits included a nearby go-kart rental racing track, or a local strip club for the guys in our group.

I became friendly with the car rental clerk that gave us cars each week, so at least once she showed me extra favor and gave me a big 4wd SUV instead of a compact car. So I made the most of my good fortune. One day when leaving, an Indian coworker asked for a ride back to the hotel. Little did I know that meant two other Indian coworkers were included. So we all piled into the 4wd. On the way to the hotel was a side road that a couple of bars and music venues sat upon. Across from one establishment was an empty lot covered with newly laid loose gravel. Knowing it was there caused me to have an idea. Without sharing it, I turned down that road and drove to the empty lot of gravel. I turned in and started carving donuts in the gravel, to the surprise of my coworkers. Apparently caught off guard, they resorted to speaking exclamations in a native language in higher tones and louder volume. It was amusing to me. Another time that week I went out after work with a car load of other coworkers. Borrowing an idea I learned from a skateboarding video I headed to a rather empty business office park. There I challenged the well kept landscaping with the strength and agility of the SUV, climbing the high banks of mulch covered planted dividers full of decorative bushes, much to the surprised delight of passengers.

More tame in some ways, the majority of the group would fill in at least one evening a week with a raucous pool volleyball game. We'd leave behind a little blood from newly scarred feet as we went back to our rooms at the end of the evening.

Week's end was my favorite time, in thinking back through. That apartment I rented, my first apartment, was just North of Dulles Airport, where the Friday night plane would land. So each weekend was pretty similar starting with Friday night's flight home. After reaching my car I'd drive back to a business complex near the apartment that was anchored by a grocery store. It also had a small video rental store next to it and a Chinese restaurant next to that. Each week I'd pick up groceries if I needed. Then I'd place an order to go at the Chinese place and go searching for a video to rent. I then took all of that to my apartment and was welcomed by the dogs upon coming home. Eat Chinese and watch the movie. Saturday and Sunday were filled with cleaning laundry, repacking, and taking the dogs across the creek to the neighboring field with something to read. It was a little bliss far from my first home of Bocomo.

So I did have lone experiences where I could live and feel good but I did still get off on reactions by others, whether biscuiting or causing mayhem in a 4wd vehicle. I've grown from that point. Luckily most of that growth was pre-accident so it was in place as I came back, and I'm thankful for having had that growth.

Additionally there are other challenges to work through. One common one comes with walking. I have to scan the area and ground to make sure I don't run into anything, and that I make steps up or down in pavement primarily. But I'm wary about walking off the pavement, either road, sidewalk or trail. What happens in the road is that I end up in the middle of the road. Walking there to ensure I don't fall off the edge of the road.

Chapter 8: More of my past

Everything from my past isn't gold and roses. In many circles it's largely a pile of shit and feathers. So largely I can be called an alcoholic or one in recovery. I say at least I made it through that alive. And that was before my car accident. I finally gave it up about 4 years before the accident. I grew up in the Midwest, in a rural area where drinking was just something to do, it was part of everyday life and a big rite of passage.

I didn't plunge into the depths, either. I was considered by many to be a stand up "nice guy". There was an early rental house previously mentioned I was in called "the Worley house" as it was on Worley street. I moved in with two people fairly deep into drinks and drugs. One was from new money, but a lot of it, and from early on was a heavy drug user and drinker. The other one also came from some money and explored the outer boundaries of drug use and sales. At one time the second person would regularly drive to Mexico, buy pharmaceutical pills, then drive back to Missouri to sell them over time, living off the proceeds.

One time the two of them together went to a hockey game 2 hours away in St. Louis, got in trouble with the law somehow, got rough with the police and ended up in the hospital. Meanwhile I had a date that night who came over for a homemade dinner. I baked some swordfish for dinner. It was a nice, tame evening. For me.

The Worley house was rented from a church. I was deemed the nice guy to the point that I was the main person to talk with the church. On occasion we'd want to play basketball in their indoor gym/court. I would be nominated to be the person to ask if we could play on the court. Lastly, one day at the end of the college semester I had completed an exam and come home. Another person was briefly "camping out" in a fourth bedroom in that he set up a tent in the room and stayed in the tent mostly. He stayed without paying rent and had some mental issues known to us. He was basically hiding from his family for some reason. When I got home from exams I decided to clean out my car. While doing so multiple police cars pulled into the parking lot, the officers got out, and asked if the tent dweller was inside. I went in first but they followed, detaining that person and taking them to psychiatric services at a local hospital. The police ignored the bong in the house. Later when we visited the guy in the hospital, we as

poor college students, ransacked the community kitchen, something of fairly poor taste looking backwards on it.

I would drink some during that time but generally kept it under control. Same for weed.

It's odd to me now, but some of my relationships from that era grew deeper because I knew the countryside so well. The gravel roads, blacktop roads, small villages, and the bank of the Missouri River. I knew them well, having ridden bikes around and occasionally riding the full bus route. Those were good places to drive, talk, listen to music, and smoke pot. I have many quick stories from that area both as an innocent youth and from later teens and early 20's.

I also knew good spots on the river that the Worley street posse could inhabit for a night occasionally. We didn't necessarily camp out, at least in any traditional sense. We'd bring a keg of beer and store it in the river, tied to a fallen or washed up tree, so that the river water kept it cool and it remained accessible, without it being pulled into the river. Bottles of hard liquor were brought, some weed, and occasionally LSD or psychedelic mushrooms.

The drug runner to Mexico, Oliver, went often on country rides. I wasn't then or ever been an abuser of pills, but he often had weed to smoke and sell. He became a roommate later by a couple of years also. However later in life he overdosed on drugs. Probably intentional by my reckoning. He knew his way around drugs and probably knew what he was doing.

So I didn't always use and abuse, but later it grew to that with alcohol. In my recollection it started mainly as others not understanding regular drinking and whether it's a problem or not. So I got grief and at times wanted to "prove" I was okay. But regardless my drinking grew both in regularity and amount over time.

It slowly worked it's way into secretive or somewhat secretive drinking. But I'll pass over much of this right now. For one thing it is it's own subject possibly for a different writing. For a second thing my memory is not fully there and it may be misrepresented.

Certainly it grew over time and through life. However I did manage sobriety a few years before the car crash and I was comfortable and pleased with it.

The soul shift spoken of earlier was largely tied to me moving on. I was at a different place entirely. For the current time and going forward I didn't see any reason to return. Then I had shame, anxiety, and was generally bothered by how big the problem had gotten, however it grew. That's just the honest truth.

Even with the soul shift I realized some people wouldn't believe it for a long time if ever. So I have to own the past and face up to it. Over time I hope and yearn to replace the image of myself held by others.

Chapter 9: Early Life

I would like to tell a little of my background to explain who I am and where I come from so that I am sure not to hold a mystery.

I was born in Columbia, Missouri. A year later, without my consciousness formed yet, my Father passed away fairly young from skin cancer. Melanoma in the early 1970s. He and his wife had one kid already, my brother 6 years older. They had been in the city, in a nice area of the town, but had moved to the country to raise a larger family.

So they ended up buying a sizeable tract of land West of town nearish the area called Midway, Missouri. But also close to a small village called Huntsdale. Just beyond Huntsdale flowed the "mighty" Missouri River. I'm not sure if they initially bought more land, but I remember it as a 15 acre lot. Mostly wooded, with hills in the woods, and valleys, one with a creek, though on the smaller size. There were a few farmers in the surrounding area with cattle but the terrain had hills and woods so there was little large scale vegetable farming. They had a 2 level 4 bedroom house built on top of a small hill for the plot but the plot sat atop a pretty large hill.

By the time I have memory, we had a very large primary vegetable garden, a strawberry garden in the shade of trees, and an asparagus patch situated in the sun close to the main garden. We also had fields cleared of forests but overgrown with grass and weeds. One field many years later was turned into a big raspberry patch of irrigated rows of the fruitful vines. The raspberries were planted with a vision of turning the land into a U-pick small business called Raspberry Ridge. That never came to fruition but the garden supplied much food, especially corn, potatoes, strawberries and green beans. Late summer early evenings were often filled by activities such as snapping buckets of green beans so they could be canned. We'd often do that on the deck and pull the television out there to ease the passage of time.

The driver behind much of this was my Mom. She was the primary driver of much of my youth and early formation.

There's more I could tell about her but she was in short an unquenchable searcher. Having ideas and fighting the world to bring them to fruition.

Not only did we have the land, and she had two boys without spousal help any longer, she went on to turn her grief into a new line of focus. She had been educated and licensed as a psychologist. But with my Dad's passing, some time and I'm sure deep reflection, she then rebranded into primarily a grief counselor. Her mantra on the topic, to share, is to honor those who have passed. Honor them in story, adopting behaviors or phrases, and more. With you doing that, their memory doesn't die. But don't wash over yourself, the one who passed surely wouldn't want that to happen.

Early on in my life she also started a smallish restaurant with two locations. It went by the name of The Kitchen Garden. I grew up with them in operation. The main one was on the lower floor of a relatively new shopping mall to the city, Parkade Plaza. The second being the only eatery at the town's airport, Columbia Regional Airport.

As far as I'm concerned, the restaurants were always in place. Some of my early memories were showing up to the mall in the morning, before the mall got lively. I'd go with Mom downstairs and through back hallways and storage rooms to enter the restaurant through a back door that opened into the kitchen. I'd later stay on the mall side of the restaurant and help open the two large garage doors that opened the restaurant for business. When the doors were closed they showed two picturesque scenes. The area immediately in front of the restaurant was a common meeting area, composed of a bit of construction that formed one large piece that composed sets and benches that, grouped together, formed planter boxes filled with low light plants. The area was a bit picturesque with the restaurant front garage doors closed.

With the doors open the restaurant spread out with booths along the sides and tables in the middle, with a salad bar and ordering line lining the back wall.

On the other side of the seating area from the restaurant was a semi-popular exotic pet store named Noah's Ark, if I'm not mistaken. They specialized in animals such as birds, lizards, and rodents. How I loved the mice! I did finally end up with quite a mouse house and at least one mouse. And we nearly constantly had at least one simple aquarium at home, with a small fish, often a goldfish, nothing too exotic and requiring much care. As it was we were a busy family so no need to add extra burdens!

Also in the basement area of the mall that the restaurant occupied was a religious Bible store, and a hallway that led to other places. Early on and in later years I was enchanted by a hobby store, where I'd often get paintable figurines, and in later years, a hopping arcade, one of the first in the city. Before it was an arcade it stood as just an empty space, with no gate. So we could access the space. Many times my brother would lead the way, often with friends, and go to a small convenience store and get bouncy rubber balls from a coin slot machine. We'd take them downstairs to the empty space, stand near the mall entrance, and hurl them the distance of the space, hitting the back wall and trying to catch them on their return journey. Hours of fun!

I visited the airport location less often but was enchanted by it. It was on the upper, second floor there, and looked out on a section of the runway, where loaded planes crept out to get ready for takeoff. While enchanting, the Mall location was more my speed, though I'm sure that some of my brother's interest and love of planes came originally from the restaurant's airport location. It certainly flourished there.

So that's a glimpse of the environment I was raised in. Fatherless due to cancer's cruel hand, but buoyed by my Mother's energy, ability to repair her heart, and through it all her general hope and excitement for life.

So I lost my Dad at 1 year of age. My Mom, a trained psychologist, shifted to grief counselor/management. Then about 50 years later or around 2021, I had to rush cross country and help her out of this life. And clean up after her; take care of her house, car, license, etc. Then on top of that I nearly lost my life these last day of May, 2024, the day I got my TBI.

I mentioned earlier her short sides, that could be snippy and oftentimes filled with self aggrandizing thoughts. But she also was filled with a non-stop attitude, which was both wonderful and frustrating to those close to her at times.

All of it shines a light for me on today and angling for tomorrow knowing it may not come.

There's more I could tell about her but she was in short an unquenchable searcher. Having ideas and fighting the world to bring them to fruition. Including a more traditional office for her grief counseling business, and a bid and run for US Congress, to represent the 5th Congressional district of Iowa, a state to which she had moved later in life, though she finished her life back in Columbia.

One tidbit from her that I'll leave here is a good bit on how to grieve a loved one who's passed. Honor them. Tell stories about them or include them. Recognize or adopt little things from them. Sayings, little quirks of movement, the list can go on. But don't bury yourself in their memory. By doing so, they'll live on through you, but you'll keep yourself, which if they loved and treasured you as you them, they'd want to see you shine through. That one is from her, or Oma, as she preferred being called after we had kids.

I'll say this here as a segue into the next chapter. I'm far from my youth. But I have discovered much of it hangs with me and continues to be a base that helps to shape who I am. I was 51 when my accident happened and 52 upon regaining consciousness. I've had a few mannerisms corrected by therapists repeatedly. Such as to eat more slowly, as described previously. I was raised in a hungry household with a brother 6 years older. Meals were a race in some ways. You either got seconds or you lost out. Then followed college and early single life. Quick eating was part of the game. An attribute to be proud of and to live by.

So early on I reframed the instructions and my overall goal. These techniques weren't necessary only because I had a brain injury. These were lessons on how to be over 50! To leave the past behind in memory and move forward in a brand new life.

Chapter 10: The Caregivers Dilemma

So with my accident my wife had to jump in pretty immediately and without warning. I, her husband, was badly hurt. Then on top of that I was active in the household to a notable degree. Before the accident I did the majority of grocery shopping and cooked most meals, especially dinners. I believe I helped make school lunches for our three kids, but certainly I was major in taking them to school and picking them up, including our oldest daughter who was

taking a small load at a community college a slight distance away. I would usually just wait in the parking lot while her class went on. During that period I was unemployed, but before that I had a fairly illustrious career. On the home front I was active in discussion and decision making. And raising our kids. All of my contributions were cut short very quickly. Without notice.

And through it all I must say that my wife's done a wonderful job overall. She's kept the house "running" and kept up. I'm sure there was early "slippage" but I'd be more surprised if there wasn't. 3 kids in their teens, with friends, school, and other activities, plus her full-time job, and all of a sudden she gets the full load. Plus she was undoubtedly worried about her husband. The worry and the decision making. She navigated dealing with the insurance industry and the healthcare industry. And by my measurements, she did quite well. She had me in a hospital first, for slightly longer than a month, then had me transferred to a second facility, a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF). 7 weeks total with me being awake but not really conscious. Preceded by a short time fully unconscious, some time in a coma. That 7 weeks of appearing conscious spans both facilities and the transportation between the two. So with that list of incredible deeds done, and now with my mind largely intact, I now worry for her.

I try to reduce her overall load. I've taken over laundry for the most part. Collecting it around the house including the kids rooms, taking it slowly downstairs which is a little high on my list of difficulties due to vision and some motor control issues. Washing and switching loads and drying each load, then bringing them back up carefully, load by load. Then somewhat ironically the hardest part comes for me, which is folding it and laying each piece out accordingly. Where my wife can fold them neatly and stack clothes in piles associated with the person, mine are slightly less neat and spread all over at least one couch because I can't keep straight what belongs to whom, except for a few pieces.

I'm slowly getting the knowledge back or are learning anew what belongs to whom, how to fold more neatly, and where some clothes, etc. are kept. The biggest change is working with towels. I've folded them since childhood. For instance full size towels are folded longways in thirds and then in thirds the other way. For some reason this ability eludes me fully.

But I try. That and other things. Leaf blowing was generally okay, but mowing the leaves proved more challenging. The main challenge again came due to vision issues. I couldn't tell very easily what path I had already taken, so didn't quite know the next path to take.

So it goes but I've digressed to my point of view largely, and this chapter at least is mainly devoted to my primary caregiver, my wife. So some days, though not overly common, end up with her a tired person haven again taken lead in rounding up most everything for everyone. I'll sometimes use that situation to drive my point in letting me take over a few more things. Though I know there are unknowns in the picture. Can I handle a boiling pot of water? Can I keep track of each thing going on on the stove? Etcetera, Etcetera.

I did get a wished for gift for Christmas, which is a cart on wheels that will allow me to walk the relatively short distance to the grocery store, shop, and bring back a small load. So we've been

practicing the various parts of the big picture, breaking it down to shopping, paying, and walking to and from the store. I did finally do a whole trip by myself in early February so I have that accomplishment.

My native response to a question posed by someone in the household is from a desire to be listened to and heard. Like I'm Mr. Know-it-all. My assumption internally is to think I have an answer and that it's the right answer. Well that's less the case now than it might have been. So frustration builds. And quickly. Some say that's a side effect of brain injury. I've heard for a long time that it comes from age. Of course I have a double whammy. But certainly from the injury, as more than one therapist has focused on me to improve in certain ways involving patience and understanding the larger picture. Of course my wife concurs. Then I see a psychologist who echoes similar statements. So all in all I am often reminded by internal voices to bide my time and quiet my voice.

The spoken voice often rises in volume and tone without me realizing it, and I'm far less in control of it. So we go around on a similar path in a similar tone. But at least I'm reminded internally of my debt to her.

I have heard of other accounts with the TBI victims going out of bounds. With the nature of TBI's being all over the map I can see it happening. Thankfully that's not my/our case. Caregivers should be thanked deeply for the lengths they can go to. My proving ground is coming up some day, to return the favors of gentleness and patience. Hopefully I'll succeed.

I also have a definite touch of "disability guilt" as I've called it. Thinking I'm not doing enough, hearing tiredness in a caregiver and wishing it were different. But all I can do is wake each morning and make the day count in the ways I can. Disability frustration is a closely related phenomenon, the main difference is the focus of the feeling. Outward is often guilt but can be frustration. Frustration is mainly directed inward, at shortcomings of self.

Chapter 11: The new frontier

So I settle in with many balls in the air at this time. I'm doing better by the day in some ways, some surprising, others not. I'm getting more used to the condition though some things are surprises for sure. For instance I'm largely an open book. I cannot tell a lie. This may come back to some degree but it'll probably be evident to some extent whenever I take that route. I also used to be expressive. When I am now it's a surprise to at least my wife.

The healthy inner parts are still there and may be more pronounced, such as love, empathy and care of family and friends. Each person individually, especially with family, gets specialized attention. I make efforts to reach out individually to each one apparently a little more than I believe I did before. The kids are all teenagers or early 20's so I feel I understand them better 1-1 and that that's how I think they'd prefer to be engaged. Though I still get on the "I'm the

parent“ train, wondering in astonishment why my word isn't taken at face value and also taken to heart.

But I think the brain injury is riling up the emotional layer of my being. I can still keep a good amount under control, but it wells up unexpectedly at times. So the kids can bother me at times. They should know and follow the plan I maintain, floating and adjusting in my head. I think I'm in a clockwork type of machine much of the time. Things should be coordinated and occur on time and based on conditions and everyone should be reading from the same script or playbook. Of course that's not how people operate and a few different people all together in the same living space definitely don't have that occurring. So I get frustrated easily and it comes out acidically at times. I have pinpointed that the feeling grows in the evening after dinner, waiting for the day to end. So I've created that time as my time alone with the downstairs tv and couch to just chill. I'm glad to have figured that out. I just want some “me” time then, so get easily annoyed at times by them especially. The kids can be the focus of ire because my wife, the super trooper, often goes to bed early to get in a little more well deserved rest.

Why does this person do X? Why does that person not do Y? Why did Z have to happen here instead of there? And for some reason it all bangs on my head, probably similar to being in a metal headpiece. At times when it wells up I feel I should point the kids in the right directions, with the right advice, but I also tend to get overwhelmed to a point I wonder if they'll ever make it out on their own. And when?

Then I know my memory doesn't serve me well but I feel at times that that is used against me. Like whenever did I say that Z would happen if Y occurred? And there are plenty of times I swear I said something but probably just thought it. Memory and false occurrences held in mind only are bizarre these days.

Sometimes I'm even prone to hearing things that later evidence proves was not the case, such as invented utterances from a family member, who sometimes isn't around.

So I can learn to navigate certain situations differently, anew, but is that mainly due to TBI or age or does it matter? Given that question my mind says it doesn't matter but I of course want to know if it's due to the accident or age. And ultimately I don't want to learn anew things that I felt used to be under control. If a thing worked for the majority of 50 years when and why does it start failing? And that's probably the key term. Failing. I've reached a point of some failure. And it's not an odd occurrence but more regular. It's frightening. It's different. And it's occurring at a time in life where I feel I should largely be in control with hard life challenges behind me. But on the realistic side, I'm heading into an age that was bound to spring anew with things including limitations and finding new ways to do common tasks.

It's like toying with the spear of Destiny.

And to look on the positive side, at 52 I do need to recalibrate and learn or relearn things in the light of being somewhat older, so in ways the accident occurred at a good time in the trajectory of life.

For instance my memory used to be incredibly strong and reliable. If one evening I thought about something at work that I needed to find out about from a certain person, that was it! The next day when I saw that person both the question and the reason behind it would flood back. Now I absolutely would need a pen and paper, but at 52, that need would probably be starting soon anyway.

A few lessons have been passed to me and have proven their worth. Make sure I have all the facts about a situation, don't be afraid to ask questions. Additionally, instead of giving orders or making statements, put them into a question format, such as "do you mind if I...?" or "would you like me to...?" or "Can I do...?"

One last technique is an amalgamation of things taught to me by my psychologist Mother and practiced and tuned over time, with notable help from my wife. Learn the feelings of emotions rising. There is a physical component nearly always. How do those upwellings present themselves early. Often it takes practice to identify and learn the feelings. It's possible and helpful to reason through them but learning to recognize the upwellings can be a signal to internally call out the rising feeling. You're allowed to catch it in the act, calling out internally "I see you feeling of..." "you can't sneak up on me" and then learn to quell it at least temporarily and focus on an uplifting feeling instead. Just recognizing the feeling well up is often enough. Biofeedback can help monitor the effectiveness of such practice and work.

Chapter 12: The Accident Itself

I have zero memory of the accident. Or anytime soon before it. When I regained consciousness I had no memory of it at all. But I had my "wits" and long term knowledge, known ways of living. I knew myself, no re-introduction needed, but I was obviously injured and was in a care facility. Looking around that's about all I could tell. No knowledge of how I got there but aware enough to deduce that I was the patient, so I could figure out something had happened.

Through time, starting at the SNF, I was told various parts, either things that took place prior, or things the police investigators relayed to my wife then to me. I know a few things that occurred leading up to the accident but those memories are spotty and I feel slightly unreliable at best. And those things are well in advance of the accident, nothing from the day at all. Though a few things are clear to me, including my general behavior and what might be called general approaches and rules of living. When things are mentioned I can say "that sounds about right" or can identify they're likely wrong.

To the accident itself specifically, it was the last day of May, 2024. I was returning home, but had stopped for gas before driving the final stretch. I was less than a mile from home. Somewhere along the way between the gas station and home I called my daughter Lily to say I was free to come get her from school, as I was coordinating her pick-up after her school day. She was still studying some so didn't need me quite yet.

I got in the car to start the final stretch home. This meant crossing a slightly large road, then going up a slight hill and past an elementary school on the left. I passed the school and reached a stop sign. I took a right turn which was my final street before reaching the bottom of a slight hill and taking a right into the court our house was on, and into the driveway, a route where one barely reaches a speed of 25 mph.

But as investigators pieced together, I must've had a seizure while driving that last stretch, losing all control of my body and actions. Most likely my right leg straightened in tension and pushed down hard on the gas pedal. I apparently reached 65 mph by the final point of impact. The car hit at least one tree to the left of the road and bounced back on a pseudo path forward. The car continued racing down the street and slight hill. Where I would've turned into the circular court the house was on the car hit a curb straight on. At that point the car launched into the air somewhat and landed into a stand of trees, coming to rest largely in two pieces, on the lawn edge of a neighbors house. It was largely in sight of my omnipresent son through his window. He was 13 at the time and needed to alert the others.

It was my fourth seizure, first while driving. I rarely had them. My first was after age 30, while in Puerto Rico. I was traveling for work. My coworkers and I had flown down in one plane, got our luggage and traveled to the hotel. We split up to go to our separate rooms and agreed to meet at one specific room to start enjoying the island together. By the time I got to the meet up room I had a strong, strange feeling, what I believe is named an "aura". Once inside the room there was a little greeting and chit chat but before too long my vision of the world dwindled and I fell over. That seizure I largely remember including spasms on the floor.

The second occurred most unfortunately at a public indoor pool area while my kids were in the pool and while I was near a wall explaining something to my Mom. I remember parts of each of those seizures but they're spotty. I don't yet have any memory of the third seizure.

So back to the accident, I was close to home but I was not in good shape overall. The car apparently did a decent job in protecting me. I have/had no real leg damage. But my head, face, and brain sustained damage. My left arm was damaged, being much like a wet noodle upon regaining consciousness but now it has largely restrengthened, with a little blood flow issue.

Section 13: Clear communication

The area of communication after the accident was a long road for me in many ways. Technically I went from nothing to a long stage of Aphasia to Dysarthria. Memory issues played sneaky tricks for awhile, and still do to a lesser extent. They're still liable to rise up unexpectedly but I both have that happen less often and also cope with that potential of memory gaps much better in operating through life. I not only have gaps but I can misconstrue things and jump to assumption as well as create things put of thin air, including hearing vocal utterances that aren't actually there, and often can be proven, such as hearing someone who isn't even in the same area as I am.

I've largely gotten around the fact I can come up with things including think are real memories by asking if something happen. Such as "did you tell me x?" or similar.

I continue therapies and sessions with a psychologist and am working on the occurrences, usually relying on tools I never needed before, like pen and paper. Don't laugh - my memory used to be extremely reliable. But I do live largely in some uncertainty of what has happened or been told to me in actuality or if I came up with it even if whatever is in my mind seems very real.

I had the injury to overcome but I also now had age, including the ages of my now teenage kids with a 20 year old. Each thing presents a challenge at times. I also had a past that followed me but I didn't know or remember the saddest parts anymore. I had apparently been somewhat crass and demanding. Not overly like an ass chump but not a nice guy all the time.

I figure that overall it - the crash - happened at a decent time in my life. I've been so reliant on my brain and memory to store and retrieve information. Surely at this age I only had limited time before that started to fray, so it is like learning how to be over 50!

But I learned lessons along the way in my early healing process. From therapists, the psychologist, my wife, my kids, and through experience and thought.

Much of this came from explaining difficulties that would occur on occasion but frequently enough, largely between my wife and I.

One example that was early on occurred late one evening. She was laying on another couch on a Friday night and remarked about how tired she was. I had to still prove capabilities around the house. But I heard her and understood her tiredness at the end of a week full of duties at home, work, and running errands plus the kids and their needs. I wanted to help. Help in two ways. Give her allowance and prodding to go to bed to sleep. And help with the last task that was predominantly on her - dividing medicine for the kids and giving them appropriately to each kid. I knew that I couldn't divide the medicine, both from reading labels, but also knowing what each kid needed, and the medicines were on her side of the bed to boot. So I encouraged her to go to bed. On each resistant statement from her I countered back for her to divide the medicines by medicine cup and lay them out with name tags or by birth order. Well that blew up

and blew back in my face. So much so that it stuck with me through the night and was there on my mind in the morning. So it blew up again. It put a stain on the weekend for her and me.

So I brought up the general idea to a speech therapist I had at the time and learned the following suggestions in general.

- 1) Make sure I have all the facts. In this scenario I had that pretty settled. But in general, understand the issue and if working by assumption, ask to clarify, even tossing out the assumption to the other person. They can verify or clarify the assumption.
- 2) Acknowledge verbally things as you see them. This ensures you both are working off the same page. It shows what is known, how they're understood - which may sometimes be off. This would largely be a big picture of the situation.
- 3) Acknowledge shortcomings. We usually have some. This deepens the understandings across both parties and deepens the connection through showing shortcomings.
- 4) Put claims and statements of action in question format. This over declarations. Instead of saying something like "go to bed", I should have *asked if she could divide up the medicine in cups so I could deliver the medicines.

In life I generally find this approach to give me back rewards in what I'm seeking. Take in the full picture, ensuring as much of the situation is understood. Then offer suggestions or actions but in a non-threatening manner. Ensuring and demonstrating honesty along the way. This should at least open up the ground for better discussion by revealing yourself and showing a commitment to openness and honesty.

Chapter 14: Seizing opportunity

So now I wait. Saved from a closeness with death or even more terrible injury than what I did sustain. With definite injury but with my mind largely intact and working, I wait for the next chapter in life. It's a situation familiar to me but time is still in front of me. Slowly passing time, which undoubtedly will be of value one day. Meanwhile I'm anxious to find the next step in front of me.

I was brought up around the idea of seizing opportunities. My grandparents on both sides were in agriculture to differing degrees but brought up by that life. Seizing opportunity is the name of that game, Agriculture. That's whether the agriculture is plant or animal based. It's always time to do something on the farm, from harvesting corn to castrating bulls.

Meanwhile I consistently find people asking for secrets to happiness or wealth in online public forums. A long tradition of such activity precedes the Internet. Not advice for specific issues, just blanket appeals for some wonder condition in life. The general practice and necessary

supporting attitude just smacks me as bad form and short sighted idiocy. Where's the spark to draw from within using talents already in shape to apply to the larger world? And where's the curiosity about and awareness of the world to know how those skills can be applied?

Earlier in life I was able to use this approach in real life. As a photographer in my 20's, with a deep passion for music I managed to find a way to marry those interests and capabilities. I stumbled into the first related foray, but I was aware of the possibility. I didn't get hung up on it before or after but realized when the opportunity was there.

It began simply by working the front of house at a local bakery/cafe in Bocomo (Boone County Missouri). The only other person I remember working about the same position was a girl whose real name I now forget. Everyone else was near the top of their field and well trained for what they did. Management, cooking, and definitely baking.

I was excited and into photography and wanted to share some of my work to the greater world, not knowing what would become of it. So I believe that the bakery became one place where I hung and showed my images. I hoped that at best I would sell an image or two occasionally, earning a few extra dollars here and there.

To keep a story on the shorter side, it turned out that the coworker doing basically the same job as I dated a minor legend from the indie punk world. He was Bill from All, and formerly with The Descendants. They were putting out a new record soon and looking for photographers. I said I was available and interested and the specifics were agreed upon through the third party person who was my coworker and his girlfriend. It turned out that the best time in general to do a shoot aligned with me moving houses. An unfortunate time for me, but I was determined and made the best of the opportunity and situation.

This resulted in a shoot that occurred while renting a U-Haul truck used for moving my furniture. We started with a plain shoot in my basement with them in seats, back to the wall a few feet behind them. The most exciting aspect of that part of the shoot turned out to be when an older roommate of mine came complaining to me about taking the clothes washer with me. He was plain out of luck as I had (somehow) already moved the washer up the stairs and into the truck. I had bought the darn thing anyway and before he even moved in. So what a start to a big world I was only entering. My roommate bitching at me in front of everyone over a non-issue.

I stepped the group through the rest of the shoot comprised of two different locations. First we drove, me leading in the U-Haul, to a pasture belonging to a friend's Dad. The creek at the bottom of the field had already been used for a partially nude shot for another friend's band named Sex In Taboo Creek. I rarely did nude photography unless I went in with an idea that called for it. Later in life I realized that I probably sidestepped many opportunities for sex or such action but I walked through life high minded, living for and through ideals. I was often asked by girls if I needed someone to pose naked for photography. In my mind the art came first so unless I had a shoot in mind that needed nudity I wasn't going to do it.

So in the field that day I played a game with the band and my furniture, challenging them to stack the furniture in such a way to reach as high to the sky as possible. I photographed the pile's creation, the band building the pile and then different band members in physical relation to the pile. Such as the drummer sitting in the dirt looking at the pile, while white summer clouds built up in the background. I actually added the clouds on the print while in the darkroom.

We finished the shoot at a second location on the edge of the large university in town. I had found an unlocked grate cover for a rather large hole in the underground cased in cement.

I continued with my artistic photography but when a friend moved his screen printing shop to a bigger place, I ended up moving my darkroom into a small room in the shop. He had connections with the owner of a sizeable concert hall up the street. In time he did occasional work for the club. He also used some of my photography for occasional pieces. A picture I took of my Grandmother weeding was used as a pass placard to give backstage access at a music festival, for instance. I ended up switching jobs to work at the screenprint shop. Somewhere around that time I talked with the club owner and was allowed to be the semi official house photographer. Primarily this gave me greater access to the artists, allowing me direct access to them starting before their shows, and allowed me to go on or around the stage to photograph the performance. I took it on myself with each artist to show up mid-afternoon to meet them and gain info on how comfortable they were in me photographing their show and possibly off stage scenes - nothing overly formal but something so I wasn't a surprise right before they performed. This sometimes built relationships with the artists, but only really in special occasions. A good example is getting close to Wilco at one time, early in the bands formation. By this point my darkroom stayed at the screenprint shop but I changed my job to be a framer up the street, primarily working with concert posters that were also screenprints. They were high quality and limited edition, often for national acts and often somewhat pricey. So my instincts were of keeping my attention open to possibilities. Here was a viable screenprint operation, a company that bought and sold screenprinted posters, and a venue that hosted largish artists. I took the various parts, talked with each business owner, and created an opportunity each party could benefit from. So returning to Wilco, one of my close moments to the band came then. I had framed a Wilco screenprint of a show elsewhere and then seeing they were coming to town displayed it prominently. Probably in the front window. At any rate the print had been seen by the band's leader, Jeff Tweedy. Probably from a late night after-show walk around town I joined him on. His parents had come to the show and after the show Jeff was saying good night to them in front of the club. His Mom saw me and was told I had framed the print. She raised her voice imploring me she wanted a similar print and frame job. Jeff to his credit and not knowing me too much calmed his Mom down swearing to her that I would get the job done. And it was shipped to her within days. I'm sure it's possibly now in his ownership, even.

But moments like that is not where it ends. Again the main point is to be aware of potentials. Again I was primarily working for the art/frame shop. It was the dawn of the Internet. The owners of the shop where I framed posters got a good URL. They then enlisted me to build the site out. It in general was a small group project to start. One owner and others supplied custom

art to be used and laid out the vision and their goals for the site. My job was to build the site. So I learned how to program the site, including e-commerce and contact methods.

Around that time I noticed a slowdown of advancement opportunities with the photography in general and specifically with band photos or my creative work. I had been living a life still filled with entertainment personalities and business opportunities but I was getting slightly older (mid 20's) and having trouble taking it to the next step, where I'd be able to own a house or afford a family, on went the list. I had been renting the bottom floor of a house on a college street, behind fraternities and between campus and a nature area. In that house I had two friends who rented the upstairs. One cool aspect of the house was a secret door between our living areas. On my side it was the back wall of a closet but on their side it was within a bookshelf along the entryway wall.

In that house I also ended up with an iguana found in the yard by one of the guys upstairs, Sammy. It was a place that carries many stories, such as selling a notable amount of weed to a member of Parliament-Funkadelic when they played at the university. I lived in quite a spot and shared it for quite a few months with my girlfriend at the time, along with her dog and mine. But she graduated college and decided to return to her home in the DC area. So seeing the opportunities around me dry up and therefore my future at large I ended up loading my car with clothes and my dog and heading out across country. It was deliberate but I didn't agonize over the decision.

I pulled into Reston, VA two days later and stayed with her parents, each of us in a separate room where mine was an office with a couch I slept on. The area was starting to really grow in terms of jobs related to the growing Internet. So I was aware of my skills and small portfolio, and searched for jobs. I ended up landing a job I couldn't have fathomed mere weeks prior. It was a small drive to Maryland but paid more than I really ever expected to be paid.

Within weeks she and I determined we needed more space and could afford it. So we ended up renting an apartment in my name a few miles away and set out to enjoy this new life.

Within a couple of months she decided to leave me which pained me but I had signed a lease in my name, and had a job that could support me so I stayed. Alarmingly she left her dog behind, with me, at the apartment. I also took care of her cats. Eventually the dog went back to her but the cats stayed with me. So in short time I went from a sort of high life in Missouri to a relatively better though more mainstream life in Virginia.

Weekends became the prime time to take the dogs across a creek bordering the apartment complex property and into a field. I often took something to read while they explored without leash, often enough scaring up a few deer to chase.

I think I only stayed there two years though I know I switched jobs while at that apartment. I went from working a decent drive from the apartment to flying every week to North Carolina to work as a consultant for Big Tobacco. Either way at some point I went to a music show near

DC to see Mick Taylor and ended up meeting someone who I still call a friend, though unfortunately he died while writing this book. At any rate, around the time the apartment lease was ending he helped me with an introduction to two people in Arlington, VA about to buy their own house and I ended up renting their current place. It was a very cute smaller house next to a church in a good, prominent location. The Columbia Pike house. So I went from one Columbia to another in short time. I remain friends with the two previous renters as well.

After settling in a few months a year passed and I was interested in finding companionship. I ended up meeting a girl for a date night. She came nearish my house to meet me at a pool hall/bar. We found the environment not to our liking and relocated to a coffee shop. It was a cold night in December or so. The date had gone well but it was basically my first date where I had just met the person, so it was a new experience for me. I clearly remember at the end of the date she walked with me to my car as opposed to the opposite. It was cold and breezy. I had high hopes because I had really enjoyed myself. So outside standing near the driver's side of my car I debated a hug or kiss. I was left without either. Driving home that night I was pretty sure I would not see her again. But we did stay in touch and continued dating, with me making the trip up her way a number of times. In short, we ended up getting married 4 years later and still celebrate being together through life today.

Chapter 15: Settling in

Currently I'm around 9 months in from my accident. I'm starting to be trusted to do more around the house and I actively try to take care of things, though some of that still falls victim to memory gaps at times and a little bit of logical thinking - or illogical being a more apropos term.

It's a far cry from where I was. I regained full consciousness one morning in the SNF, after being in what I'd call a dream state for approximately 7 weeks. A friend was visiting me. Somehow and for some reason I had gotten out of bed and had moved towards him, but was on the floor propped up by some kind of furniture where I regained consciousness.

Justin, who was visiting, was often a source of fun and merriment in life. I don't know if he had told jokes or what but I came to consciousness sitting on the floor in a full out laughing fit, leaning against a floor stool or cushion. He was moving around in an odd way as far as I remember. My wife bets that he was trying to signal the nursing staff in the hallway, but to me he was jokingly dancing around. Either way my laughter finally came to an end and he left. So I was left on my own.

I had no idea where I was or why. The surrounding made it clear to be a Healthcare facility of some sort but I didn't know why I was there. My clothing indicated I was a or the patient. This was my first time being conscious to my recollection. At that point I still had a phone in my room and I saw it. Nearby on the wall was a bit of paper with handwriting containing my wife's name which I knew, and her telephone number which I didn't know by memory at that point. So I called. I think the first call probably wasn't answered and went to voicemail. I quickly hung up

and dialed again. One of those times she did pick up, with me full of questions. She took a bit of time to explain at a high level where I was, and added that she was with one of our daughters visiting a college campus, and couldn't talk further. Well my desperation trumped her statement so upon her hanging up I re-dialed and re-dialed. She would occasionally pick up but either give me a brief message or hung up right away. Desperate I kept calling back. A total of 50 times within minutes! It was that event that triggered her to later call the facility at which time I lost my phone completely. They removed it. Many days and nights I would ask for it to be replaced to no avail the entire time. Unbeknownst to me at the time was that the phone cord was considered to be a tool that could be used for attempted suicide.

I pieced together the basics and was likely soothed somewhat by medication. I knew me, no re-introduction needed there, even though my memory was missing a lot. So the day continued. I believe being visited that afternoon from someone I knew from church who turned out to be a neighbor at the house we lived in, but I had no idea of either of those factoids. He either visited that day or the following day, with a nice Bible passage I now don't remember.

I realized I had had a deep dark veil lifted. Somehow I pieced together that my aim was to return to regular life whatever that meant and that that would require proving that I was different in awareness than whatever state I had emerged from.

So in the next couple of visits by my wife and often kids I set out to share information proving that I could remember from day to day.

I've now been home a good number of months. But I'm still settling in to some degree. I feel accomplished in some ways but the home front has MANY moving parts. Then there's the three kids. Moving parts each on their own.

So I get rattled sometimes for little reason or no real one that's sizeable in any way. And it's different than raw energy. For instance I was woken today, a Sunday, a bit later than usual in a way I didn't really like, by being signaled to roll over. It is a rather small matter in the grand scheme of things.

So I got out of bed quickly and dressed soon after. Getting dressed consists usually of pull up pants. I then launched into a small flurry of activities. Taking recycling out, bringing in soda 12 packs, turning on the oven and baking croissants for my son, and more.

But later I felt unease cross over me and settle in. I don't explicitly know why or what triggered the feeling. There are some big unknowns still and those come to mind here and there, and despite my early energy it's Sunday so a day where little can actually be accomplished.

I want to do things. Not just taking out compostables or anything like that. Moving kids forward is a little more satisfying but it's still not the meal ticket. On the weekends, job search related email and phone activities are blessedly reduced but that's not a real reason to be jazzed.

But I eased some into the afternoon. Took a decent walk with my wife and son. Of course I had more gripes but I could move those to the side and choose to focus on what I found most valuable.

Chapter 16: Further exploring the negatives

I've realized, through psychological therapy and comments from my wife, that I didn't previously count as many negative leaning thoughts as possible. And I didn't remember all of my previous shortcomings in life, either. I remembered I had a drinking problem but I didn't remember its full impact on the family. After settling in at home, I was often breaking out a ruler mentally to measure my deeds and actions against either other people or against my own self, usually my former self. The act of simply breaking out the measurement ruler in my mind reduces my confidence by opening me up primed and ready for negative doubtful thoughts. Why break out the ruler if there's nothing to measure?

My wife would come home and I felt I could be measured by the things I had accomplished. I was forgetting and overlooking our long and intact marriage, especially the lengths she had gone to in the time following my accident. And before that through alcohol addiction.

I also wanted to make sure I was heard, and such was the case often. It started with my newly flattened voice. I wasn't sure I was heard, or chalked it up to people tuning out that funky voice as odd as it was. Internally I was insistent that I be heard, whether it was a warning, advice or a good story.

What I was guided through was finding out what happened internally and when it happened within the overall process. It happened as quickly as the first utterance was issued and seconds passed.

I sometimes felt just unheard and at worst ignored on purpose. If no one knew how the laundry got done I wouldn't get the credit, and I imagined that I would instead get credit for resting and watching TV. I was stuck in a place trying to prove my worthiness.

I was reminded of a poster my Mom had on the wall as I grew up, when the psychologist I was seeing reminded me of the phrase that "God doesn't make junk". So if I didn't tell my family when I felt they needed to know about a specific issue and it wasn't about a pending emergency I could relax and not worry if the intended parties had heard it. My wife also reminded me about our teenage selves and hearing warnings and other verbal cues from parents. Those were very deflating at those times often in memory, even causing "reverse" action. The opposite of the cue to behave or do an action commanded by my Mom.

So now I'm "charged" with taking these as lessons to unseat the deeply held beliefs and related actions. Once I start questioning myself when I verbally say something or break out the

measuring tape in my head I need to catch myself and feel the internal gears working. If I feel anxiety I have the opportunity to say I'm okay to myself. If I need, I can go to a separate space. God doesn't make junk.

But as investigations go on through life I realize I now play with a different deck of cards. I write in ways that are new to me even during a re-read shortly after I write. I'll write something and additional tidbits are in my head but not written. So on my re-read it's tighter writing, more truncated, and not what I thought I had written.

And my dreams. They're vivid! I've met Presidents in them, been in a James Bond movie, and took part in foreign espionage and murder of specific country leaders.

But I go on, absorbing the tighter range that spawns negative emotions, and so I attune myself more towards the potential and to the crack in the door into which the lyrics use to enter my consciousness.

Chapter 17: Truly living in a new world

So if you've read this far, there are chances you're affected by a Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI. If you are a caregiver you are extra blessed in your being. Caregivers ROCK!!! If you are the one with a TBI you live the blessing of each day you awake.

Live in awareness above the injury. A good place for many to learn is how various emotions actually feel manifested in the body. The full cycle is best but the most important thing to handling many emotions are knowing and recognizing feelings of an emotion building. In the TBI community I often hear of emotions getting out of control easily, and even without such an injury it occurs with regularity.

I'm lucky that I don't have a huge problem with them getting out of control. It happens and happened before the accident too. Though I admit I only practiced this type of exercise occasionally before the accident. I learned the basics as I grew up with a psychologist mother.

So the hardest part is really the "beginning" step for lack of a better term. Each emotion tends to manifest itself in our physical bodies in some manner. It won't necessarily be the heart beating faster, though something like that can occur as well. The feeling is more general and not pronounced, invading and making sure it's presence is made known. It's a spirit in ways, a sense generated in the body, on the physical plane, often along the spine if being direct, though be open to other sensations and locations as they may occur.

Chapter 18: The wreck in detail

So there's an angle to the wreck that hasn't been brought up but is important to relay. The seizure that led to the wreck itself may have been one of a series, that occasionally happened about every 8 years or so. The one that started the series happened in Puerto Rico. There was one at a public indoor pool, and I'm told of a third that escapes my memory. Then the one that led to my car accident and resulting TBI.

It is fairly known that I was getting gas before the accident. At a gas station near the house. It was the afternoon of the last day of May, 2024. I didn't have far to get home from the gas station.

What has been skipped was that even though I was sober from alcohol for about 5 years, and my Marijuana usage had drastically reduced, I had been somehow reminded of the short intoxicating effects caused by "huffing" canned air canisters. I don't know how or when I remembered they could do so, but holding a can upright and inhaling the very top bit of the can produced a powerful high that only lasted seconds but was very strong. I didn't do this behavior for very long. And I hadn't done it since very occasionally in my teens. Less than a year all told at the most. Back then in my teens I learned a similar trick while working at a grocery store - that whipped cream cans could deliver a similar high. It wasn't an everyday thing. I took big breaks as well. If I did the practice before a trip to Germany I did none in Germany or on either side of the trip closely. There is some question of the usage before that summer 2023 trip as well. And when I did partake, the overall usage was somewhat minimal, usually 3 cans, and done almost entirely at home. I knew and respected the power of the high given.

It pains me to acknowledge this but I bring my case out fully, for full understanding of the complete picture. If you read and learn some of my childhood but the book is centered on the car accident I'm not being fair to you as a reader.

I had apparently shown some signs that could point to neurological difficulties such as a tremble in the hands on occasion or in the face. Brief but telling signs. They never lasted long but they were there occasionally.

So it's possible that the seizure was caused by the effects from the "huffing" behavior. It is inconclusive. B12 is something that apparently is greatly diminished in the body from heavy usage and my test results were near normal and not out of range.

But I will add this, that I have no memory of the seizure, or the car careening down the street, hitting trees on the side of the road, or heading to the traffic circle in front of our house, and especially no recollection of the final impact the car made with a curb on the edge of a neighbors yard, flipping the car and ripping it in two, resting against the neighbors trees in their yard, in view from my son's bedroom window for him to witness.

Either way I'm deeply ashamed at the use of the canned air. In the soul change moment spoken of earlier, that sort of behavior was up front in the review of the life as lived before the

crash, going back to my drinking and difficulty stopping in any reasonable way or time frame. It was very shameful for me to think of my weaknesses.

Chapter 19: TBI Communication

So communication was and remains a challenge with Traumatic Brain Injury and life in general. It has changed and morphed.

For anyone reading as a caregiver to someone recently impacted with a TBI there are many stages and it's generally a long road to any sort of "real" or big recovery. As far as I've gathered including my own expectation and experience, there's no "full" recovery. The person you knew is likely gone for good, but many aspects can remain, even get stronger. I've read a couple of accounts claiming full or near full recovery but at this point of my healing I doubt a full recovery is possible. A fairly complete recovery by some measures might be obtained, but the world is just different, never to return, and this feeling or observation is common among survivors.

Early on there might be confusion about the level of consciousness of the victim. I will briefly describe a method brought to me primarily from my wife, Ruth and middle daughter, Lily. As I told earlier in the story I was largely out of my mind for 7 weeks, with absolutely no memory of that time. I'm sure I didn't recall simple things from day to day, including if anyone paid me a visit yesterday or if I was expecting anyone today. In fact when I did regain full consciousness I wanted to prove that I was there.

So the method is to use short, repetitive messages. It's good to talk in other ways, including at length - but anything at length should be kept between repetitive phrases early on. The voice does wonders and the information is welcomed by the patient to bring them back up to speed slowly. And in my case occasional words or phrases triggered deeper memories, sometimes with no clear connection. So messages of greetings are good for repetition and definitely phrases regarding departure and care.

A test for consciousness uses these methods in a straightforward manner. Choose a time of visitation and know when you can visit again, preferably the following day. Near the end of the visit before the following day, choose a word that was very intertwined in life to the patient. It should be something the patient likely knows deeply. This could be a town name from where they're from, or a street name from youth.

Begin by repeating that you're giving a test. Keep it to just that it's a test for memory, and of course repeat that message. Tell them the basic structure of the test, that you're going to give them a word to repeat back tomorrow. Then give them the word, again multiple times. It's okay to ask if it's understood. It's not a bad idea for them to repeat it back to you at the time. Then back out of it. Tell them you'll visit again tomorrow and ask for the word, repeating the word again. Then visit the next day and ask first if they remember that you're testing them. If the answer is positive then ask for the word. If there's trouble with the word but they remember

it's the name of a town or street from youth that's an indicator, at least they remember that there is/was a test, but word recall isn't fully there. I leave detailed information about this method to others but it's a good handy way to see if they're back on our plane.

Now to shift back to my adventure, it's been a long and nuanced journey . This probably will get to a greater scope by the end but as a result of me being new to the world in many ways. It'll focus first on my trials with the TBI.

One challenge I've gone through, and with that I also mean my family has traveled through, is a flat voice. That and my unsureness about being heard. Even with my thoughts and thinking mind largely intact I had and have trouble knowing if and when I'm heard. Which is combined with sometimes having thoughts that are non-sequiturs. My initial answer to try to rectify the situation was to increase the volume of my voice and repeat myself. I am learning and can understand that this can actually be somewhat annoying. So I need to be more patient or ask if I've been heard. I'm encouraged to write notes to myself to follow up on later. That last suggestion, even though espoused by many, therapists and family included, is a stretch for me to follow. I've been able to track such things and the flows of conversation in my mind most of my life so I'm not used to having to write down many notes. I've also got to learn to review notes I've made and I'm tempted to move on in thought and conversation so I worry that notes will get lost or outdated quickly.

My brain has for a long time moved around subjects somewhat quickly, and would move from topic to topic. With the brain injury that's more dangerous as I'm finding out. I won't quite remember if I voiced the thought but I know I've thought it. So I need to learn that I need to track the conversation in a different way. To me the thought occurred but I'm unsure if it was communicated. If it was communicated, I'm not sure if that was today or yesterday or before that.

As I continue to learn other people's reactions and emotions I often end up on the sad side, like I'm a burden. *Persona non grata*. I feel I've left too much of a bad smelling trail in my wake, at least among close family. I learned, changed behaviors and feel more pierced. I'm urged strongly not to raise up my victories in too grand of a way, even current ones that may be small but show I'm at least doing things. That I'm at least not unworthwhile.

One recent interaction was begun with me thinking I was showing my wife my love, meeting her with her problem in a head on fashion. Yet I apparently went too far and offered talking through the issue and possible solutions. Thinking that going that far and meeting her where she was would be an exhibit of the love I have for her. But I did not stop at the first station on that line and remind her that I loved her. I thought mistakenly that that would be shown conclusively by going the extra distance into her worries. But she just wanted to be heard and met at the place where she was. So I'm still just making my way through life, but now in a crippled fashion, longing to be loved.

I learn of some cases where people with TBI's don't try hard to work with or through their disability. Like just about anything it's a choice. To improve and learn new capabilities or squander the time and opportunities. I can't drive anymore but I can learn and take over other things.

Working on communication is a multi-pronged thing. It takes everyone in your case communicating honestly, speaking, listening, absorbing, questioning, Etcetera. You might hear things that are tough to swallow but may arise from situations you can identify and explain, for example. Once something tough has been identified and explored, creative solutions can be explored.

And just plain sadness enters the picture. An unknown future, an unknown present, and a not fully formed past all tumble around inside a jumbled head, with thoughts of potentials surfacing occasionally, usually briefly.

I'm fully committed to whatever is in front of me but I'm eager for it to get here. I'm only months in at age 52 so I was probably getting close to closing up shop anyway, metaphorically. But I've had a couple of deep times since regaining consciousness and feel I know in my soul that I was saved for a reason, and I've learned not to dwell on that specific "holy" time I experienced. So it's in front of me but not clear.

Another lesson I should share here is a bonus for me to have learned and hopefully to at least some readers. I'm relearning the world in numerous ways. I count it as age, being over 50 and learning lessons for the last part of my life. "I'm training to be over 50". It was to me a joke I started with therapists while in the SNF. The joke started with lessons and warnings about eating food too fast, which was something I remembered doing much of my life. For one thing I'm a guy. I was raised in a house where watching the budget was crucial. So often when dinner was spread on the table that was it, with no more in reserves in the kitchen. So as the youngest I was most disadvantaged in the race to the finish. And snacking was frowned upon closely following a served meal. With college following and some single time, then as man of the house, I didn't stray too far. So eating fast was a staple and one I was now being warned about. And warned in a big way, as I'd later learn, swallowing issues are common among TBI survivors with reduced feeling and control as factors.

Other lessons followed and will undoubtedly continue to come. For instance I never would write down notes to myself outside of something like a grocery shopping list. Now I have a couple of different notebooks, for different uses, around me close nearly all the time.

Chapter 20: Continuing life

So I go on, getting used to my new body, mind, limitations and circumstances. I'm learning I don't need to tout my successes of the day instantly when my wife comes home, or to defend myself or to try and make her happier or less mad. I need to meet her where she's at, and roll

with it. Sometimes my TBI has some side effects like tiredness, confusion, anxiety, or frustration. But I've come to realize, again in life, that those are largely my issues that usually I can deal with on my own and possibly with a little communication, like "I'll be in the room" or similar. I avoid being too solo, though it's tempting at times, but I know I need to branch/reach out.

Awareness still helps. I noticed I was getting somewhat bothered by my kids. I even confided in my wife just to be upfront with her. Then I noticed on a weekend day I didn't feel that way, it was mid-day. During the week they have school, so getting home a bit later but usually taking time for and to themselves, so real interaction doesn't happen much until dinnertime in the early evenings. So I pieced together it wasn't simply them but it was on me, becoming a little tired after a day of moving along in whatever fashion, with my brain injury. Many therapists have said that brain injuries just take more energy to get through routine living. So my attempt to remedy is to aim for a little rest and down time mid afternoon before they get home. I'll still need to employ my other techniques including being aware of my inner feelings, but that one modification might be valuable.

I also need to stop comparing myself. I had been good through life with not letting myself run away with comparisons with other people but I realized something else just today. That is that I need to stop comparing myself with who I used to be; positive or negative. I'm just not quite the same person. It's odd beyond easy description how I'm similar to who I was before and how much I've changed. I feel I'm largely the same at my core but I've shed some unusable layers, those that were largely deceitful and manipulative to use two descriptive terms. I've lost some ability to act in those ways but I also don't see the need to be like that any longer.

So acceptance is a big thing. My abilities and capabilities have changed. I need to know my new limits so I can change my goals to be achievable. A similar process I followed earlier in life of being aware of changing goals, and being prepared to change course.

Sadness is more prevalent and common in my life these days but I notice and recognize it explicitly, explore it and seek to find a Genesis to it. I'll explore the Genesis if I find one but often it's a general malaise. So I pick myself up and involve myself with the day and demands of the near future, and bigger goals in my life, including connection with others, including old friends and new acquaintances, or just greeting the public and world. Despite hearing of a lot of general sadness in the world and seeing problem people elected to high office, I select myself and choose explicitly to move forward in whatever direction that takes me.

I understand people can get bogged down, but often it's by deeply concerning one's self with too much. What really is important? That's a question with a sliding scale attached to it. In any moment the scale may be different. One moment might be focused on the exact situation you're physically in. Another moment is broad enough to consider your life's trajectory more completely. As goals change so do the pathways to reach them. And the pathways can change along the way or new paths are discovered or realized.

As I get healthier I am told of some of my past actions. Some known to be true, a few remembered explicitly, and more just relayed to me as past actions. And quite a few bring me to my knees in my soul. I am told about arguments I made on life positions and cringe, in my mind responding in disbelief. Much of these to the family in general and my wife specifically. A few I can understand where I was coming from, given our cards as dealt in life, so while brusque I can see where it was, the position I came from. And I choose to own it. Sure it may have seemed short at the time but it paid off similar to my predictions.

I'm told not to try to cover up those aspects, they helped leading me to my current space. God doesn't make junk. My past led me to where I am now, to this point of awareness and reflection. As for sense into and of life that's a very fluid topic. Often it makes sense looking backwards through the rear view mirror but the future is largely unknown except the next step we try to reach - if we're lucky enough to see that far.

So now I march on, thankfully with some assistance now. Recently my wife came with me to speech and occupational therapy. Both are in the same Outpatient unit of a hospital. Somehow both seemed to cover generally the same topics. Fortunately I don't have too much trouble here but communication was (I would call) the central topic. I've seen many people report communication is a hurdle for them and it often brings up anxiety and frustration to them.

So I've been practicing controlled breathing exercises and taking some more short time-outs. As one therapist wrote on a handout she gave me even before the day my wife attended, "Pace instead of push". This also goes against the grain for me and how I've lived much of my life. One of my nicknames was actually D-train because so often I would get on a course of action and not let up until I was done. If I had a list of chores around the house, I wouldn't space them out through the day. I would do the first one and I'd carry my momentum forward to the next one and proceed to work through the list. Now I'm reminded to go somewhere and set a 10 minute timer and breathe and relax. It's quite a change.

And it's spilled over into how I eat quite a few things especially depending on time of day. We're good in our family about all of us sitting down together for dinners at night. But I've reserved much of breakfast and lunch for quicker methods, like standing or sauntering around while eating. Who needs to sit for a simple yogurt? Or a neat sandwich? Well I do now. For one I can't easily see or tell that some of my sandwich has fallen. I also now have something going on with my mouth where I'm more prone to drool. And unfortunately eating "over" the sink doesn't really cover the messes that are possible. So I try to resign myself to the need to slow down and eat at more proper places with more deliberate intent.

Chapter 21: Breaking the Measuring Stick

Readers of the previous text may accuse me of blowing my own horn. That is certainly not the aim here and I've hopefully conveyed that at times throughout telling some tales.

I've briefly mentioned not holding past thought patterns, such as saying goodbye to the "D-train" mentality, and learning how to be over 50 years of age. I've got a new mandate, which is to NOT rely on external signs to measure myself by. I'm a complete person on my own, there's no need to inform others. I have strengths and I have weaknesses. They don't need to be measured and I don't need to rely on the validation of others. I'm only learning how to live in that way. I learned fairly early to keep certain things to myself. As I previously mentioned I have learned I don't need to tout my daily accomplishments to my wife as I see her return from a day out. But that so far has consisted of me addressing myself internally to cover a similar list. I identified that as smugness. Something I used to do before some, because bragging isn't too cool or really good to do according to myself even.

Talking with my wife, it's easy to merge the two trains of thought; that I'm good because I am, and that I'm good because of my actions, thoughts and feelings. Try it out yourself, talking out loud through the process of saying you're good because you're one of God's children. But try not to go into how that what you do is proof. It's difficult. My wife made the astute observation that Jesus as an embodiment of God was a man of action, a doer to put it one way. He carried a message through doing, through action. So it's difficult to limit yourself at the point of saying you're good without providing proof that you indeed are.

And I don't get carried away with "self improvement ". Quotes on purpose. Don't get stuck on and pay attention to that there are "self improvement" endeavors.

We all change pretty constantly. Even if you don't try you change. Often people get stuck in that terminology of using that phrase, self improvement, as if they don't change over time regardless.

Accept that you change and aim to make it a better version of you than a worse version. That's basically it. If you try extra hard at times then fine - you're trying extra hard. But it just doesn't have the same catchiness.

Life is temporary in this world. All we can do is to try to make the most of it, and knowing what's important is difficult and naturally will change with time. I find it helpful to think about how people I know can honor me once I pass. I'll ultimately be fine with death. I personally will not have a stake in what happens because I'll be gone and therefore unaware of how I'm handled or what effects manifest with other people. Of course it matters, especially to/for those I deeply care about like my family. But I'll both be unaware and unable to do anything about any situation. So death isn't frightening to me any longer in terms of my experience with my death, it simply won't matter. But the legacy left is more than a monetary legacy. How am I to be incorporated into others lives? And how will I be remembered and will it be for any real length of time.

Chapter 22: Swirling emotional swings and the rest of the world

I've had to come to grips with the new me. I don't have a new name but probably should, at least known to me. I'll call him Schmittty because I can. Schmittty knows the guy before had some lackluster traits even, and regrettable actions without being a total scumbag. But sometimes duplicitous.

But he had knowledge before and retains much of it today, so Schmittty now isn't so bad. I'll have to say I feel sometimes I must be under a spell of some kind, with the inability to not be completely forthcoming on matters, especially if asked direct questions. Isn't that a good quality - one sought after the world over? Apparently the truth is sometimes not really handled well at times in some situations.

So I now get questioned obviously laced with consideration, deference, and allowance to the brain injury, not the whole person underneath and within. I wrestle internally on this point. I know the opposite would be much worse - to be assumed to be normal or as my old self. I get breaks and allowances - isn't that grand? It is, sure. I welcome that. But I also want to be known as at least partially capable.

My psychologist and I have walked through a few scenarios and I discovered I am the one in control or I'm the one who turns over control. That is my decision each time, all the time.

I know I've mentioned this before but I do need to retire my old moniker of sorts, D-train and welcome Schmittty. Pace, not push as the one speech therapist says, or slow your roll, per my wife.

Chapter 23: Looking forward (with an eye out behind)

I don't want to paint Polly Anna here. I have obstacles and challenges ahead, especially in the days of Trump as President. But I've been blessed in many ways and a lot of that comes from my view of the world, and digging down to and with what I can. How much do I need to break down any particular problem and to what level in order to see the order of steps needed to solve or advance the solution and know I can stop digging?

First is just living. In these days of hater el Presidente I'm looking for social security to pay a fraction of what I used to make. Even that old job sector I was in has experienced falling pay rates and increased competition, and more seems to be expected. Apparently Project Managers are expected to deliver through environments they don't control or (and this is usually on them) understand including dealing with out of touch sales people, and DELIVER. I blame in part those doing the hiring - for example I don't want someone in charge of building my house if they haven't done it before. Apparently they often manage verticals and domains they don't even fully understand. So no thanks to being in a delusional world set to destroy confidence and strain brains - I have an injured brain.

Project Management at its core is fairly simplistic but the domain of operation needs to be understood and known. Project Management first requires breaking down the work necessary to reach a goal into logical steps. Then sequencing those steps is needed. Then assuming the team doing the work is known, estimates need to be gathered from each team member for each step/task for which they're responsible. The project manager must know each person's skills and responsibilities, and whether estimates are complete, and whether they seem overly large or small, and then possess the ability to follow up appropriately in any of those cases. That's downstream management and communication but often there's an upstream communication component needed after the project estimates of time and effort estimations are finalized and submitted. At anytime other upstream communication may be needed directly to/with the intended recipient of the effort. Often that comes in a question format that starts with "is it possible to...?"

But I digress. It is possible to retain optimism and return it to the world, being recognized for such an activity and reaping rewards. The expectation should be limited to non-existent. No one owes you anything just because, and that is unfortunate but an important place to start from and hold within your thoughts. But it doesn't call for lashing out at the world. We're all too precious individually to be that way in the world, spreading disdain and hatred, and stark sourness.

So I work to catch myself and remember how I got to the place in life I reside, the good fortune and bad luck moments. The spirit to move forward and the headwinds encountered. The self-assessment of skills along with remembering my actions of basically taking a strong stick to my kneecaps while standing, ending with collapse. In short I didn't have it purely easy nor did I help my case oftentimes.

Down times also came. Many I could weather through, especially by taking actions at times like removing myself from others especially if there was tension over something specific. But I've also been able to rise to occasions for others, especially family. Then it's been rare but darker times have appeared, which is largely new to me. Sure I've had dark times but they've been rare overall. But this time I've passed through suicidal ideations a couple times. Not that often but it's good I have no idea how to go about it.

One friend and former roommate did it gruesomely by walking off a 5-story building in front of a post office, a block from the town's main cop shop but that must've been a tragic fall and lead up. I know my speeding down the street to crash probably took as long and was undoubtedly frantic, trying to control the car partially (as much as a seizure would allow) but driving up 5 floors of a parking garage, stopping the car and exiting, then walking to the edge and climbing the final barrier is time where he must've been not fully there. An honest look into his perceived negatives wouldn't call for such a step.

To anyone overly concerned about how you're now cast in the world and perceived by others, move beyond that. I don't get overly worried about what others think. I was like that before too.

It's nice when others regard you well or properly but that's outside my control and I have no idea what's going on with most people, including their thoughts of me. Anyway many people have a capacity of sympathy in their hearts.

Chapter 24: Going down the road

The road nearly took my life but in other ways it's taken much of my life up until the accident. And added to it.

I've spent much time on many different roads. Of course driving country roads has been a part of me for much of my life, with the roads around my childhood home, even after growing up some and moving from Raspberry Ridge.

I had a few jobs early in life that used that ability, including delivering flowers on romantic holidays and pizzas around town for two different pizzerias. Both with surprises to discover. The floral delivery included an attractive lady obviously suspecting another visitor and gracing her door with her lingerie clothed body upon answering my knock on the door.

The pizza job carries many more memories too. I took advantage of my position with the occasional delivery that stiffed me on tip, especially if in an apartment at the edge of the delivery zone. Commonly a portable grill was in sight, and once the door closed I would often liberate the grill, trading it for my tip money later, often five dollars to a college student in need.

And once I escaped a police ticket for something amiss with the car - probably a registration tag I had on my list to take care of. With a ticket I'd receive and have to pay it'd be longer for me to afford a new registration sticker.

To set the scene I was delivering once to a college dormitory hall at night. The driveway as it were was a half moon and a large parking lot was across the street. After trading the pizza with the intended recipient in the lobby I started towards the door. I saw an "Umper" pull slowly by my car in the drive, stop briefly and pull on. Umper was the nickname given to University of Missouri police- UM combined with the term "Copper" or Umper.

So I added 2 + 2 assuming correctly he had spotted my expired sticker on the car. Leaving the building allowed me to see his route which took him from the dorm to a light that led him up a major street where he re-entered the large lot across the street from the dorm. I pieced together his route and that he was planning on circling in that fashion waiting on his opportunity to make a dramatic play delivering a ticket to me. So I let him go up the big road while getting back in my car and pulling forward sans lights. I was ready to pull out onto the streets from the drive as he pulled into the parking lot. I switched on my lights and turned twice to put distance between us and foster a sense of uncertainty in him about my intended path. He signaled his full intent by turning on his police lights on at the far end of that large parking lot giving me conclusive

evidence of his plan while allowing me easy distance to get away safely. I'm still confounded he just didn't park behind the car and wait. Would've been much easier and straight forward.

But the driving wasn't limited to the city or Bocomo at large. I've driven between Virginia and Missouri quite often in the 25 or so years since moving though with the accident and injury those days may be over. But even when I was more youthful I saw what opportunities existed and built on them.

I was an older Boy Scout in the day. I made Eagle but enjoyed the offerings through belonging to a scout troop near Midway. Annually we'd do a weekend float trip on one of the many floatable rivers in Southern Missouri, the Current River being the old standby and most common.

One year my brother was entering Air Force flight school in Mississippi. That year the scouts added one extra float trip consisting of a five day float on the Buffalo River in Arkansas. So I decided it was a good opportunity to tie the two things together. So I drove to the float location and took in the full experience which was quite an event. After leaving the river behind and camping out one last night I bid farewell to my scout troop and headed further South in my car. I traveled largely by non-major roads or highways largely because there weren't many - East/West routes were covered better that way. I know I purposefully did use highway 61 for a good measure. I had been a fan of the blues and a trip to Mississippi as a blues fan basically calls for nothing less. I of course made a stop in Clarksdale. This was back in the late 80's so I can tell by online pictures it's changed since then. The blues museum or hall of fame has obviously grown. I remember a single room entity.

Over time I collected one nickname that is now to be questioned and re-evaluated for current health and capability factors. That nickname is "D-Train" and was given to me by my best friend aside from my wife, John "Gianni" Marshall. I used to find it hard to really stop much once I got really going. If there's a list of 5 chores to be done I'd usually start with the easiest or hardest but either way once completed I'd be in the zone and after each one was finished just move on, even picking something else along the way.

But now I retire the nickname, after probably 30+ years. I just can't safely do that any longer. Brain injuries cause more activity to be expended just being awake. Thought takes more energy and especially in my case with the vision, just navigating the space around me.

So I'm out to rebuild and build myself anew. I've fortunately just moved on from some things in life. I certainly don't have any desire to return to alcohol. Only curiosity about weed, but no desire. I'm more caring about my family, both immediate family and those related, and friends. I don't have any reason or inclination to deceive or to do anything that would need a deceptive cover.

Chapter 25: Survivors guilt and reconciliation

I'm growing into, through and with my injury quite a bit. Emotionally, with and in reason, and with awareness and thoughtfulness to the injury and limitations. Also in terms of how to navigate the limitations and accomplish at least some of my goals.

I often WANT to do big things. But why the drive, especially with limitations? I have learned so many things that amount to being slower, more deliberate and with thought. A few mantras are "slow your roll", "make sure you have all the facts" and "pace yourself, don't push yourself".

I wrestle internally with delusions of grandeur, as put in an Alice Donut song, with the very next line singing about a hit to the head.

So I pursue an idea of talking about the condition, inviting those interested into this strange new world - a different planet, a different place.

I'm opinionated but allowing with a high degree of tolerance. That last part is certainly a saving grace. There is a very wide spectrum to brain injuries. And it seems I landed somewhere in the middle by my estimation. I need to count my blessings and be grateful it wasn't worse, which was easily possible.

Its odd that in many venues I'm very okay and unphased by the differences in cases. Such as the outpatient rehab center I attended after home therapy ended. I didn't ever focus on anyone in a harness. Or walking and looking or sounding more "normal" than me. I didn't even try and I withheld judgement.

I realized and appreciated capabilities and deeds of others, and was open about my limitations.

That last point is at times troublesome to me. Here I am, with history of contributing at work and home, now stripped of both shining points.

It can cause guilt. Here I am, poor me. Being doted on by some, especially my family, bless them. Where I used to be co-captain of the ship. While especially my wife picks up the mantle and holds it extremely well. But it often is too much, running her ragged.

Its started to be an issue as well. She's somewhat of a perfectionist with certain things, especially the look and cleanliness of the house, including where things should reside and how to go about certain tasks.

I've made it through life well by limiting comparing myself to others. That was relatively easy - I don't know their full story. So they have a fancy car or big house, but they may not have the income to maintain them for long, or appropriately even.

Now I have to take it one step further by not comparing the “new” me to who I used to be, or what I was able to do.

One important and helpful thing I've reminded myself of is that change happens constantly to the living. The traumatic brain injury just caused a lot of change to occur quickly. I have and will continue to change even after the injury.

Postlogue

A short life encapsulation with regard to TBI's.

I probably had one if not two rather severe brain injuries as a young child but no terminology even with trips to the hospital both times. One time an excited family dog ran under my feet as dinner guests arrived and our family was outside to greet them, standing on the cement portion of the driveway. The second time was from very high atop a slide at a church playground. I was under 5 and trying the popular “big slide” for the first time. After climbing the stairs slowly in a consecutive line without spaces, so there was no real turning back from the crowd of kids, and being cheered on and yelled at to go already I sat perched atop the slide in fashion to go down. Scared of the vision of the very long slide and the massive crowd of older kids jamming the ladder, I intentionally chose the quicker way down, rolling straight off the side, skipping the slide altogether and greeting the asphalt with my head.

I led a rather normal life, sometimes fascinating even.

At 51 was in a horrific 1 car accident and over 2 months in institutions with 7 weeks of la la land. Regaining consciousness I first heard the term and this time I definitely have a life changing injury. So what were the first two? By a lot of accounts I read about if those are called TBI's then dang it those first two were those. But again my life overall wasn't affected and was even a little blessed. Go figure.

Life certainly isn't over. It changes constantly, for everyone. This is where I get to use a term from back in the day in a nursing way: Normies. Now meaning those unaffected by brain injury. Life constantly changes for them as well. TBI just makes a lot of change happen pretty instantly. So if you're new to the world of brain injury or are feeling super down, hang on because change is not only possible, it will occur. By maintaining awareness you can have a say in how those changes manifest in your life.

Suggest over time that he learn what the feeling is like before he acts like that. Make sure you're on the same page about the actions. Then help Jim identify the feeling he has just prior. If he identifies it that's where he can learn to recognize the feeling and from there it's on him but you

can guide. When he feels the feeling he should ask himself honestly how he should react. There's a ton of things there. The easiest one is for him to ask questions, first of himself and then maybe of others. The first one to himself should be "do i have all the facts?" Again, there's a ton more but hopefully that gets you two started.

I've changed for sure. My memory used to be nearly impeccable, now I rely on paper and pen and family and phone. But I'm luckyish at 52. That memory degradation would've come soon anyway and I got a lot of miles out of it. That's my lucky part. The real part is that everyone changes all the time, we just had big changes at once. So we need to learn how best to accommodate. We would've changed anyway, just not as quickly. It's proper to mourn, but I urge that we don't dwell. And remember our past selves, not compare.

A new person to discover, probably. I think that's the general lay of the land. For me certainly. If you remember your past self do spend time with memories but don't get too hung up on being changed. Even without such an injury we all as humans change constantly. The injury just made a big change happen faster. You'll still change from today, over time. Remember that. It's important.

Survivors guilt and Survivors frustration.

Don't compare yourself to others, including your old self. Take the first step first then take the second step.

Also the old you built your current foundation. You can applaud that foundation and work that went into it but you've added upwards on top of that foundation. The new structural addition is you as well.

The bright n' shiny fallacy

In these days of Chump and maga people aren't grasping the big picture, by which i mean the long term and how a nation duped will continue blubbering forward.

Chump's policies are causing long term damage though it is felt by some now and will be felt nationwide soon. It will take much time and capital to pull out, or correct current mistakes. The Republican party will certainly lose big time in the near future because of the damage they incur.

But with the current short attention span that grips America, the following election or elections will be highlighted by current Republicans as too spend happy, though that money was spent correcting Republican blunders which devastated many. While Democrats correcting this huge blunder will be cast as having too loose of pursestrings. So even with Democrats literally saving many in this country the new shiny thing presented will be the cost of fixing those Republican mistakes.