



## Laura Davey

A Survivor's Story

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Did you know that June is #BrainInjuryAwarenessMonth in Canada? This month, we're shining a #SpotlightOnBrainInjury.

Help us raise awareness about #BrainInjury in Canada by following along with our posts & sharing to your stories!

**#SPOTLIGHTONBRAININJURY**

Before my twelfth birthday I had no problem making decisions or making my mind up about things. I was quite the independent kid. I didn't need help deciding what clothes to put on for the day. This all changed on June 25, 2001. The weather was beautiful, but my world was turned upside down! I was on a road trip on the way to my surprise birthday present, which was a day of fun at the African Lion Safari in Cambridge, Ontario, although I didn't know the final destination at the time. My two older sisters had planned this whole day for me four days after my twelfth birthday. They even signed me out of school that day. We left at eight in the morning, taking our time, travelling at the speed limit, even taking breaks, getting out of the car at the side of the road and taking some pictures of an emu farm we passed. All was well until approximately ten that morning.

We came to a four-way stop on a double lane highway. The person in the vehicle on the outside lane waved my sister on, she proceeded and – Wham!

The truck in the inside lane T-boned our little white Dodge neon at the right hand side. Thankfully, I was seated in the back seat behind the driver, but was found unresponsive at the scene. I had a large irregular shaped laceration on my forehead with bloody discharge and containing shards of glass. When the paramedics tried to move me, I was described as being "combative with fluctuating levels of consciousness." I was rushed by ambulance (but the situation was so dire I almost was going to be air lifted) to McMaster University hospital in Hamilton, where I had surgery to put a shunt in and relieve the swelling and was put under a medically induced coma, to stop more damage to my brain. Upon arrival at hospital I was a Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) of three. I had sustained a traumatic closed Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). On one occasion during the night in my first week in a coma, my lung collapsed and I flat – lined. Thankfully the doctors were able to revive me. I was in a coma for two weeks. Once I woke from my coma, I was a GCS of only nine, and therefore, my pediatric neurologist described my ABI as catastrophic. I had to have a score of at least four to six GCS to be deemed stable enough for transport to get transferred to London Health Sciences Centre for Children. Since I was so young when I was injured, none of the neurosurgeons could tell how many functions and abilities I would re – gain. Gradually, as I stayed at the children's hospital for the next two and a half months, I re – learned how to stand, walk and say my first word post – injury, "Mom!"

It took many rehabilitation professionals to get me to where I am today. I had to work hard in speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and aqua therapy. I even had a tutor to review the last year's schoolwork (that I had most likely forgotten) and cover what I had missed. I was adjusting remarkably well, considering all that had happened.

I was left with a limp on my right leg and a weak right side, which was annoying, but manageable. At least I could still walk around with a limp. I had memory issues too, which included trouble remembering information just said half an hour ago and cognitive problems with the rate at which I completed a task. I also am quite slow at working in my volunteer position. That is okay though, as there is no time limit on the jobs I have to do, such as shredding papers. They keep me busy though, nevertheless.

I first started to get involved with the brain injury association in 2009. Actually, my pediatric neurologist asked me to do a speech at the brain injury conference. The theme of the conference that year was "the maze of rehab," and with me now being an adult, she pointed out to me that I had already been through the maze. I enjoyed writing a speech for that conference.

In 2020, I participated in the annual Mike's Brain Injury Superhero Walk on May 23rd. It was a great opportunity to give back. That year it wasn't held in its usual location at Springbank park, due to Covid-19 restrictions on capacity limits on outdoor gatherings, so instead I walked around my neighbourhood. I misjudged the distance though, and walked almost six kilometers instead of five!

In March of 2021, I decided to try my hand at writing a speech for the upcoming brain injury conference in June. Since my injury occurred before employment, I decided to discuss "going to work" at my volunteer position.

Over twenty years after my accident, in 2022, I got asked by the executive director of the brain injury association if I would like to write an article for the Shine a Light on Brain Injuries Campaign. But I had been through so much – and I couldn't decide what to write – that's when it hit me: the thought that decision making has been an ongoing struggle ever since my brain injury. It was unbeknownst to me, but other people in my family, such as my Mom and Dad had realized, as they were usually my go – to when I didn't know what to do. This issue only got intensified as I aged, because as a young teen it was okay, but when I turned eighteen, I was now an adult and I was responsible to make my own decisions. The things I would need help with would be silly questions I would ask, like "there's grey clouds in the sky, do you think I should wear a jacket?" Or if I got invited somewhere, like to a movie, "Do you think I should wear jeans or those pants?" They were rhetorical questions that I could have easily answered myself, but for some reason, just hearing my voice speak the words kind of made me more at peace with one than the other. If I can't make my mind up about something, I ask my parents. If they can't give me an opinion because they do not know enough about it, I ask my sisters or my friends.

Other situations where I have this trouble for example is Christmas shopping and deciding what to get for everyone. I have twelve other family members, and of that, two of my nieces, three of my nephews and my brother-in-law all have birthdays around that same time. Since I also have a problem with organizational skills to add to my decision making problem, I always sit down in August, and make a list. Lists help because I'm a visual learner. I can see what I've got to get written by each name. I would say both making lists and planning things super in advance are my two secret coping mechanisms.

If I am ever put on the spot where I have to make a decision quickly, I tend to struggle, as it usually makes me freeze up. I have to have time to go through my process of elimination to decide. I am not good with making a decision on a dime. With a decision weighing over my head, I experience much stress, worry and can't focus on the task at hand. If the decision I have to make is "do I stay or do I go to this event?" I make a list; a pro/con list to be exact. I write a chart with the title Pro (for reasons why I should go) and Con (for reasons why I should not go). Whatever list has more reasons wins and the worry and stress is wiped away.

Another tool in my back pocket I use to aid in decision making is if I have a gut-feeling or a vibe that things are not meant to be for me. This could be an inner monologue argument with myself "but I'm not feeling good" or "but I'm too tired." Ultimately whatever I have peace with is where my decision lies.

Thank you to the brain injury association for giving me this opportunity to write about my struggles with a brain injury. This gives me hope for my future as a brain injured individual. It also makes me feel like I have a place and a purpose in London, Ontario.