



Gaitan Phaneuf

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

As a child you think you're untouchable and nothing can hurt you. Well, my story begins when I was 3 years old.

One day I was sitting on the railing of my family's second story home, when I fell back, lost my balance and crashed 10ft to the ground. My head and back were what broke my fall. Assuming I was okay, my parents did not seek medical treatment at that time. Back in those days, some parents would say, "if you get hurt, you get back up and if you're breathing, you're okay."

As a rebellious teenager, 13 years later, I confronted my dad about something. The outcome for talking back, of course, was not good. I learned my lesson after being struck in the back of the head with a closed fist.

Finishing highschool a couple years later, I managed a gas station in my hometown. One day, rushing to complete my shift, after checking the gas dips, I ran as fast as I could towards the back door of the building. Running into the doorway, my head struck the header of the door, bending the siding in the process. The crash made me hit the back of my head while falling onto the concrete floor. In the early 80s concussions were not discussed, and I did not seek any medical treatment for that injury as well.

Only when it was too late did I seek help. About a month after the gas station accident, and many symptoms later; including double vision and an excruciating amount of headaches, I went to see my doctor.

I was admitted into Sunnybrook Hospital with a devastating brain injury. This injury led me to have a cranial shunt inserted from my brain into my torso in order to relieve the pressure and fluids building up inside my skull. I stayed in the hospital for 2 weeks, with one week in the ICU.

Fast forward many years later, I continued to live my life, but never felt the same after receiving that brain injury and shunt.

About 5 years ago I had an unfortunate head-on vehicle collision which gave me a severe concussion, which in-turn, ended my working career. Through the last few years, I went through intense physio, sought occupational therapy, counseling, doctors and therapists. My life will never be the same. But, I'm still very grateful to have had the support, patience, and love from all my family, specialists, doctors and therapists.

To this day, I struggle with excruciating headaches, intense grogginess, back, neck and knee pains, memory loss, fogginess, and have a difficult time following any types of instructions. I'm always tired and get fatigued easily. I deal with anxiety and depression and I am sensitive to sound, light and large crowds. My health has deteriorated since my last accident.

I've been struggling to stay awake and struggle completing chores and daily tasks. This also includes having irregular sleeping patterns.

On the brightside though, I have learned many techniques to help me cope with my many problems and complications. I practice mindfulness walking and activities, my wife bought me a companion dog to keep me company throughout the day.

I have also completed a happiness therapy program which helps me stay positive. I spend more time with my wife and children. They have been extremely supportive throughout my journey. I have also been blessed with a superb therapy and medical team. To whom, I am grateful for.

My life has been altered in many ways, but I have learned to accept these changes and continue to accept my journey with a positive perspective. I have learned to relax more which has helped me with regulating my high blood pressure.

Life is precious and should never be taken for granted. My journey has been extremely difficult and challenging, but well worth it. I live my life to the fullest, keeping these lessons and gifts in mind. As many people say, "you live everyday and only die once". I believe that life is worth living, no matter the circumstances. And to always remember that even baby steps forward will always get you ahead.

My journey is not over, and I plan on fighting for it until the day I die.

Written by Gates, edited by my wonderful daughter.