



Nikki Fodor

A Survivor's Story

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Did you know that June is Brain Injury Awareness Month in Canada? This month, we're shining a Spotlight On Brain Injury.

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#SPOTLIGHTONBRAININJURY

Dancing in the rain

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain" by Vivian Greene has to be one of the best inspirational quotes I have ever come across; at least for me personally. It was 2007, I was 26 years old and little did I know a storm was brewing.

My boyfriend and I had just recently split. We shared a child who had just turned 3. I had just finished my second year in College and was one credit shy of being a graduate. I had been looking for work in the field of study with no success. I was in a lot of debt, using some self-destructing behavior and my priorities were not right to say the least. It was Remembrance Day of '07 and my personal chaos got the best of me. My Step Dad, (Dave) was a soldier. We were together doing the days celebrations with Mom and friends included.

Alcohol, especially then was part of the family. When there was a celebration, we drank. When things got chaotic, we drank. It was a learned behavior I picked up over the years and like I said, my life at that time was pretty chaotic. It was suggested I sleep at my parents that night. My child was with her Dad. Eventually I agreed. I was safe and sound or so my parents thought. It was after they shut down for the night, a loud noise was heard. Mom knew something was wrong. She and Dave came down from their room to discover I had fallen down the basement stairs. I had hit my head on the concrete floor and I was bleeding out. My breath was shallow with gurgle.

Because of the fall, I was in a coma for nearly 4 days. The hospital staff wasn't sure if I would wake up or if I did, what state I would be in. When I first awoke, I spoke as if I were 5 years old. I had lost hearing in my left side. I'd developed some facial paralysis and hadn't a clue of the reality that lied ahead. None of us did. I literally had to relearn how to walk, talk, and went through an abundance of therapies including, Occupational, Speech, and Behaviour therapies. It was during these therapies and doctor visits my future would be reviewed. Would I ever be able to hold any type of employment because of my deficits? The fatigue and memory impairments were not going away. I was always told no. That answer took a toll on me, but it was what it was. This all sounds pretty grim right? Well..... therapies weren't the easiest dance, in fact they were the hardest dances ever, but because I stuck through them and because I had a great support system, so many other dancing opportunities came my way and they have been amazing!

The boyfriend and I rekindled our romance after he vowed to (literally) take care of me for the rest of my life. We married in 2008 and are still going strong. I was determined to have enough balance to walk down the aisle. With physical therapy, it happened. My husband is my rock. We have learned to lean on each other so much through this; me on him, he on me. Words cannot even describe our bond.

It was shortly after our daughter started school that I began to volunteer. I remember it was pretty scary at first but I have always loved kids and the school was looking for help. I shared about my long-term deficits and the school accepted me for me. From there it gave me the boost of confidence that I needed to eventually explore other volunteer opportunities including the Brain Injury Association of London and Region and the Canadian Country Music Awards. The CCMAs was my favourite. With communication and determination I rocked that week. It was such an experience. It was also that year I got to witness the birth of my niece. Who knew I would ever have the stamina to pull an all-nighter post brain injury. I then did it again 2 years later when my nephew entered the world.

Let's fast forward to the now. It's been nearly 13 years and I can certainly say I am still dancing. The dances are a lot easier now. I still have deficits but I also have tools that I use every single day. I know that if I meet someone new that making a visual connection or associating helps me tremendously. For example, if Amanda has pink hair I've learned to train my brain, Amanda with the pink hair. Pairing people also works great for me too. Another strategy I use is arriving early at functions or events. Crowds get to me. If I arrive first, I find it doesn't bother me as much when the "party" fills up compared to entering a party with lots of people. It also allows me to use the excuse "I've been here since the beginning, I think I will head home now" as an early out. For my memory issues, taking a picture is my go to and last but not least, being aware and or accepting. Being aware of my deficits and then using a tool is the best tip ever! I have learned that I do better with written instructions. If I don't ask for written instructions I am only going to get more frustrated. I know this so I am always sure to ask for them. Using a budget sheet to pay my bills which lists which bills I have, how much they are for and when they are due. It makes sure they all get paid

Strategies, tools and volunteering are just a bit of how I got to where I am today. Because of those dances and the dance of hope and determination I've reached the goals I never thought possible. We bought our first home, and I found employment! Employment that I enjoy! I am a lunch lady at the local school. Never in a million years did I think that I would be able to do that and here I am living my dream. I love that it is a place that is accepting of me, but also a place where I love being. Sometimes it kicks my butt but with the right planning and pacing, I get along just fine.

When approached to write this article, I didn't hesitate for a second. I've written about my brain injury in the past but never the full truth was shared. I felt it was time. Being intoxicated was also something that had taken a toll on me. It left me with the feeling of guilt for a very long time. I've been able to let go of that guilt now. I am proud of that.

I came across the quote "life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain" after my I obtained my brain injury. It was a quote that just spoke to me and continues to do so each and every day. Some go by "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade", etc., etc. There is just something about the storm and dancing in the rain that is just so liberating to me. Have you ever danced in the rain? It can be quite magical. Don't you think?