

Sharing OUR Recovery

A quarterly newsletter designed to support victims, survivors, caregivers and loved ones of motor vehicle collisions.

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Editor in Chief - Dawne McKay

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Stay Safe & Healthy

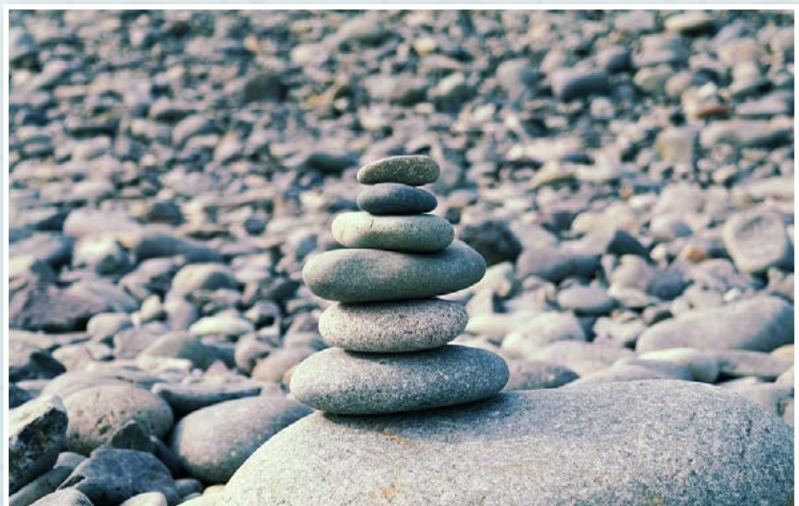
As the days lengthen, grow warmer and we are drawn more outside, I can't help but to continue to celebrate the beginning of the season that welcomes longer days and excessive sunshine. COVID is having a profound impact on all of us especially crash survivors that are recovering as medical treatments have been put on hold as well as our social interaction. The last few months have been extremely challenging for so many and connecting with crash survivors is crucial more than ever.

We have been keeping busy during these challenging times. Our readers and followers have reached out to us seeking support for fatal crashes and we are excited to announce that this past April, we launched our sister support group "[Fatal Crash Support Group](#)" which is an online support group for anyone affected by a fatal motor vehicle crash.

In this issue, you will hear encouraging words from a survivor, how words really do matter when referring to a crash, a clinical and forensic psychologist discusses flashbacks & PTSD, a survivor reminds us to never give up and we discuss how important it is to connect with your council about road safety in your community. We are also excited to introduce you to our new Mascot, Survivor Davis.

Lastly, we want to remind you to be kind to yourself. This is a stressful time for everyone and it's okay if you feel more anxious than usual. Being optimistic, even in the darkest of times, can be uplifting and help you reconnect with yourself. Always remember that you are doing the best you can in a time when simply turning on the news can feel overwhelming. We will get through this together!

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Writing Became My Therapy After Surviving a Crash

Submitted by Stephen Gregory, M.A.Sc.

My personal journey starts much before the motor vehicle accident but to keep the things in order I will start from there. I started writing as a means of therapy – it proved to provide some relief and I would encourage all of you to start doing some writing and journaling is a good way to start. It provides a creative outlet and gives you something that you have control over. Keep it to yourself if you can but remember to talk to others about what you write as this is healthy.

I am a determined problem solver. When rehabilitation did not work out for me due to my speech, vision, balance and coordination difficulties, I started to analyse rehabilitation. As writing became my therapy, my book, *“The Journey Tips and Tales”* revolves primarily around the first awareness scenarios after awakening from a coma. It introduces the reader to their new surroundings and gives them some frame of reference for the process that is about to unfold.

My second book, *“The Journey Continues”* provides some additional insights on how the survivor can develop their own thinking. This really starts when formal rehabilitation is over (if it existed) and the survivor needs to plan their life for their self and at their own pace. This book attempts to bring the principles of rehabilitation into the sphere of possibility for the average survivor. It gives easy to follow steps and is the gateway to a lifetime of free therapy.

Curiosity Can Be Nurtured

Resilience has many steps to it. First you have to have a little bit of resilience to prime the pump if you will. Once you can do basic things you can begin to start developing some curiosity. There are many things to be curious about at first. The professionals need to embrace this even as I had one therapist whom I would always have good discussions about brain injury rehabilitation. This started my thinking processes again. Just analyzing and evaluating in a quiet calm and relaxed manner did me a world of good.

Then real therapy started and it was all about fulfilling the professionals’ desires – almost regardless whether it was good therapeutically for you. This ability to question the basic practices of the professionals is lacking until you get out of their paradigm a bit and reflect back on it with a broader understanding of what the process is all about. Curiosity can be nurtured about many other things though. Physical device problems are one big area, another is the culinary arts.

“... I would encourage all of you to start doing some writing and journaling is a good way to start. It provides a creative outlet and gives you something that you have control over.”

Becoming Resilient

Learn to ask questions. This also needs to be done during therapy – what will this help me with? Why do I need to do it this way? This is not singular process though. One area of curiosity leads with drive and problem solving to resilience in that area. Another area of curiosity leads to resilience in this area – and so you become resilient following many areas of curiosity and follow through to end up with that most desired result - resilience.

The curious mind is active and open to alternate ideas as well as broadening one outlook by giving a different perspective of reality. The resilience definition used for these purposes is “The art of returning to the previous existence”. My last piece of advice is to force the conversations as they need to happen. And remember never, ever give up.

Stephen is a survivor of a very serious motor vehicle crash resulting in a level 3 on the Glasgow Coma Scale. His recovery has challenged his beliefs and his strength of character to the maximum possible. For more information or to order one of his books please visit: www.afterabirehab.com. Stephen is also a member of Crash Support Network and we thank him for sharing his inspirational story with us.



Crash NOT Accident

Submitted by: Shelley M. Martin, Personal Injury Lawyer

Legal
Piece

Crash not accident - words matter. Did you catch the news this morning? Chances are you got a link to a story about a traffic accident. It was awful. It was tragic. It was devastating. But it was an accident. It just happened. No one is to blame. Right? Wrong. We know better. Planes don't just fall out of the sky. They crash. Trains don't just run off the tracks. They crash. And car drivers don't just accidentally hit other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. They crash. A car crash is not an accident and crash survivors deserve better.

In recent years, a movement has picked up steam. Advocating for transparency and neutral reporting in the news, it urges reporters, editors and the general public to think twice before automatically using the "A" word. Accident implies that no one is responsible. Accident means nothing can be done to change it. Accident means it was an Act of God. And we are powerless to stop it. But that's not true. Ask any car crash survivor. They will set you straight.

There is a reason why that survivor's life has been turned upside down. Why they were in the hospital for weeks or months on end. Why they suffered through multiple surgeries and then years of painful therapy. Why they missed their kids' graduations, hockey games and weddings. Why they lost their job and career. Why they are afraid to get behind the wheel or on the road at all. Another driver, or another human being responsible for bad road design or maintenance, made a choice. And that choice destroyed another person's world.



Old habits are hard to break. We automatically call a car crash a car accident because that's the way it's always been done. But sometimes we need to ask ourselves why we say what we say. Maybe it's time we say what we mean. It's time to call a crash a crash.

If you've been seriously injured in a car crash, call an experienced injury lawyer who knows that your car crash was not an accident and find out where you stand.

For more information please contact: Martin Law Office at www.injurylawyerontario.net



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Coping with Flashbacks & PTSD Resulting From An Auto Crash

Submitted by Dr. James F. Zender, PhD



For the past fifteen or more years I have specialized in providing psychological services to people who have survived serious auto crashes. From my experience in working with hundreds of survivors I have observed many common psychological characteristics to the point I would like to see a designated diagnostic classification of Vehicular Trauma Syndrome.

The common constellation of post-accident conditions includes emotional, psychological, cognitive and physical characteristics. Increasingly I have been impressed by the number of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) characteristics many survivors present. TBIs are often missed by medical professionals, however I have seen significant progress in this regard over the past ten years. I have also expanded my knowledge base significantly with regard how the impact of injury to the brain impacts recovery and dictates specialized services that are needed to facilitate recovery.

The brain is estimated to have 100 Trillion neuro connections and is composed of highly specialized cells held together in a material described as toothpaste or jello- like encased in a bony skull structure that moves about in fluid. Hence, the brain is very vulnerable to violent movement due to the mechanical forces characteristic of car crashes. The brain has also been described as an endocrine gland, since every hormone produced in other areas of the body are also produced in the brain. An area that needs increased awareness in the medical community dealing with car crash survivors is how the endocrine system is vulnerable to disruption related to brain injury. I recommend that anyone with a TBI characteristic receive a neuroendocrine screening. There are over 100 known hormones in the human body that are critical to psychological and physical health.

Flashbacks of the Crash

One of the most interesting manifestations of trauma are what has been termed flashbacks which refers to the experience of reliving an overwhelming event that involved actual or threatened death or severe injury. These experiences are one of the symptoms designated in the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. So what is a flashback like? I once spoke at a victim of violence conference and met another presenter who was on a panel with me. He had been a Marine Corps captain in Vietnam who lived through some extremely traumatic events. He told how he had gone to one of the Vietnam war movies that depicted an enemy ambush in a rice field. As he watched the movie, he became increasingly aware of how similar the situation was to what he had lived. So, his heart rate increased, his breathing became shallow, his body became tense, and at some point, he was no longer watching the movie, he was reliving his experience years earlier in Vietnam. He felt his feet sinking into the mud, and the sounds and images of the battle flooded his consciousness. After a few minutes in a state of panic he fled the movie theater and found himself standing in the lobby confused, distressed, and swept away by powerful emotions he didn't now how to manage. This is a great example of how powerful flashback experiences can be. They involve a temporary loss of control over mind and emotions. Time, memory and reality collide in a terrifying and mystifying nightmare. It is often described as the feeling of going crazy.

Useful Tools for Coping with Flashbacks

One of the most useful things for people who have flashbacks from their traumatic car accident, is knowledge and awareness.

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***Coping with Flashbacks & PTSD
Resulting From An Auto Crash***

By knowing flashbacks are common and normal reactions, it is profoundly reassuring for the survivor to know they are indeed not crazy. There are the minds way of attempting to process an overwhelmingly traumatic event.

Often survivors are fearful of being in vehicles again after crashes and avoid vehicle travel when possible. The range of reactions vary from feeling a little tense to full-blown panic attacks which are immobilizing. I recommend survivors have a driver's rehabilitation evaluation to determine how the trauma has impacted their ability to safely function on the highway and to receive support and instruction. Until functionality is determined, it is wise to avoid or limit driving to assure safety.

Flashbacks and nightmares go hand in hand, and are often important topics to process in psychotherapy. There is also an approach called EMDR which stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing which can be useful in addressing the problem of flashbacks. Coping with Flashbacks can be done.

Some survivors find medications helpful. I believe the endocrine approach practiced by Dr. Gordon and others is very promising, but is unfamiliar to many medical professionals. One thing for certain, is if you are a survivor coping with flashbacks, it is helpful to be able to process this with a supportive professional who understands the dynamics.

In my clinical experience, flashbacks and nightmares of the crash subside with time, however can be re-triggered. They are perhaps an adaptive, survival mechanism our minds and bodies have developed to keep us safe, a releasing of fight, flight, freeze automatic responding encoded into our souls from violently destructive forces. As with most things psychological, we must make friends with the dark places and learn to be curious about them. By doing so we gain wisdom, and integrate them into the wholeness that we are.

For more information about Dr. Zender please visit: <https://drjameszender.com/>

Meet Our New Mascot!

**Survivor
Davis
Spotlight**

The Crash Support Network is excited to welcome our New Mascot, "Survivor Davis" to our Crash Support Network Family!

We welcome you to follow his journey with us where you will find him sharing many tips and advice for crash survivors as well as some fun-filled adventures.

Most of his time will be spent on Instagram but don't be surprised to see him making special appearances on our Facebook Page & Twitter as well!

Don't miss out and follow his adventures at: www.instagram.com/crashsupportnetwork

Did I mention that Survivor Davis also comes with a removable inner heat pack that can be warmed in the microwave or cooled in the freezer? This heat pack promotes relaxation and provides natural relief from aches, pains and stress which is a great for a crash survivor!



Are Drivers Running STOP Signs in Your Community?

From the Crash Survivor Blog

Have you seen drivers running STOP signs? When STOP Signs are misplaced they can create a dangerous situation. As we embrace summer in the small town that I live in, people are getting out of their homes to exercise and I have recognized a significant increase of more and more pedestrians on the road in our community. Whether people are walking, jogging or bicycling, everyone seems to be out more than ever as we face these challenging times.

Something else I have noticed is the number of drivers that continuously go through a three-way stop sign that is right outside of our house. I remember like it was yesterday when a gentleman and his wife knocked on our door to introduce themselves alerting us that he was running for Council. At that particular time, we mentioned to him that there were concerns about that same stop sign. Fast forward six years and although there has been police presence over the last few years, unfortunately there has never been a permanent solution to solve resident's concerns about that particular stop sign.

This spring, we have not only noticed a significant increase in traffic but it is actually quite "jaw dropping" to witness the amount of drivers running these stop signs on a daily basis. It is literally happening all day and everyday. I cannot begin to tell you how unsettling it is to watch drivers pay absolutely no attention to the safety of our community and it how is adds undue stress and unnecessary triggers to my well being as I am a survivor of a horrific motor vehicle crash caused by a distracted driver.

Municipalities Are Responsible to Provide Safe Crossing

As I cannot in good conscience stand by and witness what could potentially be a tragic incident waiting to happen, I decided to connect with the police once again. A police officer returned my call and spoke with me directly and understood my concerns. He also took the time to come to the area in question and agreed with me that there is clearly a problem with the stop signs and thought they could easily be fixed. He also mentioned it would most likely be a council issue. In order to assist in providing safe crossing to pedestrians, municipalities are required to build infrastructure that allows them to do so. Not only should they assist in allowing all individuals to safely cross, they must pay particular attention to areas where children play and the elderly live. This is expected and it is important.

STOP signs are one of the most valuable, low cost, and effective traffic control devices when used at the right location and under the right conditions. The purpose of STOP signs are clearly to assign right-of-ways between vehicles approaching an intersection from different directions. STOP signs require the driver to STOP the vehicle before entering the intersection, yield to any traffic in or approaching the intersection and then proceed when it is SAFE to do so. When misused, STOP signs can create an inconvenient and even dangerous situation for motorists and pedestrians which is exactly what we have been experiencing in our community.

Our Councillor is very receptive in taking phone calls and although we are facing challenging times, I recently reached out to him sharing my concerns once again and started to push the issue as we have been waiting for over six years for some kind of solution. In speaking with him, I was also surprised to find out that he has lived here for 25 years and that there has always been an issue with those stop signs. Approximately two years ago, our council started to allow "short term rentals" in our community and we also offer a public beach that a significant amount of people have recently discovered. When you add guests together with permanent residents, this stop sign is becoming more and more hazardous and there needs to be a permanent solution.

Why Are Drivers Running the Stop Signs?

Recently, I have been watching the Council Virtual Zoom Meetings as I was given "heads up" by our Councillor that he was going to address the stop sign issue because he happened to be driving in the area and witnessed a Transport Truck "blowing right through the stop sign doing about 60-70 km/hr" and it was pointed out that this same driver had been doing this for days and his reasoning was that he didn't see the stop sign. Our Councillor mentioned to me that if there had been another driver or a pedestrian on the road at that particular time, they would have been completely "wiped out" and there were no repercussions to the driver in question that works in our community. At the Council meeting, the Mayor of our Town admitted that he, too, does not understand what is was wrong with the stop sign and admitted that in the past he has almost driven right through this stop sign as well and suggested taking two of the stop signs out. I was also shocked to hear him refer to this stop sign outside of our house as "death corner."

There didn't seem to be any discussion about another permanent solution such as speed bumps being installed or even a flashing light and council came to the agreement that there should be "bigger stop signs" as they are convinced that drivers simply do not see these stop signs. I can personally tell you that when there is police presence in the area, each and every driver miraculously stops and is aware that they are approaching a stop sign, however, I will take this as a step to move forward in trying to rectify the situation and that council is listening. I was informed that it will take 4-6 weeks for this to happen and the best I can do is keep my fingers crossed that no one gets seriously or fatally injured while we patiently wait.

I Want Our Community to be Safe

Just yesterday, I witnessed three ATV's drive right through the stop sign and none of them were wearing helmets

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To My Former Self...

Submitted by Susan, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Chicago, Illinois

Survivor
Advice

A Member of Our Online Support Group sends a little support to her former self and to possibly to help another crash survivor move forward.

Thank you Susan!

Dear Old Self:

I know you're in a lot of pain right now, and you're scared, shocked, in denial and not sure how you will get out of this but you will.

When you think you won't be able to work, it works out and you will heal.

When you think you won't be able to get through a weekend due to pain, you will and the right person will help. When you think you will never walk stairs again or walk far, you will.

When you give up your gym membership because it's been so long, you will get it back.

When people discriminate against you for your invisible disability and you're too vulnerable to stand up for yourself, you will rise again.

When you feel so weak like you're 90, you'll go back to your age again.

When you think you have no future, you will have a more understanding attitude toward others because you understand what it's like.

When you never want to get in a car again because of what happened to you, you will and you will be confident.



When you get negative because you don't understand how it will turn out, time will always heal you as the body heals well.

When you get flare ups and you think of the old times in a negative way and get scared, you didn't go back, your body just gets stronger every year.

My journey was four years ago. I was in so much pain. I couldn't do stairs, couldn't walk and was so scared. I didn't know my future and my back was awful but I gained it all back.

I am a gym member again, I'm able to carry my dog. I jog and the people who discriminated against me, I smile past them and watch them stare as I walk down to the train.

For my old self, I love you, I know you suffered and were SO scared of the pain and how it was going to turn out. Your body healed and every year you became more of your old self.

Go drive, go run, go do stairs. Live! Go see the people that matter. Never forget how hard this was and never take it for granted.

Old Self:

I wish you knew this information and you didn't have to suffer so badly. I wish you were able to just have a peaceful mind, rest, watch Netflix, heal and not worry. It's ok, you became stronger and are helping others now. I know they will heal too..... xo

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Are Drivers Running STOP Signs in Your Community?

as well as a pontoon boat being hauled on a trailer with 4-5 people in the boat while in transit speeding down a bridge and we were almost hit three times last summer just trying to get out of our own driveway. When I saw these reckless drivers, I found myself taking a deep breath and thinking..."if they only knew what recovery is like when they are in a motor vehicle crash." I have also recently been told by a member of our council that they have no control over poor drivers and the decisions they make. And that neither council, the Mayor or our paid by-law enforcement officers have any authority with this issue and that if I continue to see reckless drivers running these stop signs, that I should continue to call the police. If I did that, I would literally be calling the police everyday and although I support police presence, I am more interested in a permanent solution. It's all about community safety.

I cannot begin to tell you how many of our members of our [Online Support Group](#) have had their lives permanently changed in a matter of seconds due to a driver running a stop sign and what their recovery was like and continues to be. If you notice that there is an issue with road safety in your community, it is important to connect with your local Councillor and/or Mayor to share your concerns. Connect with neighbors to see if they also notice it and want to get involved. Don't be afraid to connect with Council and keep pushing them as municipalities have the responsibility to keep our communities safe and you could stop a potential tragedy from taking place.

Dawne McKay is a survivor of a horrific motor vehicle crash that changed her life forever. Her advocacy continued in 2018 as she became a Crash Survivor Blogger.



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