

(Podcast Intro)

Welcome to *More Than a Mind* — a podcast for anyone navigating life after a brain injury... or simply trying to understand what it means to lose part of yourself — and find something new in the process.

(Season Intro)

Welcome to Season One, *“The Collision and the Climb”*, where Cathy shares the raw aftermath of a traumatic brain injury — from the day of impact to the emotional and cognitive climb that followed. It’s a beginning, not just of recovery, but of redefinition.

(Episode Intro)

Now... let’s dive in. Cathy, take us back to that day and any details if you remember the moment of your injury. Walk us through the moment your brain — and your life — changed.

[Cathy]

Okay, so I’ve struggled with my memory actually since the accident and initially this question used to make me cry and used to be extremely challenging for me to answer. There’s PTSD now in trying to relive out the incident and also real time processing of trying to access my brain for memories that were never clear and remain foggy until this day. But I’ve progressed to the point where I figured out it’s easiest for me to explain through different layers so I’ll unpack it through accepted snippets of scenes, in this way it’s easier to transfer the information more cohesively. First let’s start with the bike and the bike ride.

It was my 2nd day owning this bike that my beloved father helped me to pick out as a new commuter option since I complained to him about the Denver parking issues where I lived. I had just moved into the city, the heart of Denver, and if anyone knows downtown anywhere, it’s always an extreme hassle to find parking. Even when you live there. So I was taking a joy ride, my 2nd ride ever, on this brand new e-bike to test out the controls and learn to create my new comfort zone to get to work. The air was cool, fresh, and just perfect. I had ridden the bike actually the night before to a music concert downtown with my really close friends. So this is not even 24 hours later, I have a snapshot of my face the night before and then a direct comparison to the morning after. The road in which I was riding to work was also another way for me to map out the routes that would allow permissible access to pedestrians and plenty of spacious sidewalks. However, recall this is only my 2nd day and this is all so very new to me. So I reached a point where the sidewalk starts to diminish and I check for a convergence point. There are 4 car lanes on my left, the sidewalk that is on my right, ends to merge into the farthest car lane on my left. I figure I just stay on the farthest right until I find a sidewalk.

This is it. This is the moment where I relive the awakening scene of the accident. In the next moment of my memory, I woke up with my left cheek pressed against the pavement and I opened my eyes. So my first thought was “Why is my face on the ground?”

[Host]

That is odd... Do you think your brain was just foggy and maybe this might have been some physical illusion that your brain was trying to register? how long do you think it took or how much time had passed, if you can recall?

[Cathy]

I don't know how many blinks it took for that to register until I noticed the next strange thing - rocks. In my mouth. My brain started layering in awareness, like levels of consciousness stacking up. So then I resorted to attempting to move. And the first thing that physically I tried to move was my mouth. Somehow I had gained consciousness of the graininess and the rocks inside of my mouth. And even more confusion settled in, because the original first question as to why my face was on the ground, wasn't answered yet. So now a second question arose and as I began to try to move my jaw throughout the blinks of consciousness, I realized that maybe I should get up and try to assess the situation, to figure out how to answer my questions. And then the third realization came in of if I were to attempt to try to move my body in this moment, why is it that I feel a giant, enormous weight that is beyond my normal weight of my body, and that's when the third level of consciousness hit my Brain, my bike that is nearly over 90 pounds. Was sitting on my neck and my back, and my body was in a contorted position where, like I mentioned, my left cheek was on the asphalt, and my left arm and hand were slightly very relaxed, hanging on the left side a jarred out, and I could not feel my legs, and once I realized the weight that was being added on to my normal body weight, I still proceeded to think in a normal fashion that I probably just should get up. So I mustered up, folding my arms inside to bring them under my body, to push my upper torso up above the ground, and then the fourth level of consciousness arose at that moment. Something was wrong. Something was very wrong. I couldn't exactly make out what the problem was, but I knew that there was a problem, and it was a problem I didn't understand, and although in the moment, I didn't panic. However, I do believe my fight or flight system might have kicked in, because the only next thought in my brain that repeatedly started to trigger my mind in about I don't know how many milliseconds over and over again in frequency was that I needed to go find someone, go get help, get up, and as I made my way to try and follow these instructions that my brain incessantly could not stop to think, I managed to lift my head up and immediately saw a door. This door was directly across the path in front of me. So I managed to move my body, because I was determined that I had to get to that door, and I physically crawled over to the door, and as I mentioned, I couldn't feel my legs. I also couldn't feel anything else in my body. I just knew that I had lifted more than my body's weight above the ground, and something was wrong, and I needed to find help to figure it out.

[Host]

So then what happened next? Did you find help? What's the next scene or picture that your mind remembers?

[Cathy]

Now we enter the scene where there are other people and not just me processing the entirety of the event. As I approached the door that I had my mind set on achieving, I was encountered by someone who opened the door, and immediately had an expression on their face as if they saw a ghost, and hence

my fifth level of consciousness hit that I might have not looked normal. I'm not sure what my presentation was and what my present state was physically, but maybe it wasn't normal? And so my brain immediately started to overcompensate, and the next thing that proceeded to come out of my mouth was, "may I use the restroom?" And the ghost-like look on their face did not change, but the expression heightened ever more urgently, and somehow they attempted to mask their response of "Yes, of course". And as soon as I tried to walk to the bathroom, I blacked out again, and I found myself waking up to a group of women surrounding me, asking me if I'm okay. And I said, "Yes, of course. Why wouldn't I be?" and I asked, "May I use your restroom" Incoherent that I was already there, in the restroom laying on the ground on my back looking up at the staring faces peering above my body.

In my mind, I tried to walk to the restroom. Of course, physically, I could not, and I was dragged to one of the stalls. And as soon as I laid down in the restroom, and I had a moment alone because of the group, I immediately heard that they were going to call an ambulance. And obviously there was quite a rush happening. So I could only remember the audio in those details at the moment, but I remember being in the restroom, laying down and waking up, and I tried. When I found a moment of solitude, I tried to get up because I thought to myself, it can't be that bad. There's nothing wrong with me. Denial, I think must have hit at that moment. I'm not sure why, if the flight or fight system does that to your nervous system automatically. However, I tried to get up and stand up, and as soon as I successfully did that, I was immediately shocked by what I was presented with, because as soon as I stood up, I was facing the mirror in the bathroom, and the mirror presented to me now, the answer as to why the person that greeted me at the door had such a ghost, like freakish impression on their face,

I looked like a bloody monster, and I wasn't aware of it, and as I began to touch different parts of my face, because the next level of confusion hit at that moment, why couldn't I feel it? Why couldn't I feel the pain from the bloodiness that I saw in the mirror?

It, and I was again confused, and somehow my head began to spin and I got dizzy, so I decided to sit back down. And thought, maybe it's not so bad that they're sending help. Maybe I'm not okay. Question mark, and as I began to sit down, in that moment, all of whatever felt like five seconds. My head got a rush of pounding, is what I will describe it as, and it felt like someone had grabbed my head instantly in that moment and was throwing my head against the wall and bashing my skull, and I began to scream profusely at the top of my lungs, and that continued until the paramedics arrived and started to ask me very odd questions. I honestly do not remember the questions, but I remember that they were odd, and I remember feeling extremely irritated in the moment because they were asking me odd questions. And I started to question my insanity internally, and wondered why were they asking me these awkward questions? Eventually, I stopped yelling, I stopped being confused, and I lay down in the stretcher, and I wanted to sleep. I remember feeling a wave of just immense tiredness over my entire body, and it felt like I was going to black out again. But the paramedic wouldn't let me. He told me that I shouldn't and that I should keep trying to focus on him, and so I did that. I followed all the instructions that I could for what I could remember. And eventually I ended up in the ER, the emergency room of the Aurora Medical Center.

[Host]

“Wow. Thank you for sharing such a vulnerable and tumultuous time for you. So now, you’re in the ER. What was your initial diagnosis and how did you feel when you first heard it?”

[Cathy]

To be honest, I can’t really recall in the ER what my initial diagnosis was. All I remember was the ER doctor’s frequency in telling me, repeatedly, that “you’re lucky to be alive! You should’ve been wearing a helmet! You’re a walking miracle!”. It wasn’t instant that I came to the translation of his statements: that I almost died and only over time, working with all the medical specialist: the dentist, my general physician, the neurologist, the physical therapist, the neuro-optometrist, the cognitive therapist, my emotional counselor, medical aestheticians, and last but not least my spiritual therapist, that I better understood my condition and all the effects of my sustained injuries. Those injuries included 4 shattered teeth, a sprain jaw, sprained left wrist, road rash from my face down to my ankle, and a 4th degree burn on my left palm that pulled my skin off completely, a traumatic brain injury, and a shattered identity.

(Episode Outro)

[Host]

There it is — the moment when everything begins to surface. The truth is, sometimes we don’t understand the weight of what we’ve been through until much later... when we’ve had time, support, and space to name it. Cathy’s story doesn’t end in that emergency room — it only starts there. The real work began in the quiet, painful, and sometimes sacred spaces of healing. And to the care team — the dentist, the neurologist, the therapists, the emotional counselors, the healers, and especially those who tended to her spirit — Cathy wants to say thank you. Your time, attention, and patience made this journey possible. And above all else, Cathy gives glory to God — the One who sustained her breath, her spirit, and her second chance. This season is about more than injuries. It’s about identity. And next time, we’ll explore something so many brain injury survivors face in silence: the invisibility of trauma — and what it means to feel misunderstood, even by the people who love you most. If this story stirred something in you, you’re not alone. We hope you’ll join us again. Until next time — take care of your body, protect your mind, and give your spirit space to breathe.