

Journeys through EXPAND

Providing Affordable Fitness, Leisure and Cultural Arts Programs for
Adults with Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and other similar
Neurological Conditions.



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JoAnn Carroll's Journey with a Brain Injury—by Cory Lasher, CTRS

For those of you who have acquired a brain injury, you may already know that your chances for acquiring another one are very high. In fact, the majority of individuals that I know through the Journeys program have acquired two to four brain injuries in their lifetime. JoAnn Carroll is one of those people. I chose to write about Jo's experience because Jo has a beautiful spirit that does not give up, and no matter how hard life may seem, she can find the best in everything. So, here is Jo's Story and what has helped her get through three brain injuries.

Jo's first brain injury, in 2001, happened during a ice storm. As she stepped off a porch, she slipped and hit the back of her head. Prior to this accident, Jo worked two jobs; six hours as a Special Education Paraprofessional and the other as a Residential Coach for adults with developmental disabilities. After her accident, she had a hard time with word finding, depth perception and executive functioning. Due to her limitations, Jo could not drive and had to give up her job as a residential coach. For many years, Jo could only work a few hours a day as she kept her job as a Para, but she had no energy left over to do anything else. Therefore, she would just get home and crash on her coach. Fatigue has been the most serious and lasting issue on this entire journey. When Jo was able to drive again, she took a job as a Behavioral Coach but then suffered another concussion at work in 2004. Once again she found herself back at Mapleton, and this is where she learned about Journeys. Mapleton had told Jo that she gained a significant amount of weight since her first brain injury and warned that all patients who have sustained a TBI are at risk for sedentary lifestyle's and secondary health consequences, but she did not "heed that warning". It was not until 2012 that she finally took a fitness class through Journeys with a certified fitness instructor.

Offered by the City of Boulder Parks and Recreation Department
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JoAnn's Journey Continued

Through Journeys and the help of a good nutritionist she was able to lose weight which meant she had more energy and was able to get off the couch. Through this experience, she gained more confidence about herself and has been able to keep her weight off. Since then, Jo has taken a number of classes through Journeys including golf, yoga, community outings, hula hooping and the Ageless Grace Program. When asked about these classes, Jo states “I could feel safe to recognize and acknowledge my deficits in a caring, supportive and accepting environment. I learned so much from others who have had a similar experience and these classes have been able to build up my self confidence.”

In April of 2014, Jo received her third brain injury while driving to the Journeys Hula Hooping class. Jo was struck by a driver that had run a red light while she was turning left on a green light. Her world had changed once again! This last brain injury has been more severe as Jo struggles with aphasia, dysarthria, anxiety, severe exhaustion, vertigo, balance and rashes. I heard that when Jo became conscience after her car accident, her first words were “is my hula hoop okay and I need to let Cory know why I did not show up to hooping class”. Jo and I loved this class so much we had the instructor make us our own personal hoops.

Jo states that all three of her injuries brought different struggles and meaning to her life. However, this last one really had rocked her world as well as her family and friends. So what has helped Jo get through all of this? Here are some inspiring words directly from Jo that she would like to share.

- Let go of ego and be honest with yourself! Don't push yourself and know your limitations.
- It's okay to put yourself first. Jo used the metaphor regarding oxygen on an airplane. They teach you to put the mask on yourself first, then to help the person next to you.
- Do not avoid replacing your old skills and habits with new skills and habits even if it makes you feel vulnerable.
- Play brain games which can be found on apps on your phone or computer.
- It's important to breathe, breathe, and breathe when you fall short of a task. Accept where you are and that you are ahead of where you would be if you did not bother to do the work.
- I like to make cards to untangle the knots of creativity that used to flow with such delight. It is my own kind of art therapy with the bonus of letting family and friends know that I am thinking of them with love and gratitude for their deep reservoir of hope, kindness and support.

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- Boulder County Area Agency on Aging offers some great classes. The first is “Matter of Balance”, in where you learn to manage risk of falling, reduce fear of falling and strengthen your body; and a “Be well” class that teaches techniques to help change your perspective and manage your chronic condition. They also make these classes available to younger residents and their caregivers with disabilities. The classes are free and donations are encouraged and appreciated. For more information you can call 303-441-3599 or email: mpruitt@bouldercounty.org.
 - It’s important to keep your mind open to grow and to learn. However, it’s important to make sure that it will be appropriate for where your energy level is at this time in your life and not to take energy away from the homework necessary to make progress in your therapy.
 - Acupuncture has helped my mind and body to reconnect.
 - Be mindful of your nutrition as I am able to manage pain through eliminating certain foods.

Jo states regarding this most recent brain injury that “I had months of self reflection, the good, the bad, and the ugly and found appreciation, honesty, acceptance and progression after questioning past struggles, intentions, and needless drama. I had to sit in a quiet house and that forced me to take the time to look inward for a better tomorrow. I raised my consciousness. Everyone’s battle is more complicated than it appears, only your perspective can make it a struggle or an opportunity.” A quote that Jo reflects on during her toughest days that wills her to adjust to what has changed and move on is “In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned in life: it goes on.” – Robert Frost.



Above is Jo and the group who went on an excursion to the mountains to do the George Town Loop. It was a beautiful day to take in some landscape and breathe in the fresh mountain air. We hope to see you on our next outing with Journeys.