

Completing My Education After My Traumatic Brain Injury

Source: BrainLine.org (Produced by Victoria Youcha and Brian King)

Video Link: <http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=2389>

Kelli Gary: I tried to go back to being in ROTC. I was medically discharged from the military, so I didn't go back to my army setting. But then I also tried to get back into the same classes that I -- was about to continue in my junior year because I basically didn't miss any classes because I was basically at the end of my sophomore year when I had the accident. So I just like a semester behind trying to jump back into those same classes that I was scheduled to take in the semester. And I couldn't do it. I couldn't focus. I could not follow the lectures. I could not understand the material. And this is all the things that the neuropsychologist told my mother that would happen to me. And she tried to tell me but I wouldn't listen. You know, I was emotionally unstable. I had anger problems. I was still angry and didn't really realize it. Thought I was okay because I had gotten so much better physically. I, you know, so when I came back home and just sat back for a couple of months and had a chance at least to sit back and think, okay, you can no longer do this, what can you do? So I went back to school, and I started slow.

I took basic remedial classes just to get me in the -- just to get me going back to school getting used to going back to school again taking a class here or there, remedial reading, remedial math, remedial vocabulary, one speech class. And then as I was learning to learn how to study. I was taking study skills classes. Things that I thought I never had to take because I had moved beyond those things.

It was also a hit to my ego as well because I never considered myself a lower level student. I was always a high-achieving student. But I did. I started back slow. I started to seek out some resources not many but at least I went to the Department of Disabilities for my school and, you know, saw how I could integrate into the school that way. After about being in school for a year, I was able, instead of taking one class here or there, I was able to take maybe take two or three and at the same time I was exploring different options because I know I did not want to go back -- I couldn't go back into the military. I didn't no longer wanted to be a business major which was my major aside military science. So I looked at other options that was at the school near my home. It was a commuter school, so I didn't have to stay on campus. I could stay at home and commute to school. That was very helpful because I had the supervision of my mother.

I decided, -looked at all the options and then I looked at occupational therapy because I knew about the field because I had it. I went to speak to some former occupational therapists that were part of my care. And I spoke to my neurologist who actually advised me against it, but I did speak to him. And I decided that I would just take a few classes at a while until I could build up. And so that's what basically led me back -- that led me and then I continued to study hard and take more classes until I was taking a full caseload. I got accepted into the Occupational Therapy Program at the school and went on from there.

Both of the two years that I had completed before the injury it took me six and a half years to finish. 'Cause I basically -- when I came back I had to start all over again. So I mean, starting from remedial classes and just taking one or two classes a year but because luckily, because I already had two years and a lot of my prerequisites, general English, general math was already taken and I had already passed those classes, those credits transferred. So besides the fact that I had switched majors from a business major to a science major and I had more classes related to occupational therapy to take, I didn't have to take any other prerequisites and the other things that I took was for my own edification, you know, to build up my reading skill or to build up my math skill.