

Kelli Gary: Living With Traumatic Brain Injury

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Video Link: <http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=2395>

Kelli Gary: I actually sustained a brain injury in August of 1990 while I was a sophomore in college in Florida at Florida A&M University. I was pursuing a career in military science. I was in the United States Army Reserve. I had been in for one year, and I was in ROTC training to be a commissioned officer. When I was going to visit a friend long distance over a summer break and I fell asleep at the wheel and had a severe car accident and severe brain injury. While I remained in the hospital for over four months of inpatient care, initially in the state where the accident occurred, but then I actually was in a coma for two weeks. But then as I started to regain consciousness my family AIRVAC'd me back to the hospital in my hometown. My mother actually was a nurse. So I went back to the hospital where she worked so she could go back to work but yet still keep an eye on me.

I received, while I was there, I received occupational, physical, speech therapy, cognitive therapy, the whole gamut, neuropsychology, and I remained at the inpatient care for basically about three, three and a half months. When I was discharged from that facility, I continued with intensive cognitive rehab for two months. So altogether I had approximately about six months of care in a hospital setting or a full-time outpatient setting. I then basically was released home and, you know, with not much care after that. They did recommend that I have psychotherapy, but I refused to have it. And my only goal was to get a sense of normalcy and to return back to school because that's all I knew. I was a student. I didn't know anything else. And I pushed and I pushed to go back to school. My mother and my neuropsychologist recommended that I delay that. I did not listen, and I threatened my mother that I would hitchhike and go back to school if she didn't take me back. So she consulted with my doctors and they said let her go. She'll realize soon that she can't do it. And they -- I went back and within two months time I was begging to come home.

I flunked out of all my classes. I could not keep up with my ROTC classmates. I was losing all my friends. I was endangering my roommate who I lived with off campus. I couldn't -- I no longer had any transportation. It was horrible and so I returned home and started to see how I could, you know, what I could do and what new goals that I could, you know, where could I go from here. I kind of was in limbo for about a good three or four months trying to get myself together, wallowing in my self-pity, you know, depressed just laying at home not really doing much, trying to stay out of trouble but, you know, just really not having anything to do or wanting to do anything. Then I decided that I needed to go back and pursue something at school.

I needed to go back to an educational setting. But I had to do it not the same way that I tried to do it before. I didn't actually use a lot of resources. There were resources given to my mother, but I thought I could do it on my own. So life at school was pretty difficult for me because I didn't have any help. It was hard for me, but I guess I just had an inner drive and a will to want to succeed. And so I continued, you know, persevered and I stuck through it. But my life would have been so much easier if I would have used the resources that my school had and that I might have been able -- I might have knew about if I would have read the material that was given to my mother.