Finding Purpose and Not Giving Up After Brain Injury with Craig J. Phillips

2025 Winter BrainStorm Event Transcript

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Finding purpose and not giving up after brain injury, presented by Craig J. Phillips on February 27th, 2025. Craig J. Phillips is a rehabilitation counselor, motivational speaker, author, and TBI advocate. Join us as we delve into the remarkable story of Craig J. Phillips and the powerful impact he continues to make. Through his articles, videos, and captivating keynote presentations, Craig shares his profound wisdom with the world. This presentation is sponsored by the Northern New Jersey Traumatic Brain Injury System and Kessler Foundation.

JEANNE LENGENFELDER: 00:31

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our quarterly Virtual Speaker Series, Winter Brainstorm. This series is sponsored by Kessler Foundation as part of our TBI Model System grant, which is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. It's now my pleasure to introduce Craig Phillips, who will be presenting today, Finding Purpose After Brain Injury and Not Giving Up. Craig sustained his brain injury because of a motor vehicle accident in 1967 when he was 10 years old. He would go on and obtain his undergraduate degree in 10 years and his master's degree in 3 and a half years. After all that time and two Department of Vocational Rehabilitation evaluations, he was determined to be unemployable. Craig spent 7 years searching for a way to use his gifts, talents, and abilities. He then created his website, Second Chance to Live, and that was 18 years ago. Craig's focus is to encourage a holistic approach - mind, body, spirit, soul, and emotions - to ongoing brain injury recovery. To date, Craig has written over 2,000 articles, has created over 400 video presentations. He's conducted 30 keynote presentations, has written 19 e-books and 22 posters. All his work has been designed to encourage hope in individuals living with brain injuries. Thank you, Craig, for being here with us today.

CRAIG J. PHILLIPS: 02:21

Thank you so much for having me, Jeannie and Erica and Serena. It's really an honor to be able to do this, to share my experience with you all because the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. And in my experience, that has just taken what it's taken, as Jeannie alluded to and shared. This is the presentation that I created. So what I'm going to go through is briefly, I'll just go-- well, not briefly, but hopefully I'll just go through quickly on is my journey and process that Jeannie alluded to, just so that you have a little understanding into my background in a little more detail. So my car accident happened in 1967. I have right frontal lobe damage, severe brain bruising, brain stem [involvement?]. I remained in a coma for three weeks. I had a fractured left femur. I was in traction for six to seven weeks, and then they put me in a full-body or spica cast, which I remained in for five to six months. I was released from the hospital, and I was tutored at home in the fifth grade while I was still in a spica cast. Went to physical therapy several times, but then I was essentially on my own. So I learned how to walk again. My mom encouraged me using a baby butler at the time to kind of be a walker because this happened in 1967. By the way, I'll be 68 in May. So I've been down the road 57-plus years down the road. So it's really important not to compare my journey with your journey because we're all on a different path at different times. So just be encouraged to run your own race. And that's what I'm going to do, is encourage you to do that.

PHILLIPS: 04:14 So I had several EEGs and cognitive and psychosocial testing. The results were shared with my mom, but not with me-- my mom and dad, but not with me. So I wouldn't find out about the effects of my brain injury until I was about 39 years or so. So consequently, I ran into a lot of different walls along the way. So once my external wounds healed, I looked normal. So I was mainstreamed back into elementary school in the sixth grade. I graduated on time with my high school class. And then I went to the University of Arizona, where I studied geology and physical education. Then I transferred to a community college. I entered into a nursing assistant program, and then I got into an LPN program. And six to seven weeks before I was going to graduate, they asked me to leave the program because I was having a difficult time learning things. Sequencing, I had a difficult time with sequences because of the deficits that I had. So I was transferred to Oral Roberts University. And I had difficulties there, and my parents were asked to come over from El Paso, where they lived at the time, to be able to have a meeting with the department chair. I don't know exactly what went on in that, but the long and the short of it is I was able to graduate.

PHILLIPS: 05:49 I applied to a seminary. I was on probation. I didn't know about that. And I was having difficulties in the day term. And I asked to meet with the department chair at the seminary, and they didn't admit me to the second year. As a result, they wanted me to go through counseling for a year. And so basically, I just didn't feel like I wanted to continue on that path because I didn't feel like I wanted to continue in seminary. So I went to graduate school at the University of Kentucky. And what had happened there is that I had some problems with working at a mental health hospital, working with an individual, and writing IWRPs, which are individualized written rehabilitation plans. I had a difficult time writing notes, and as a result, I was no longer able to continue with that practicum. Met with the graduate school director of the rehabilitation counseling program that I was in. And he said that he would give me one more opportunity to do another practicum. If I did well in that, he would allow me to graduate. He would allow me to continue on. If I didn't do well in that, he would ask me to leave the program. So I had a very, very kind supervisor. I worked at a supported workshop network helping people with different types of disabilities.

PHILLIPS: 07:31 And then what happened is that I had some difficulties working in an internship. And as a result, the director of the program met with me and said he didn't know whether he would allow me to graduate with my master's degree. And then I had to show up an hour before the graduation to find out whether he would allow me to graduate or not. Well, he allowed me to graduate, and I obtained my credentials as a CRC at the time, a certified rehab counselor. So I found out that North Carolina was rehabfriendly. And as a result, I was able to send up resumes and cover letters, and I was recruited by an insurance company to do workers' comp rehab. And four months after I got hired, he told me he no longer needed my services. So for many years, I felt like I was all dressed up with nowhere to go, although I diligently applied myself.

PHILLIPS: 08:36 So in Florida, whilst working as a voc rehab counselor, I disclosed to my supervisor that I was having difficulty and that I had had a brain injury when I was 10 years old. And she told that to her supervisor, which the manager told to the district supervisor, who met with me, and they made me a client while I was still a counselor. So a couple months later, they fired me as a counselor, and because of a job placement that didn't work out, they terminated me as a client. So when I moved to North Carolina, and I got fired by the job with the workers' comp, I tried to get other jobs, but it didn't work out. And then I reapplied for SSDI the third time. I was denied twice in Florida. And so I applied for services with the Voc Rehab. And after the evaluation process, they deemed me to be unemployable.

PHILLIPS: 09:44 So for many years, I felt like I was all dressed up with nowhere to go because I diligently attempted to achieve things through 10 years of undergraduate and 3 and a half years of graduate school. And I'm a very hardworking individual. I have a good work ethic. But due to the disabilities that I have or the deficits, I just don't have real good people skills, apparently. I have a hard time reading social nuances and non-verbal cues. And because I'm very focused, it's good to accomplish things, which I've been very blessed to be able to do, but it's not so good with relationships because I have tendency to be dogged in what [I'm about?] like a dog with a bone of sorts. So I just realized that it's better for me to have limited interactions with people. So that's worked out for me. So for many years, I beat up on myself because I wasn't able to work.

PHILLIPS: 10:53 There's a quote that I share. I like quotes. I share a lot of quotes in a lot of my presentations. And one particular quote I attribute to Albert Einstein, he says, "Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." Again, everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. So for many years, I felt like-- not that I was stupid, but there was something wrong because I couldn't climb the tree, traditional employment. But, and as Jeannie alluded, seven years after I started receiving SSDI, I found out that I could use my gifts, talents, and abilities through a blog. And I created Second Chance to Live on February 6th, 2007, and I began on the journey. And now what I'll do is I'll start to share some things that helped me that I learned as a result of my journey up to the point that I shared with you. So when I reached a point in my life-- and the reason why I'm showing a PDF file is to keep me on point, it's also because we learn in different ways. Some people learn visually, some people auditorially, and other people kinesthetically or doing. And I learn by a compilation of those things. So I present and go through the presentation, as I said, to keep me on point the best I can, and also just to provide the opportunity for people to read along with me.

PHILLIPS: 12:35 And I didn't share this. With some back pay, I got a computer. I wrote poems, an autobiography, and a book, and then started my blog, as I shared. So what helped me when I reached a point in my life that I could no longer deny the impact of my open skull fracture and traumatic brain injury, I began to grieve. I realized that I needed to stop defending the denial that kept me trapped, trapped defending, answering, and explaining what I could not change. The grieving process involved confronting my denial, being angry about what I couldn't change, trying to change what I couldn't change, and being depressed about what I couldn't change. Grieving the impact of my brain injury and invisible disability gave me the ability to accept what I could not change, to realize that I could use the power of choice. And it's really important for us as individuals living with brain injuries to realize that we have choices, that even though we may not be able to do certain things, we're able to do other things. And I'll talk about this as I go along. But I believe a brain injury is like being on a railroad track. We're traveling down this track, and we come up against a brain injury. And I liken the brain injury to a switch on the railroad of life that points us off into a different direction. And although the scenery per se is very strange and different after we have a brain injury, the good thing is we can learn how to use our gifts, talents, and abilities in ways that will work for us. And that's what I've done in my life.

PHILLIPS: 14:14 And I'm a student of martial arts. I've been training in the different martial arts for about 26 years. And my sensei's original instructor-- his original instructor is Bruce Lee. And Bruce Lee's philosophy of Jeet Kune Do was to research your own experience, absorb what is useful, reject what is useless, and add specifically your own creation. So what's really important is realize things are not going to work for us, other things. So it's just been a trial-and-error process for me as a martial artist, and then also in my journey of living with a brain injury, as I shared. So I wrote this quote, what I discovered about purpose, "Purpose is about a process and a journey, not a destination. I cannot know until I know, and knowing just takes what it takes. There are no shortcuts, silver bullets, or magic potions. By accepting that reality, I'm given the gift of knowing. I'm given the gift of knowing by trusting the process, a loving God, and myself." And that's really important for me. Each day, I get up and I ask God to guide, lead, and direct me, [the God?] of my understanding. Because many, many days I get up and I have no idea how to go because I don't have any structure. So I have to create structure in my own life. So by asking God to be a part and show me the knowledge of his will for me and the power of care, that gives me the opportunity to try different things. So that's what I've learned about purpose. It's about a process and a journey. So if you're struggling with what your life is about, don't give up. Just don't give up. Keep searching for a way that will work for you.

PHILLIPS: 16:01 So what is very important to remember, because there are voices that want you and I to agree with their assessment of who we are as individuals living with brain injuries, we need to remember you and I are not our brain injuries. You and I are not a diagnosis or a prognosis, what someone tells us that we have or tells us what we can and cannot do. You and I are not defined by labels, stereotypes, or societal stigmatization, although there are people that want to put labels on us because of a diagnosis and limit us. They want to minimize, marginalize, discount, and dismiss who we are as individuals, but the good thing about it is that those are their opinions, and we can create our own opinions. There's a quote that says, "No one can go back and make a brand new start. Anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending." And then another quote, "Not everyone will understand your journey. That's okay. You're here to live your life, not to make everyone understand." So it's really good to realize that we are not our deficits. Our brain injuries were only an event that occurred in our lives. Our brain injuries do not define who we are as individuals, but we get to define who we are. And we are not our deficits and limitations. Instead, we can create-- or we can find ways to work around our deficits and limitations. And it may take time. And in my experience, as I shared, it took me a lot of time.

PHILLIPS: 17:35 So what we can do to empower our lives, I think it's what's really essential is that we grieve the impact of our brain injuries, grieve the impact of what we are powerless to change. Doing so by confronting our denial, facing our anger, work through our burdening, trying to change what we can't change, embrace our depression, and accept our reality. So what that does is it helps us to grow in awareness, acceptance, and action, and allows us to realize that we have different choices. And as I shared about the railroad, it's just a switch on the railroad of life. It doesn't mean that our lives are over. It means that there's a new adventure for us to experience as we go down that track. And here's a quote that I like, "When one door of happiness closes, another door opens. But often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which is opened for us," by Helen Keller. And these are concepts that empower the process of finding and living our destiny.

PHILLIPS: 18:41 As I alluded to earlier, learning styles and strategies. I had a friend who was kind to me in trying to help me learn things about the computer, but I wasn't learning. And he was frustrated and get angry at me, and I was feeling inadequate. And this went on for a couple of years until I realized that I was trying to get from him what he couldn't give to me. So what I embarked on, I found out that I learned best through watching and listening and following patterns. So I started to do stuff through YouTube. And so I've been able to create a lot of stuff that I have by watching YouTube videos and then trial and error. So I just really encourage you, if you have not been tested, to find out how you learn, because how you learn may have changed after your brain injury. So it's really important to find out whether you're a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner, because there may be people in your life that are frustrated because you're not learning as they're teaching. And you may not be able to learn because of the way that they're teaching. So by learning how to find a way that you can learn will help you excel, and so that they don't think that you're being non-compliant, which I don't like the term. We do the best we can.

PHILLIPS: 20:04

And I believe that brain injury recovery is like a jigsaw puzzle. A jigsaw puzzle, you have a lot of pieces that get put onto a table, and then as time goes on, we try to connect the pieces. And I believe that those pieces are our learning experiences. I believe our circumstances are not meant to keep us down, but they're meant to build us up because they teach us lessons that prepare us for opportunities, which teach us more lessons. And as a result, we just get to go on with our lives. So as we learn the lesson, another puzzle piece appears. So we need to just keep on learning and not give up. And when I first started at the martial arts school, my sensei and I had a conversation. He said, "Craig, what I do is I provide you ingredients. What your job is to combine those ingredients to become a black belt, to become a better martial artist." So with that illustration, I have done that as a martial artist by combining different martial art disciplines, which I'll talk about maybe a little later. And that's the same way I've done with my journey as a person living with the impact of a brain injury. I don't like the concept of survivor because, in a way, I feel like that can leave us feeling powerless. But if we look at ourselves as living with the impact of a brain injury, we realize that we can do something about it, that we're not just merely surviving. We learn to thrive.

PHILLIPS: 21:46

And I like the illustration of the tapestry. So a tapestry, on one side, you have many threads, many jumbled, multicolored threads that seem to make no sense. But on the other side, there's a beautiful picture being created, story being created. And even though we may not understand the threads, the multicolored, jumbled threads on one side, it's really important for me to trust in that process. I trust a loving God and trust myself. Because I believe that, like I said, our disappointments, our discouragement, the things that occurred in our life that don't make sense, that as we learn from them, they create the beautiful story that's being told on the other part-- on the other side of the tapestry. So my encouragement is don't give up. Just keep learning as you go along. And I like the riddle of the elephant: how do you eat an elephant? The answer is one bite at a time. So it's really important to realize that even though we may have a goal that seems so ominous, so large, so big, so unrealistic, that if we just take and learn the goal one bite at a time, by learning one skill and then learning another skill-- and with me with martial arts, I've had to learn one skill and do that skill a bazillion times and learn another skill and learn that a bazillion times and then combine those two skills together to create a skill set. And then I'm able to replicate that process. And over time, I've been able to achieve things that I never dreamed possible.

PHILLIPS: 23:35

And Thomas Edison had a newspaper reporter come up to him and say, "Thomas, you've failed so many times." And Thomas said, "No, I've not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." So it's really important to the way that we look at things. We have not failed. We've just not found a way that worked. And that's what happened with me in my life, as I shared. I tried a lot of different ways, but they didn't work. I was in nursing, emergency medicine. Started out in geology, theology, then in rehab counseling and in different things, and it just didn't work, so I had to find a way that would work for me. And then Babe Ruth also had an individual come up to him and say, "Babe, you strike out so many times." And Babe said, "Yeah, but every time I step up to the plate, I have an opportunity to hit the ball out of the park." So it's really important for us to keep stepping up to the plate and not give up, not give up on ourselves and [inaudible] and our circumstances and our process. As I shared in that, purpose is about a process and a journey, not a destination. I can't know until I know, and knowing just takes what it takes. There's no silver bullets or magic potions. By accepting that reality, I'm given the gift of knowing. I'm given the gift of knowing by trusting the process, a loving God, and myself.

PHILLIPS: 25:01 Now, I enjoy the fable of the tortoise and the hare. I don't know if anyone's ever heard that, but the fable goes like this. There's a hare and a tortoise, and they're having a discussion. And the tortoise is making fun of the hare, and then the hare said, "Why don't we have a race?" And the hare starts to laugh at the tortoise. So the animals of the forest, they set up a course. And the course, there's an end point, which is the finish line. So the race begins and the tortoise starts and the hare runs out into a field and plays and then lays down for a-- lays down for a rest. And then he wakes up and he realizes that he needed to get to the finish line. And as a result, he finds the tortoise waiting there. And at the bottom of it, of the fable, it says, "Slow and steady wins the race."

PHILLIPS: 26:01 So we may have hares in our life, people that laugh and scoff at us because they don't think that we can achieve things with our lives because of our brain injuries, because of the diagnosis or prognosis that they may have given to us. But the reality is we can do something different, and that we can go forward. There's a quote by Steve Jobs who says, "You cannot connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect the dots looking backwards." So you have to trust that the dots will connect in your future. You have to trust in something, your gut, living destiny, karma, whatever, because believing that the dots will connect in your future will give you confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path. And another quote that I like by Henry David Thoreau, he says that, "Do not go where the path may lead. Go where there is no path and leave a trail." So the thing about it is that people may not understand, like I shared that quote earlier, "Not everyone's going to understand your journey. That's okay. You're here to live your life, not to make everyone understand."

PHILLIPS: 27:15 And another is a story of the cracked pot. The story of the cracked pot has this gentleman. He has a-- it's a pole that he hangs across his shoulders, and he has two pots. One pot is perfect, no blemishes. The other pot has cracks in it. So each day, this gentleman, he goes down to the river to fill up the pots, and he goes back to his master's house. So this goes on for two years. And as a result, the cracked pot eventually has a conversation with the water bearer. He says, "Water bearer, I'm so embarrassed I only give you half the load of the water that you collect." He said, "Do you not notice the beautiful flowers that are on your side of the path? I knew about your flaws. So what I did is I planted seeds. So every time we walk up the path, what you do is you water the seeds and the beautiful flowers spring up as a result and they're able to grace my master's house as a result." So as a result, we may have cracks and idiosyncrasy foibles and other things that seem like they're not realistic to be of service, but the great thing about it is that as we trust the process, and I said, a loving God, and we just keep learning from our experiences that we'll water the path and we will be of service to other people.

PHILLIPS: 28:43 And here's a couple of quotes that I like, "If you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams and endeavor to live the life that you have imagined, you will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." And that's a quote that I've hung on to it for the last 18 years. I keep moving forward. Everything that I've done up to this point has been altruistic. I've not gotten paid for anything that I've done. My interest has been to be of service. So if you know anybody out there-- in the event that you're listening to this after the presentation and you know anybody looking for a speaker, keep me in mind because my presentations, 30 of them, all focus on hope. And another quote that I like by Abraham Lincoln-- and we know about Abraham Lincoln, he had many, many, many failures or apparent failures. But then he said, "I will prepare and someday my chance will come." And another quote is, "Big things have small beginnings," by Prometheus. And the most common people-- the most common way people give away their power is by thinking they do not have any. And through my 56 years of ongoing brain injury recovery, I needed to involve my mind, body, spirit, soul, and emotions, as Jeannie mentioned. That's why I feel like it's so very important to work on areas of our life because once we have a brain injury, that affects the way that we do things, but it also affects our mind, body, spirit, soul, and emotions.

PHILLIPS: 30:14 So that's what I talk about in my 19 e-books, how I've learned things as I've gone along. And those e-books, they're nominal. They're like 5.99. The most expensive one that I have is 9.99, and that's my e-book on neuroplasticity. But it's just really-- and at the bottom of this - and you can go to my website, too - I have a lot of resources that you can use that are free. So I use the principles of neuroplasticity to create new neural pathways and brain reorganization. And over the past 27 years, I've trained in different martial arts disciplines through development of neural pathways. And below are several demonstrations. I'll share one of them with you. And this was made-- and I do this [every?]-- I trained with it-- I trained with it yesterday, not with the long sticks, but. So this presentation is at the Y, the YMCA, where I work out at the top on the floor. And in the background is Charlotte.

PHILLIPS: 31:28 So this is escrima. These are rattan sticks. And what I'm doing is I'm using large muscle groups and large motor skills. Smaller muscle groups, more fine motor skills. Then I use smaller sticks to even work on more fine motor skills and more small muscle groups. And then I use putty knives. And what they are is they help me do more different fine motor skills and more small muscle groups. And this is using kali, the martial art that I do. And these are knife strikes. So I do horizontal knife strikes, and these are vertical knife strikes. And it's just training my brain. I have no desire to kick anyone off of their hill. I just do it to improve my quality of life. And that's why I encourage people to get involved and develop their own program of neuroplasticity. And then this is Western boxing that I do also using large muscle groups. These are Muay Thai elbows and Muay Thai knees. My primary art is Muay Thai, which is called the Art of Eight Limbs. This is Wing Chun. Centerline strikes, working on my brain in a different way. That's what I do, and I continue to do things.

PHILLIPS: 33:04 I'll just go down here and share, and then we can open it up for a discussion. There's a lot of different links that I have here. There are self-advocacy resources. And what I'll do just before, I will turn it back into-- I'll just click on this. This is my website. Okay, I'll just go to home. So this is my website. So up at the top, you see I have the home, the about page, and I have information, testimonies, biographical information, autobiographical, how to schedule me, worldwide organizations that I've used. And then I talk about neuroplasticity, and I have a neuroplasticity presentation. And then creating hope, which I included in this article. Then resources and ability to translate Second Chance to Live in a variety of languages. So if you know anybody that doesn't speak English, but would be benefited through Second Chance to Live, let them know that they could translate Second Chance to Live.

PHILLIPS: 34:12 And then I have my 30 presentations that I give around the country as I have the opportunity. Then my 19 e-books, which, as I said, you can go to-- these are my 19 e-books. So you can go to, say, this one, and it'll take you to the page on Amazon. And then over here-- oops. Then on my 27 posters, that you can come down and click on those. And what they'll do, it's like I did this one, and I send it to Jeannie, and I encourage her to send it to y'all. It's that, "We are not inadequate. We are living with an invisible disability, deficits, and limitations." And here's the poster, the way that poster looks. And again, it's all about just encouraging people to not give up, to consult their neurologists and their neuropsychologists and doctors to find a way to work around your limitations, deficits. And when you feel like you have a difficult time, maybe they can help you learn how to compensate for them, as I've learned and I encourage. So that's basically the end of the presentation. Thank you for listening to me, and thank you for being here. And I appreciate it. And I'll turn it over to Jeannie and also Serena, however this works.

LENGENFELDER: 35:58 Great. Thank you so much, Craig. We really appreciate you coming here and sharing your story, but also sharing those resources that you have created for everyone. So at this time, we'd like to open things up for questions.

PHILLIPS: 36:14 I just want to also encourage you: no question is a bad question. All questions are good questions. And I know that I went over a lot of information. So what I do sometimes is I encourage people, if they don't have questions, to just let me know what the presentation spoke to them. And the reason why I do that is because it reinforces what you heard that spoke to you. So that's just an alternative to questions.

LENGENFELDER: 36:42 So Craig, I have something I would like to ask you, since you've had your brain injury so young and you really struggled for a long time with education and different jobs and trying to sort of figure out what you wanted to do. I imagine at some points you got very discouraged. And at what point would you say you kind of turned it around and kind of found your purpose and found your direction?

PHILLIPS: 37:16 Yeah, that's a great question. Yeah. For me, as I said, I called my mom after the graduate program director in rehabilitation counseling told me that he would allow me to graduate. And I called my mom and I told her and she said, "Well, you proved them wrong. You got your graduate degree." But yeah, I was able to do that, but I just ran into a plethora of walls, a bunch of walls over time. And I just really had a difficult time being able to accept because I had a neuropsych done in Florida, and I explained the results to my father and my mom - I called them; I explained it - and my dad said, "The doctor doesn't know what he's talking about. He doesn't know what he's talking about." So it just fostered my own denial, feeling inadequate because I wasn't able to overcome. So it just took a long time for me to get to a point-- I think after I was approved for SSDI and starting that process, that I began to come out of that reality of what I was facing.

PHILLIPS: 38:30 And a friend of mine, the guy that I was talking to you about with the computer, he was my best friend at the time, and we went to a movie called The Beautiful Mind. I don't know if y'all have ever seen that. But yeah, John was a very bright individual, but he had a disability called schizophrenia. And it was an invisible disability. Other people couldn't see it and didn't understand. At that time, too, there probably wasn't a whole lot understood about it. And there was probably a lot of blaming and shaming and scapegoating and making other people the victim, which causes us to want to isolate. So what we did is we watched that, and his light bulb went on for him, and then it went on for me a little bit at the time. But it had been a progressive thing because I had a lot of people along the way just not understanding and feeling like there was something wrong with me.

LENGENFELDER: 39:30 Right, right. Craig, there was another question that came in the chat from Susan. Have you ever considered cognitive therapy?

PHILLIPS: 39:40 Hi, Susan. Yeah, the situation, for me, is-- that's a good question, Susan. And I'll be 68, as I said in May. And what I've done is I do cognitive therapy. Since September 2021, I have walked 7.2 million steps. And when I walk, I have these 3x5 cards and I write down quotes and I write down verses and I memorize them and then I'll review them as I go along. And as a result, that's how I've been able to memorize the quotes that I've shared with you and all the other quotes. So being in a traditional cognitive therapy, I guess for me, I realized that Voc Rehab offered me what they had in two Voc Rehab settings, and nobody could tell me what I could do, so I had to figure it out.

	So I basically learned how to use what I have, my gift, talents, and abilities, in ways that work for me. But no, not formal cognitive therapy per se.
LENGENFELDER: 40:58	Arthur would like to ask a question.
ARTHUR: 41:03	Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm stunned by the idea that you were in the car accident when you were 10 years old. You didn't find out you had TBI until you were 38, 39. Tell me about your family. And you mentioned at the end of your presentation about medical assistance. It's just unbelievable to me. First of all, tell me about your parents, siblings. And now do you have a wife, children? What's your social and familial status?
PHILLIPS: 41:46	Hey, Arthur, I really, really appreciate that. The car accident, my dad was driving. We were in a Volkswagen Beetle. And as a result, we were coming back from a butcher shop. And it was a two-lane highway with a grass median. And a lady driving a Cadillac, a 60-year-old lady, from what I understand, there was somebody that sped by her. She went off, she hit a pole and ricocheted and came across the grass median and hit us in the passing lane. So my mom, her back was broken. She had 200 stitches in her arms. Her face was completely smashed. She had to have 15 or 16 [given?] reconstructive surgeries. She had a broken foot. She lived. She just recently passed away, December 19th. She was going to be 99 in August. So I'm really fortunate to have had my mom. My dad, when I came across the bucket seat and hit the windshield, I messed up his neck. So he had some issues with his neck. And my brother, who was behind me, who I was arguing with at the time of the accident, and they were trying to get us to be quiet, he fell down in the back behind my mom's seat and developed a nosochomial infection in the hospital, which means that he got an infection by being in the hospital.
PHILLIPS: 43:32	So in terms of growing up in a situation that I did, I was blame shamed and scapegoated. That was the role that I was in. I grew up in perfectionism, and good was never good enough. And the proverbial bar kept on being raised. So in terms of-- and I spent the majority of my life trying to find my way out of this proverbial brown paper bag called brain injury, which I had no idea about. So to answer your question about my family situation, both my are parents passed away. My brother's still living. He's married. I have not been married. I have not been able to be. Financially, I've not had a window or a pot-- or a pot or a window. So financially, that's not feasible. That's not been feasible. And as a result, in a way, God's been doing for me what I can't do for myself. I'd like to be in a relationship with a lady, but at this time, that's not part of the plan. Otherwise, that would happen.
PHILLIPS: 44:51	So socially, as I said, I walk a lot. And while I'm walking, I encourage people that are running. I have good relationships with people and storekeepers that are encouraged as I go along. But what I've learned about myself is that it's too stressful to me to interact with people on a continual basis, so I don't. I don't beat up on myself because I don't have the capacity to do that. So it's easier for me to have like two shifts passing

in the night of sorts. And as a result, I have a degree of isolation, but I enjoy myself. I enjoy being in my own skin. For a long time, I didn't like being in my skin but I've learned how to enjoy my company and do what I love and that's through my website and through my continued martial arts training. Did that answer your question? I know I kind of tangentized that [to a degree?].

ARTHUR: 46:06 No, no, absolutely. It did. And I'm sorry for the loss of your mother. I'm happy she lived till 99 and saw your success. But medically, I just don't understand. I understand doctors don't talk to a 10-year-old about their medical condition. But at some point before the age of 39, weren't you being helped medically in terms of your TBI because [crosstalk]--?

PHILLIPS: 46:35 No, no, no. No, I wasn't. They didn't know about it, and it went under-- and my dad denied it. They never talked about it. My parents didn't share with me the results of the EEGs and the cognitive and psychosocial testing that showed that I'd never make it beyond-- I'd probably academically never make it beyond high school. So once it became invisible, no, I didn't have it. I ran into a lot of different walls that I didn't elaborate on. But I had a bunch. I went through a lot of interest inventories and career assessment tests. And I did the Myers-Briggs several times. And I just found that all those tests, although they kind of pointed me in the direction they didn't factor in my brain injury. So I had to find a way to use what I have that other people-- so that's why I encourage people maybe that getting tested to find out how you learn, and then following your passion. My passion is to encourage people to not give up, to not give up. That's my passion. And it's my gifting of encouragement and hope. So, yeah, Arthur, that's a good question, and it's befuddling to me, too. But in a way, I'm glad that I didn't have people giving me their opinions on brain injury that they didn't know, they didn't understand. There are a lot of people out there that don't have brain injuries that are trying to tell us based on things that they've lived themselves. They're doing the best job that they can, but sometimes we can get a lot of information, but I mean. There's a quote that I like. It says that opportunity is often missed because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work. So it's just really important that we get it, do the job.

ARTHUR: 48:42 [crosstalk].

LENGENFELDER: 48:42 Craig, I have a comment and some questions from Patricia I'm going to read to you, okay?

PHILLIPS: 48:48 Hey, Patricia.

LENGENFELDER: 48:48 So were you experiencing emotional dysregulation as well as physical and cognitive impairments? And then she comments that her emotions shattered after they went haywire. Now she's numb, but she sees things more clearly without an emotional veil to obscure the truth. And she asks, "How did you become a speaker?" because she has no fear of speaking and she has a lot to share and she'd like to speak as well. So maybe if you have some thoughts on that for Patricia.

PHILLIPS: 49:22 Sure. Thank you, Patricia. I appreciate it. Yeah, in terms of how I grew up, neither one of my parents were alcoholics, but the disease of [the ISMS?] got passed on from her dad and my dad's dad. So I grew up in codependency. I did a codependent dance for a long time. I thought if you're unease about me, it's my fault. Therefore, I needed to make you okay so we could be okay before I could be okay. So I did that dance with a whole lot of people in my life. And as a result, I didn't have a self. I didn't know who I was because I was constantly trying to make other people okay so I could be okay with myself. And in terms of the-- one of the other parts, how I became a speaker, when I was in Florida and I went-- actually when I was here in North Carolina and I said I wanted to be a motivational speaker and the woman who was doing the evaluation said, "You wouldn't be able to do that." So the thing about it is that I have just gone along.

PHILLIPS: 50:39 And interesting, I started writing articles, then I created video presentations, 462 of those, for people that learn better through watching and listening. And then with the advent of COVID and Zoom, I started creating presentations. And then I had the opportunity for doing speaking. And then people told other people about me and I had the opportunity and I created more presentations. So as a result, I've done a lot of marketing per se, letting know, "Hey, I'm available. I'm available." I probably inundated people too much trying to let them know that I was available because I'm wanting to be of service. I wouldn't make any money. I was just trying to be of service because I was living on disability at that time. And I live very frugally, and I am-- so the situation is now I'm no longer on disability because of certain circumstances, but I'm still live very frugally. I haven't changed my way of living.

PHILLIPS: 51:45 So I don't know the other part. I think that you asked about-- you found yourself being frozen. Something that I found that's so very helpful to me is the journal. Journaling helps me to connect my head to my heart, my heart to my head, because sometimes they don't know what's going on. So I just really encourage everybody to journal, maybe in the evening or in the morning, whenever you're comfortable. And it doesn't have to be perfect. Just talk what's going on with you emotionally. And as I said, my e-books, my 19 e-books, I talk a lot about what you're asking in my e-books. So I just really encourage you to look at my e-books. And if you think you'd like to get one or two, you're welcome to. Again, I said they're 5.99. They're not a lot of money, but they're chock-full of my experience, strength, and hope that may also help you to get in touch with your process and journey, maybe that you're not aware of, and have that, being more aware. So did that answer-- okay.

LENGENFELDER: 53:06 I see a thumbs up from Patricia, yeah. There's another question. It's from Alicia. Since my TBI, stress can cause difficulty functioning. Do you also have this challenge? And if so, any strategies to help me cope with deadlines that feel stressful?

PHILLIPS: 53:29 Yeah, that's a good question. Yes, I do. I have right frontal lobe damage. And the way that I understand is that the brain, with a brain injury, they're damaged. We have filters, okay? And those filters get damaged. And as a result, people that voluntarily-- or involuntarily are able to manage that. For people with brain injuries, sometimes we can't, and we become a label. And so in terms of a strategy for myself, is that statement that I know [inaudible] be true, I have to realize what my capacity is and what I'm able to do. And that's why I like doing what I do, because I can work at my own rate and pace, and I can create beautiful things, which I'm very grateful for, that I'm able to use the creativity. All this stuff that I do is about creating creativity in my life.

PHILLIPS: 54:36 So strategy-wise, be gentle with yourself and let people know that you're doing the best you can. And there's a quote that I like. It says, "Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, it's very hard." So it's really important to realize that if we just do life inch by inch, life's a cinch. And as we work at our own rate and pace, we could celebrate goals. We could celebrate our success. So we don't have to achieve a certain thing to be able to achieve success. There's a quote by-- I think it's by Zig Ziglar. He says that what you achieved by accomplishing your goals is not as important as what you become accomplishing your goals. So I just realized that I'm learning as I go along, and it's okay. And yeah, so it's okay. Did I answer that? I see--

LENGENFELDER: 55:46 I see a head nod, yes. So we're almost out of time. So if we weren't able to get to your questions, please feel free to reach out to Craig directly. You can contact him through secondchancetolive.org. If you're interested in any more of our events or participating in our research, much of which can be done remotely, please check us out on the Kessler Foundation website. Thank you, Craig, for joining us today. And again, thank you all for joining us this afternoon. And we hope that you all have a wonderful day.

PHILLIPS: 56:22 And thank you for the opportunity. It was so nice to meet you all. And I have an email address, secondchancetolive1@yahoo.com. So you're always welcome to contact me at my email address. And take it one day at a time.

ANNOUNCER: 56:39 [music] Missed our past events? To view them, scan the QR code or go to bitly/KFTBIresearch. [music] Interested in participating in our research remotely or in person? Scan the QR code or go to kesslerfoundation.org/join. [music]