



**BRAIN INJURY
ASSOCIATION
OF NEW JERSEY**

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No Brain Injury is
Too Mild to Ignore,
or Too Severe to
Lose Hope

From a Parent's Perspective

By Linda Levine

I was reading an article in *Newsweek* where Elie Wiesel, a world-renowned novelist, philosopher, humanitarian, political activist, and Holocaust survivor talks about where there is no hope, we must invent hope. That set me to thinking about how my husband and I handled our son Eric's brain injury. It seems so long ago. As I look back on the journey that started with that car crash seventeen years ago, we got through it because we invented hope. He was in an unresponsive state for almost eight months. He was fed with a feeding tube for a year and was restricted to a wheelchair for even longer. He lost almost 50 IQ points. Yes, sometimes I feel sadness and loss, but most often I have a sense of tremendous thankfulness. How can this be?

I don't like when people tell me that God only gives us what we can handle, or it only makes us stronger. I didn't need to be this strong and why should my child suffer because I could "handle it". Yes, I'm strong and I've proved that. So what? I believe things "just happen". To my mind there is no why, at least none that we can discern. We don't have control over these things, but we do have control over how we react to them.

I've found that the only way for me to cope was to break off a little piece at a time and do something positive or proactive. One little piece at a time, step by step... Now when I look back, I see how far we have all come. In the beginning, the most important thing for me to do was to make sure that Eric was surrounded with a positive attitude. I would not tolerate people telling us, especially within Eric's earshot, what he would never do again. Perhaps this was denial, but I prefer to think it was hopeful. When Eric was discharged from the acute care hospital, we were told that he would most likely remain vegetative. My response to the neurologist was to ask her if Eric had one chance in one hundred of regaining consciousness. She replied yes. So I proceeded to tell her that she didn't know the child that lay in that coma. He never gave up at anything and if he had one chance in one hundred then we were going to go for it. I never felt having Eric back the way he was before the accident was the goal. He was "good enough" the way he was. The goal for him was to achieve to the level that he could at that moment and reach down and push a little more. I guess we were pushy parents.

I choose not to view our son's accident as a tragedy. It is what it is, and we go on from there. I will not allow thoughts consume me of what could have been or what should have been. I choose to believe that we are the luckiest people in the world, and embrace the fact that today is a good day.



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Linda is the parent of a young man with a brain injury and is also a member of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey's Children & Adolescents Committee.

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