

Young Lincolnite turns his life around after TBI recovery

Jason Lilly points to the tattoo at the base of his neck. “It’s a symbol of faith,” says Jason, one finger lingering over the date 2-26-03 inked on his skin. “That’s a permanent reminder of when my faith got tested,” explains the confident 25-year-old from Lincoln.

It’s been eight years since a car crashed into Jason’s Mustang GT on an east Lincoln road that winter, launching him into the back seat. Jason’s head hit a sharp corner of a speaker box, puncturing an artery in his brain.

After being lifeflighted to BryanLGH West Medical Center, Jason was diagnosed with a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). As his brain swelled, doctors gave Jason’s parents a grim prognosis for their son — a ten percent chance of survival and that he’d likely be in a dependent, vegetative state.

Days turned into weeks as Jason endured three brain surgeries and his family and friends prayed for a miracle. Against the odds, Jason gradually emerged from his comatose state and transferred to Madonna for rehabilitation in mid March 2003.

Jason, then 17, was a self-admitted risk taker who had gravitated toward a rough peer group. An intelligent young man, he became bored with high school and began to skip school. Jason eventually dropped out, but earned his GED shortly before his accident. “My parents said the accident was God’s way of telling me to slow down,” said Jason. Brain injuries like Jason’s that occur as a result of motor vehicle crashes and traffic-related incidents are the second leading cause of TBI.¹

During his inpatient rehabilitation, Jason explained he felt like an infant as his therapists helped the teenager master basic tasks, such as standing, dressing and feeding himself. “My little niece could hold a fork and here I was having to learn it all over again,” said Jason.

The TBI caused multiple frustrations for Jason as his speech, cognitive and visual skills were all affected. He endured months of intense therapy, which focused on strategies to help Jason cope with his permanent deficits and rewire the neurons in his brain. Repetition paved the way for Jason to achieve his goals to walk and be independent. “Jason’s family was amazing and stood by him all the way,” recalled Virginia Schweitzer, occupational therapist.

At the end of August 2003, Jason transferred to Madonna’s outpatient program. Lisa Anderson, occupational therapist, noted Jason still required significant assistance with tasks. “But, what was so remarkable to me was Jason’s determination,” said Lisa. “The young man has never lost sight of his goals during his five plus years of outpatient therapy.”

Last summer 2010, Lisa added the Bioness NESS H200™, an innovative technology, to Jason’s therapy to improve mobility in his compromised left arm and hand. The device provides electrical stimulation to stimulate nerves and



muscles, which allows Jason to practice grasping and releasing objects, while also performing activities of daily living. “Jason deals with a lot of spasticity, an abnormal increase in muscle tone,” explained Lisa. Spastic muscles are resistant to normal stretching that occurs during use and can remain contracted for long periods. With consistent use of the H200, patients can often regain range of motion, while further reducing spasticity.

Jason is now 25 years old and lives independently in his own apartment. He attends Southeast Community College and carries a 4.0 grade-point average. Jason recently received special recognition from the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest for overcoming barriers to become a successful student. His essay was on exhibit at the State Capitol in January as part of a traveling exhibit.

Jason said poor choices drove him down a path of self-destruction and robbed him of graduating with his high school class. “I’m walking a new path now,” said Jason. His career focus is on working with troubled youth. “I want to reach out to kids, share my story, tell them to keep the faith.”

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Center for Injury Prevention and Control <http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/index.html>