

For Many Of Us, Brain Injury Awareness Month Is A Daily Reminder

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Much to do has been made about March being Brain Injury Awareness Month. That's a good thing. But for most people, as the days get longer and March fades to April, their focus turns to taxes, sprucing up the lawn, and spring cleaning. They never really consider brain injuries again till next year.

Many of us don't have that luxury.

Everyday is Brain Injury Awareness Day.

My brain injury history began in 1970 as an 11 year old on the first Pee Wee Pop Warner team Stockton, CA ever fielded. With 30 knuckleheads on the team, incredibly three of us signed NFL contracts in 1980. Pat Bowe who played with me at Stagg High signed as a free agent tight end with the Green Bay Packers, and Jack Cosgrove who also played with us at Stagg, was an 8th round pick of the Seattle Seahawks. I was selected in the 6th round by the NY Jets. In addition, our safety was a kid by the name of Von Hayes who went onto a multi year Major League Baseball All-Star career with the Philadelphia Phillies.

Probably had something to do with the fact we outscored our opponents 255 - 0 in the first 5 games.

I never considered myself a violent person, but I absolutely loved the sanctioned violence of the game. You were not only encouraged to be violent, you were rewarded for doing so.

Hit of The Week

Bone crusher Award

Stick of The Year

Lay the wood to someone and the crowd goes crazy. Coaches slap you on the back. People remember you.

For the most part, the more violent you were on the field, the more successful you'd be. By my 3rd year of Pop Warner I had established myself as a hitter, breaking a helmet and gouging a huge chunk of flesh from my head in a game. I still have the divot in my forehead. I captained the team as an offensive guard and middle linebacker, despite my gangly physique and amazing lack of speed. Very early on I discovered you could still be successful in football if you just beat the hell out of your opponent. All perfectly legal. If you violently imposed your will on the man opposite you and you'd be rewarded.

You didn't need to catch passes, score touch downs or return kickoffs.

Just hit people.

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Midway through my 3rd Pop Warner season I knocked myself unconscious in a dangerous Bull-In-The-Ring drill and was hospitalized.

They held me out two weeks.

I can remember my first day back one of the coaches telling me not to be afraid to get back out there and stick my face in people.

Ten years, an undefeated high school season, an Orange Bowl, and the beginning of a Super Bowl season, and multiple *undiagnosed* concussions later, I developed hydrocephalus, or water on the brain and underwent emergency VP shunt brain surgery. The only *diagnosed* concussion was against the Dallas Cowboys in 1980 when they treated me with smelling salts and sent me back on the field. I never missed a play or practice and my family's lives have never been the same. Emergency VP shunt brain surgery in the 81 Super Bowl season, a total of three emergency brain surgeries, last rites, several gran mal seizures, major short term memory issues, and three arrests followed in the next eight months.

The arrests all followed drinking a few beers.

I'd never been in trouble before or since.

On my brother Bob's concerns to my neurologist, I underwent an EEG after drinking two beers a few weeks after my 3rd brain surgery in May, of 1982.

The test showed I have brain seizures from alcohol. I quit drinking at age 23, and I've never had a problem since.

Not a problem with drinking that is.

In 1986 I returned to school to complete my biology degree. During an eight month period I survived 5 additional brain surgeries and several gran mal seizures. I graduated five years later at age 32 with a Bachelor of Science in Biological Conservation, dyslexia and major short term memory issues.

Every day I wake up to Post Its on my mirror, coffee maker, dash of my truck and on my desk. A reminder of Brain Injury Awareness. In 1993 I underwent my 9th emergency brain surgery, gran mal seizure in 1999, more Post Its, more asking people to *remind* me. Another reminder of Brain Injury Awareness.

Dilantin, Depacote, Phenobarbital, Kepra, Zonegran and Lamictal at one time or another the last 34 years for gran mal seizures. A daily reminder of Brain Injury Awareness. Packing my emergency *brain drain* kit in my truck or whenever I go on a backpack bow hunts. Another reminder of Brain Injury Awareness.

In 2012 I lost my environmental consulting business due to short term memory issues, forgetting to bill projects and forgetting to do projects. Another reminder. We lost our home in 2013 and my marriage in 2014. A daily reminder why I no longer live with my children.

Brain Injury Awareness.