

MY WIFE DIDN'T KNOW ME

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In January 2008 our lives changed forever. My wife Debi was driving home down a country lane when her car aquaplaned across the road and into the path of a 16 ton tractor. She sustained a brain injury, but surprisingly enough, there were many reasons to be grateful following this terrible accident. Firstly, the Clinical Director of an Acute Care Unit was in the car behind. He stabilised Debi at the scene of the accident and organised an air ambulance to get her to hospital quickly. Secondly the impact was on the left side of the car – which probably saved Debi's life and that of our three year old daughter who was strapped in the back.

When Debi came round she didn't know who I was or remember the children, Bethany (12), Millie (10) and Phebe (3). She was like a blank canvas. Slowly things have started to come back to her. Debi has been left with left-sided weakness and cognitive issues. Her personality was different which is really hard for me and for our older girls because they remember her before the accident and know that now she is not the same.

Debi left hospital in a wheelchair, but then didn't remember our home; she only recalled our previous house. Her short-term memory was severely affected. I remember the stress and anxiety I felt when she kept repeatedly asking me where her handbag was and I would answer her, "It's by the bed", again and again. She also had mood swings and got so frustrated, which impacted on the whole family.

I was desperate to get back the Debi I married and fell in love with; it's not just physical changes, but mental changes that are hard to deal with. It felt like a bereavement but she was still with me. Debi was the key person at home and in my company, now it's a daily struggle to run my business, and look after three kids and a home. I can't believe that I have been through this and come out of the other side and not lost my marbles. Sometimes I want to curl up in a ball, but it's not an option. I must carry on.

When Debi was in hospital I was told about Headway and made contact; a Community

Support Worker came to visit me. You can't comprehend how confused and traumatised you are after such a terrible thing happens to your family, and how relieved you are that Headway is there to offer you support, hold your hand and guide you through the difficult bits.

Debi and I attend Headway Support Group Meetings. It's been really helpful to meet and talk to people with similar issues; we find it reassuring. Recovery from brain injury can be a lonely path, and whilst our families and friends have been amazing, they do not understand exactly what we are going through, so it really helps to chat to other people who do. I shall also be attending the Headway Carers Training Workshops which I hope will be really useful. There are so many aspects to brain injury, and you are learning all the time, you think you have got to grips with it and then something unexpected smacks you in the face again.

In terms of recovery from brain injury it's still early days for Debi, but we all hope that with time, guidance and support we will see more of our old Debi back again.

