

The Road to Recovery

January 14, 1995. Teenager Chad Stephenson was out driving when his car suddenly hydroplaned on the wet road. As the car skidded sideways, his head met a telephone pole at an estimated speed of 50-60 m.p.h.

Fortunately for Chad, a doctor was in the car traveling behind him, a doctor who happened to own a cell phone (remember—this was 1995). Within an hour, Chad was being operated on at the University of Kentucky by award-winning neurosurgeon Benjamin Warf.

The surgery was the simple part.

A few weeks later, Chad was transferred to Cardinal Hill Hospital in Lexington where he would begin the long road to recovery: six months as an inpatient in the brain injury unit, followed by another six months of outpatient treatment.

Chad had suffered severe injuries to the right side of his brain. His left leg's movement was affected, as was his vocabulary. Most importantly, his memory had been damaged. He could no longer remember HOW to do the most simple things.

Although that fateful evening changed Chad's life forever, talking to him today, you might be surprised to find a very positive thinking young man.

I asked him what sort of support he had following the accident. Unfortunately he lost every friend that he had. He was relearning who he was, and none of his teen friends were emotionally able to handle the severity of the accident. Nevertheless, Chad was lucky to have strong family support during the months of speech and physical therapies. He remembers his father's constant drive to help him with therapy and to find new ways to assist his recovery.

He also had a strong religious faith to help him through the difficulties. To this day, Chad lives by his philosophy of "I know God won't give me anything I can't handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much!"

A key factor in Chad's amazing recovery was his desire to get better. Today, he occasionally goes back to Cardinal Hill to attend monthly brain injury meetings and his purpose in going is always to help others understand that recovery is possible, if sometimes difficult.

There are still a few lasting effects of the accident. Chad misses being able to run; he also occasionally has memory lapses and has a harder time regulating his body temperature in the hot Kentucky summers. Nevertheless, he seems to have truly found the silver lining in what looked to be a very dark cloud.

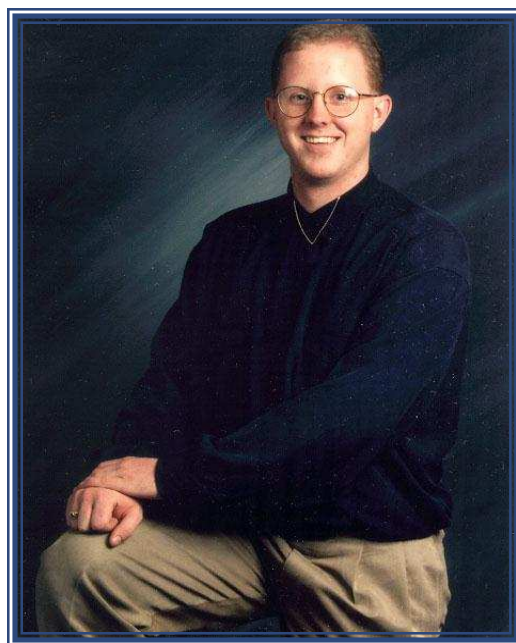
Since 2002, he has owned and operated his own computer business, Curbside Computers, providing a wide range of computing and support services for commercial and residential customers (including KSHA). He is also grateful that his accident allowed him to meet his wife. She was the roommate of his pharmacist. In July of this year, they celebrated their first wedding anniversary.

He is much more extroverted now and credits that to needing to make new friends after the accident. He has volunteered in Fayette County Public Schools and currently gives much of his time to teaching computer skills to seniors at the Lexington Senior Center.

Looking back to the accident, Chad acknowledges that had there been a passenger in the car (blocking his trajectory), he would probably have escaped unscathed. However, the passenger would certainly have died, a fact Chad wonders if he could have lived with. He recalls gladly that his father nearly went with him that night but decided not to.

Chad says, "If there is one thing I want others to learn from my accident, it is that when things like this happen, life is not over. I just decided to take a different road."

Fiona Young Brown



Chad Stephenson, courtesy Curbside Computers, Lexington (<http://www.cmpute.com> / 859-227-1211).