

Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor to Become Pediatric Neurologist

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

- June 8, 2010

The impact of a [traumatic brain injury](#) is often fundamentally life-changing, and no less is true in the case of Jessica Jones of Cobb County, Georgia. All survivors of brain injuries struggle, and so did Jessica. You expect that. What no one expected was that -- in this very unusual case -- the change in Jessica's life would be one that would be so positive and inspirational.

When Jessica arrived at Children's Scottish Rite hospital in Atlanta on Halloween night eight years ago, she was bleeding from the mouth and ears. Her pupils were dilated, and she was in a coma. Her doctor, pediatric neurosurgeon Andrew Reisner, estimated that her chances of surviving at all were less than 5 percent.

In a recent profile in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Dr. Reisner said that Children's treats about 100 [children](#) with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) every year, and most die or suffer from serious, lifelong complications. Less than 10 percent are able to function normally after recovery.

Jessica is one of that small, lucky minority -- and then some. This week, Jessica will graduate, nearly at the top of her class, from Stanford University with a degree in human biology. She was recently honored as one of the top students in Stanford's School of Humanities and Sciences. Next on Jessica's agenda is a research fellowship in neuroscience at Yale University with the goal of becoming a pediatric neurologist -- so she can help kids with brain injuries.

Facing Long Odds and Fighting Past the Damage to Her Brain

When Jessica awoke after five days in a coma, she was able to talk and recognize her family, but she could not feed herself and had to wear diapers. She had lost her ability to read and had cognitive challenges, common after a TBI. For example, she was unable to name three things that were the color red.

Jessica showed unusual determination and persistence. When encouraged to take ten steps, Jessica took eleven. Within weeks of her injury, Jessica had taught herself to read again, practicing skills like keeping her place for hours, over and over, until she succeeded.

Despite the fact that homework and test-taking now took her much, much longer, Jessica finished that year -- and all of high school -- with straight A's.

The 'Wow' Moment of a Doctor's Career

This spring, Dr. Andrew Reisner got a special invitation -- to Jessica's Stanford graduation ceremony, where he was invited to give a short speech.

Jessica's amazing recovery -- so precious and rare for victims of traumatic brain injury -- motivates him never to discount the chances of patients who are facing long odds.

"A large team of doctors did their job," he said. "Initially we did not know if Jessica would survive, let alone walk or talk again. But that was only because we did not know Jessica Jones."

Related Resource:

["From brush with death, two lives are renewed"](#) (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, June 5, 2010)