

## What to Do When You Can't Remember Your College Major

The stretch of road from Muncie, Indiana, to Morehead, Kentucky, is only 280 miles long – a road trip normally lasting less than six hours. When I started out on that road, I was a gifted student, enrolled at Ball State University, in one of the top actuarial science programs in the country. With dreams of being a successful career woman, I was offered a golden opportunity as the first student intern for a national insurance carrier just before my senior year of college. After successfully completing the eight month internship, I returned to Ball State to complete my actuarial science degree. Little did I know that my dreams for the future would be shattered in just three weeks.

In early September of that year, four sorority sisters and I were returning to Ball State from an event at Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky. As we entered the southern outskirts of Cincinnati, something went terribly wrong. Our driver lost control of our vehicle in the wind shear of two passing semis. The car spun, and we ended up sideways in the middle of the highway, trapped in the path of a Freightliner semi-tractor trailer. The resulting impact was so great that our car's crumpled side panel bore the imprint of the semi's front license plate.

When the screeching and grinding came to a halt, the two girls buckled in the front seats were able to exit the car and walk away. The three unbuckled girls, which included me, in the back weren't so lucky. Two were instantly killed. The paramedics could not tell at first whether I had

survived the crash; they had to remove some of my nail polish to be sure. If I were dead, the color under my fingernail would have been blue. It was pink. Barely breathing and placed on life support, I was taken by Life Flight helicopter to the University of Cincinnati Hospital and admitted to the surgical critical care unit.

The injuries I sustained were massive. Unconscious, I remained in a coma for six days with a left and front lobe brain injury that paralyzed my body's right side. The doctors told my parents that the prognosis was grim. Damage to the left side of my brain resulted in a significant loss of memory and impaired my motor skills. Awakening from my coma, I had to prepare to learn a new lifestyle. With no control over my bodily functions, I endured the humiliation of wearing adult diapers. Getting around required the use of a wheel chair. My self-esteem and self-confidence plummeted like stock values in a market crash.

Beside my hospital bed was a chart listing various tasks that I would have to complete independently before I could be discharged. I refused to dwell on my injuries or give up hope. Completing each task became my new goal. With determination, I began relearning simple skills like brushing my teeth, tying my shoes, and going to the bathroom. I progressed to relearning more complex skills like how to eat, walk, and behave appropriately for someone my age. Slowly, one by one, each item on the chart was completed and checked off.

My doctors estimated that my recovery would take one to two years. They told my mother privately that I would leave the hospital with a cane, but I left weeks earlier than the doctors had

predicted without assistance. Seeing me experience a speedy, remarkable recovery in just a few months, the nursing staff deemed me “The Miracle Child.”

One of the main life lessons I’ve learned is that in life, we have two choices. If we don’t like the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can either accept them the way they are or do something about it to change them. I didn’t like the fact that everything that I had worked for, regarding preparation for my career, was taken from me in one instant as a result of a car crash. What am I supposed to do now that I couldn’t remember my college major? Then, the answer came to me.

The burning desire to reach my goal of obtaining a college degree and being a successful business woman was impressed on my heart. Despite my short-term memory problems, I chose to go back to college and declare a new major. I had lost the ability to complete my original major, actuarial science, from the crash due to extensive brain damage. While I was able to relearn simple arithmetic through memorization, the analytical skills required for more complex mathematical applications were no longer accessible.

The thought of beginning a new major just when I almost had been finished with my previous one was disheartening. Boy, my work was cut out for me as I struggled to learn the material in my new major. However, I didn’t get down and depressed because the road would be long and difficult. To help with my short-term memory, I tape recorded my classes, with permission from the professors. I enrolled in the same classes as one of my Honors College friends, who studied

with me until repetition overcame my memory problems. With intense studying and concentration, "The Miracle Child" graduated with a bachelor's degree in insurance a short year and a half after leaving the hospital.

Another life lesson I've learned is that life is too short not to pursue our goals and dreams, right here and now, because tomorrow is not promised to us. Unfortunately, I had to learn this lesson the hard way. One moment, I have everything going for me. I just finished an eight month internship with a company and received a promise of a job upon graduation the following May. The next, I find myself in a hospital bed, paralysis to half of my body, and memory loss. I don't think that I would have listened to anyone had they told me that I could lose everything in one moment. I mean, not me, right? This would never happen to me. Wrong.

When we are young and learn a new sport, the fundamentals are first taught to us. We are taught the basics of how to communicate and how to treat people. We must master the basics before we can advance to more complex skills. As we grow up, we get better at practicing and mastering what we are taught. But, it was when I had to relearn how to swallow, walk, and talk that I had to go back to the basics of how to accomplish these tasks before I could eat solid food, run, and communicate in a clear manner. I had to use a grocery cart and learn balance just like my daughter had to learn to hold onto furniture when she was standing and learning to walk. I find this to be true in every aspect of my work and personal life, as well. I had to learn the basics of how to handle money before I could purchase more things and not allow myself to be in a

position of never ending debt. I had to learn the basics of operating computers and other office machines before I could learn shortcuts without losing quality and productivity.

I tell you my story not to just share with you how I achieved what doctors told me that I couldn't, but to show how you, too, can achieve what you want in life despite any circumstance that you encounter. Often, opportunity involves a great deal of work and a willingness to take a chance on something, the outcome of which may be uncertain. Eventually, you reach a point when you must either accept an opportunity with all of its unknowns or else turn your back on it. No one can tell you when you have reached that point; you alone know when it's time to make your move, to have the courage to take a chance. Along the way, I learned many of life's lessons and what really matters to me. When times were uncertain and objects seemed insurmountable, I never gave up on my dreams. Sometimes, we want to give in and crawl up in the corner, hoping that everything will go away. But, life doesn't go away or sometimes go our way. So, why not make the most of it?

Today, I am a professional speaker, helping others learn the secrets of overcoming life's challenges so that they can lead the life they really want. I am also living my dream as a successful career woman, working as a business analyst at one of the largest insurance companies in the United States. I am living each day to the fullest and enjoying every moment.

The stretch of road from Muncie, Indiana, to Morehead, Kentucky, is only 280 miles long – a road trip normally lasting less than six hours. Although my dreams were forever changed by a

crash on this road and couldn't remember my college major, I found the inner strength to persevere despite my severe injuries and the dire predictions of my medical specialists. And, finally, I never gave up.

What is holding you back from your dreams? What is "paralyzing" you from achieving what you want in life? Life is too short not to pursue your goals and dreams, right here and now. I challenge you to pursue your goals and dreams with fortitude, perseverance, and determination, and success will surely follow.

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