

patti

By BETTY EWALT TAYLOR

"Make a difference now, because we don't know how many days we have left, or what the quality those days will be. While we have this moment, live it to the fullest," that's the advice of Patti Foster, she should know. It was a little more than ten years ago that Ms. Foster was injured in a traffic crash, leaving her with traumatic brain injury, among other severe injuries throughout her body.

From a lifeless, bloody, crumpled mass on the pavement, covered with a white sheet, to the vibrant and beautiful person she is today, one truly sees a miracle.

She has just completed her first book, "Coping with Traumatic Brain Injury," which tells the story of one woman's journey from death to life. In this book she tells it all. From the day of the wreck, up to its happening, then her long recovery, which is still going on.

She just doesn't stop. When I visited with her she was preparing for her trip to Dallas where she participates in the Volunteer Corps of Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, talking to brain injury victims and their families. The third floor of the building is named for Dr. Mary Carlile, leading brain injury treatment physician, now retired, who was Ms. Foster's doctor during her time there.

"When they find out that I am a former Carlile patient, they are very interested," she noted.

In the book she tells of her ordeal as she worked to overcome the trauma her frail body had suffered. "I'm still recovering," she said, "And I guess I will be in recovery the rest of my life." To visit with her one would never imagine the pain she has suffered. She is happy, smiling, talkative and has a beautiful outlook on life, striving to help people who have traumatic brain injury with their recovery.

"I tell them, 'Don't stop, don't throw in the towel, don't quit,' because it is so easy to get frustrated, discouraged and worn out when coping with this type of injury," she said.

Ms. Foster tells of the long coma after the wreck while in the hospital in Tyler, the time in the trauma unit at Baylor and then the three months at the rehabilitation unit at Anna, Tx., near McKinney. There she learned how to take care of herself, how to cook, take care of living quarters and mostly, how to transition back to regular life, day to day. She tells how hard some of these feats were.

Just being around several people at one time was hard for her, but she enjoyed the calming effect of music playing.

She gives her parents, Judy and James Foster, credit for her ability to keep on trying. Her brother and sister-in-law, Scott and Rhonda, and their children, Braden and Alexis, visited her often and were a tremendous asset in helping her to recover.

"I still have deficits in every lobe of my brain, so I have to cope with these. I can see continuing improvement, but it takes a long time for the brain to heal. I have to think to live, because I stumble easily, I choke sometimes when I'm eating, and sometimes I just plain forget. So, I use lots of sticky notes! At times my sleep pattern gets off and it takes time to get back on the right track," she noted.

Before she was taken to Dallas for treatment her parents were told, "She will never walk again, never talk again, she'll never feed herself, she will be a persistent vegetable." They wouldn't give up, and neither did she. She had to learn to eat, walk, talk, learn the alphabet, numbers and the functions of everyday living. She has done all that and now spends her time talking with people who have the battle ahead, encouraging them to keep on keeping on. "I just want to help others so they can mend, and let them know it's an ongoing thing," she said.

Before the wreck Ms. Foster was a motivational speaker, singer, pianist and had traveled extensively in her work, was a radio personality and a Bible scholar. She has returned to a lot of this. She has appeared on the television show "The 700 Club," and has given many motivational talks to groups. She also has learned to play the piano again, and enjoys singing.

Medical schools sometimes invite her to come and address people who are working with patients with traumatic brain injury, as well as their patients and the patient's family. She is vice president at Living Alternatives, cuts voice-overs for radio here in America and some foreign countries, loves being with her family, attending church services, going to Bible study, and leading singing. She even went through driver training and drives her car.

She also enjoys going to Friends for Hope, a one-day camp for brain injured people and their families. "Helping others is a big help to me, it's like a B-12 shot. Everyone needs inspiration from someone whose been there," she said.

In her book, Ms. Foster shows appreciation to the numerous people who have helped her, and expresses her desire to return the favor by helping someone else. She has written excerpts for other books but this is her first. She was assisted by Sharyn Koph. It is a must-read; set aside a couple of hours, because once you start reading, you can't put it down.

She has some book signings scheduled, but if someone wants to talk with her and ask questions about traumatic brain injury they can contact her at: [www.pattifoster.com](http://www.pattifoster.com)

PATTI FOSTER, signing her book.

