

Happy Anniversary *By Kristina Betts Coil*

January 23, 2003 marks a very important day for me. Ten years ago, on January 23, 1993, I was in a car accident and my world changed forever. Everything I had ever known and counted on left me that day and for years after I struggled to find the person that was in that accident. What I have discovered is that that person is no longer in existence. But in her place is a person who is much stronger, much wiser, and much more compassionate. I am a person that now enjoys every day and I thank God for what I've been through and what I have accomplished over the past decade.

Ten years ago, I was a Junior in high school. I was an honor student, a varsity cross-country runner, and a nationally ranked competitive figure skater. I was looking at colleges all over the country and was excited for the opportunities and experiences that I knew lay ahead of me. I was full of promise and hope, excitement and anticipation. But as we all have learned, things happen and plans change in an instant, and the car accident on a snowy January night quickly crushed any plans I had been making. I managed to graduate from high school on time, but it was a major struggle. Every day I doubted whether it was even possible. I could not have done it without the support of my family, teachers, and the people from the Brain Injury Recovery Program (now called the Center for Neurorehabilitation). I had a network of support that was invaluable to me, and it was because of them that I was able to finish high school.

Instead of going out of state to college, like I was originally planning, I chose to stay in state so I could be close to my family, doctors and therapists. I was not only recovering from a head injury, I was also facing major physical struggles and setbacks.

In all, I was in physical therapy for almost 5 years as a result of the car accident and had two shoulder surgeries, in January 1995 and February 1996.

I enrolled at Colorado State University for the Fall 1994 semester, but it was a decision that I question to this day. I did not think about how hard it would be. I did not realize that I was still recovering, still healing.

I did not realize that my brain could not handle the memorization or rigors of a college curriculum. But I pressed on nonetheless. I managed to finish my first year, still in a daze, still not fully realizing what I was doing. I was going through the motions. I was doing what my friends were doing, but it was not me and it was not right or fair. I should have been kinder to myself. Yet everything happens for a reason, and if I had not persisted those first years in college, I may never have gone to begin with.

The next year I transferred to the University of Northern Colorado and faced another setback, hitting my head in a freak accident in the garage. I had almost finished the semester at UNC, but had to take a medical drop of all of my credits because I could not remember anything I had learned and therefore could not take finals. No finals, no grades, and so I lost 16 credit hours and all of my confidence.

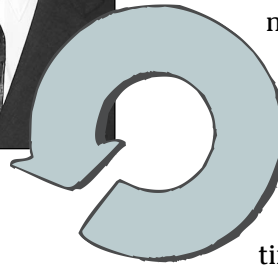
The next few years I struggled through each semester and finally decided I needed some time off from college. I was still recovering physically and

desperately missing my truest passion, skating. In 1996 I met Jac Coil, my best friend. We married in 1998 and it was Jac who encouraged me to finish college and return to skating. I was so tired, so frustrated, so willing to let it all go and let myself think that I could never do it, but he persisted. He believed in me, in my dreams of skating and finishing college. He told me I was smart and slowly I began to believe him. With skating, my soul began to heal and I became inspired to do greater things. With his support, I enrolled at my third college and continued to work through what was almost impossible for me. But every day he encouraged me, and every day I stuck with it, even though I could have given up on any one of those days.

In 1999, I was a passenger in yet another car accident. The physical injuries I had worked so hard to get rid of returned, and I spent another 3 years in physical therapy. I had surgery on my hip in October 2001. Fortunately this time, my brain was not injured, but I was in so much pain that I could not attend classes at the fourth university I was attending. I finished the semester by tape recording classes or by



Kristi, Ainsley, and Jac Coil



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