

The Accident
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I had just snuggled beneath the covers of the bed in a Nashville, Tennessee hotel. I needed to study for the final test on the children's version of the Porch Index of Communicative Abilities. For the past eight years, I had worked as a speech-language pathologist with neurologically impaired children. During the past year, I had acquired an increased interest in children with traumatic brain injuries, due to the increased number of students with traumatic brain injuries enrolled in the school, where I worked.

Upon hearing the phone ring, I casually picked it up to say "hello" when I heard my sister Carolyn say, "Jenelle has been hit by a car." I panicked. "What should I do? How bad is it?" She said the hospital stated that she was OK. My thoughts raced as I realized that even a mild blow to the head can cause severe learning problems. My little girl was so bright and even reading at four years of age.

I immediately called the emergency room at Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center in Memphis. A frantic search for my plane ticket and the telephone number of the airlines a few minutes later at 9:00 p.m. revealed that the last plane had just left the runway

I prayed all night amid catnapping. I called the front desk to check out. One more call—I called my sister, who by now was at work on the eleven to seven shift at a nearby hospital. She stopped by LeBonheur on her way to work. She said that, dressed in her nurse's uniform, she was given more information. Jenelle had a basilar skull fracture and hematoma. My numbness increased. Bleeding in the brain, skull fracture. No one told me that.

I boarded the airplane the next morning to go home. I was in a daze as I entered the intensive care unit at LeBonheur. The nurse was polite as she informed me of my child's status. The tears began to flow as I listened. Jenelle was easily aroused and knew me immediately. The nurse told me that she was doing fine and was to be moved to a room later.

Jenelle complained about frequent headaches, but refused to take Tylenol. The neurosurgeon told me that the headaches usually do not persist in children. I was still worried about learning disabilities and personality changes, but it was still too early to tell. My experiences told me that her speech/language skills were good. There was no inappropriate verbalization or slurring, and no swallowing problems were observed. We went to the pediatrician's office for a follow-up visit. After the doctor checked her out, the nurse said that an Angel must have been with her. She was healing just fine.

Jenelle's headaches decreased to one or two a month after we arrived home. She began to color and read her books. She was irritable for about two or three weeks, but soon became her old self. She entered kindergarten that fall, and was described as her teacher as a very good student. Some changes in personality were observed, such as increased impulsivity and sensitivity to noises. They soon diminished.

I returned to my job with an increased interest in the management of children and adolescents with traumatic brain injury, as well as heightened awareness of the changes that families go through.

Jenelle entered Kindergarten that fall and I continued to monitor her learning abilities. She graduated from high school with honors, and received an academic scholarship to a state university. She later received a graduate fellowship to earn a Master's degree with honors. I am always reminded of the day my world stood still.

