

Mentally Tough: The Administration of a Recovery

By Robin Ross

My name is Robin Ross. I am 43 years old and live in Tishomingo, Oklahoma on the Cross J Horse Ranch. I love horses and love to ride. I am also a recovering brain injury victim.

On May 27, 1994 I suffered a severe traumatic brain injury. Accidental brain injury is one of the fastest growing causes of disability in American society. I was riding a two-year-old gelding at the Caldwell Idaho Quarter Horse Show. He slipped and fell and I went down with him. My head whacked the ground with a whiplash effect. I was rushed to a hospital for an emergency craniotomy. On the Glasgow Coma scale a one is rated most severe, with fifteen being the least. I was diagnosed as a three. I lapsed into a deep coma. But eventually I did awake. My neurosurgeon's prognosis was not optimistic; he predicted confinement to a wheelchair and uncontrollable and permanent drooling.

I had been an accomplished horsewoman prior to the accident. Therefore, it was natural for my recovery to be based foremost around the horse. The horse is a remarkable facilitator. I had a strong beckoning reason to heal - I wanted my good life, my friends, my family and my horses back. I have traveled a long and arduous road to recovery with the horse being a very positive motivator throughout. But how was my recovery from this severe injury administered, what were the other components?

Maybe most important were my parents - they were and are fantastic. We all live at our family home, the Cross J Horse Ranch. They have always supported me in all that I do. They were there to help me right from the day of the accident. It was they who took me home from the rehabilitation hospital. My center of balance was gone. I saw double. My cognitive skills were weak and I had to rely on my mother for most personal care. It must have been painful for them. I was in a state that I myself had difficulty accepting.

I also had great medical support. Dr. Ronald Jutzky and Saint Alphonsus, a top-notch hospital, did wonders. The Idaho Elk's Rehab proved to be a super facility. My mother took me to other doctors who provided alternative therapies. I received a non-invasive treatment protocol, which helped me to improve approximately 30 percent of the way. My center of balance returned, my vision began to clear; my cognitive skills became sharper and increased.

The major turning point for me came after months of intense physical therapy in Oregon with Jim Stiltz. And it was the seemingly small act of getting back on a horse that reconnected me with my life. One day at home on the ranch, Dad saddled Norman, one of our solid, dependable saddle horses. He and my mother helped me mount. There I sat astride a horse, one parent on each side. Slowly we rode on. How can I describe my feeling of joy and freedom after all the setbacks? With Norman's cadence I felt like it was me who was striding along-strong and steady. From that day on I had a daily goal, I was back in my realm. Once again I was using my body and mind, enjoying the physical and mental exercise and I was outside, getting dirty and feeling fine.

My parents refused to settle or let me settle for less than I could possibly be. They and my whole support group provided the proper stimulation to keep me trying. I was surrounded by positive energy. I struggled to meet the expectations I saw in other people's eyes and manner. While my confidence grew, so did my support group. The competitive horse-world that I was part of before my injury is a tight knit group. My comrades kept in contact and encouraged me. They made me feel important and that my recovery mattered to them. Never underestimate the power friends can have. Every kind deed was noticed and stored for strength. My support group held an awesome power.

Today my life is not totally recovered, but I am getting there. In retrospect, my story sounds like a

Cinderella saga. In some ways it has been that, in others not. It is a fact that not every accident, injury or illness can be completely overcome. But I do believe nearly everyone can improve their lot in life and their time on this earth. The ending to this chapter of my life story is happy, but the road to the present was uneven and not graded, it was not even paved.

But what better companions to have on roads like that than a caring family, supportive friends and a sure footed horse.

Did you Know? The Idaho Neurological Institute has done a recent study of "Superior Recovery from Severe Traumatic Brain Injury". Robin Ross was one of the successful cases studied. Personal hardiness was identified as one of the main factors needed to survive. Spirituality, autonomy, perspective, positive support systems, and traditional and non-traditional treatment approaches were also identified as component of recovery.

About the Author: Robin Ross is striving to find her place in the world following a traumatic brain injury. She will be the subject of a book *Grounded*, written by her friend and author Kathy Peth. Robin is a strong believer in the Mentally Tough Program advocated in Barbara Schulte's book *Cutting, One Run at a Time*. She also credits James Loehr's, *Mental Toughness Training in Sports*, a text she read prior to her injury, as having shaped and guided her footsteps during her recovery. Most of all Robin wants to pass on her success story, motivate others to overcome obstacles and be a support system. Needless to say, Robin's recovery has surpassed her neurosurgeons predictions. Contact Robin Ross at: Cross J Horse Ranch, 10700 S. Canada Lane, Tishomingo, OK 73460