

OurHealth

magazine for richmond

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Healthy, Can They Be
Expected to Learn?

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Financially Literate?

What it Takes
to Beat a Brain Injury

What's All This
Buzz About
Fermented Foods?



7TH Annual SENIOR HEALTHY LIVING AWARDS

From assisted living and rehabilitation experts to restaurants, pharmacies, and salons, **we unveil readers' top choices in Richmond for services they trust** to keep our golden generation healthy and happy.

Beating BRAIN INJURY

Following being **STRUCK BY A VEHICLE** while serving on a traffic crash scene, police officer **JOSH MAKIN RECALLS A LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY** that may not have been possible without the help of a **RICHMOND-BASED TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY REHABILITATION CENTER.**

words | CHRISTY RIPPEL

Josh Makin is a police officer with the Virginia Beach Police Department's K-9 unit. His partner, Amos, is a half German Shepherd, half Belgian Malinois mix who lives in Makin's backyard, at a house he shares with his wife Sarah and their baby daughter. Makin is living out his dream of working as a police officer and returning home at night to a loving family, but his dream was almost shattered when he nearly lost his life seven years ago in an accident.

It was August 2012, and the then 26-year-old police officer had two years on the job. He was newly married to Sarah, his college sweetheart. It was a rainy evening, and Makin was called to the scene of a vehicle crash to help direct traffic. Makin was in the road with his hand up, preparing to stop a truck.

**"IT WAS A
LARGE TRUCK,
AND I REALIZED
IT WASN'T
GOING TO STOP."**

- JOSH MAKIN

"It was a large truck, and I realized it wasn't going to stop," says Makin. "Well, that's what was told to me, because I have no memory of any of it." As the truck approached, Makin jumped out of the way to avoid being hit, but a sedan that was traveling in the adjacent lane struck him.

"It wasn't the sedan driver's fault, all of a sudden a police officer was coming at his car," explains Makin, whose head went into the windshield. The local

news in Virginia Beach covered the story, and showed a photo of the car, which had an imprint of Makin's head where it impacted the glass.

After Makin hit the windshield, his body flew 15 feet and landed on the pavement, much to the horror of onlookers.

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J.G. MAKIN

POLICE K9-17



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Traumatic Brain Injury Left His Future Uncertain

Makin, not surprisingly, sustained a severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). At the time of the accident, his wife Sarah was at the movie theatre with her parents, who were in town visiting. She got a police escort to the hospital from the theatre, and when she arrived, the captain met her there, somberly telling her they were going to take the best care possible of Josh.

But she didn't grasp the severity of his injury until she saw him. "That's when I hit my knees," she says. The doctor sat her down and showed her a scan of a normal brain, and then showed her a scan of her husband's brain. "It looked like a blur instead of a brain," Sarah remembers.

Still in shock, Sarah tried to absorb the news that her husband was not expected to make it through the night. If he did, doctors said he'd likely never be the same person, physically or mentally. "Josh was a surfer, a police officer, and he lived to be active," Sarah says, swallowing the lump in her throat, the memories still a painful reminder of that frightening time. "Here I was in my early 20s, with a vital husband that I was told wasn't going to be able to do the things he loved anymore, if he ever woke up."

The next morning, Makin's pupils weren't dilating, a discouraging sign. The medical team discussed surgery with the family to remove a piece of Makin's skull, to relieve swelling and pressure from the traumatic brain injury. "They decided to do some more

scans to see if the surgery would be necessary," Sarah says. The results were encouraging, and the surgery was called off. After three days of constant bedside vigil by his wife, father, and father-in-law, Makin woke up.

"I think in the movies, when someone wakes from a coma they are suddenly 100 percent recovered, and completely with it," Makin says. "But that's not how it is. The doctors had cautioned my family that I may not be the person I was before when I woke up, if I woke up. And I wasn't, at least not at first."

When Makin's eyes fluttered open for the first time, he was staring at a sign on the wall with a confusing acronym. It didn't make sense to him, and he said out loud, "Why are there two 'Rs' in that word?" Besides a reduction in the swelling in his brain, it was the second good sign for his family – he could talk.

Makin spent two weeks at the hospital, first in the intensive care unit, then in a step-down unit and finally on a rehabilitation floor. Despite his encouraging recovery, he was miles away from the life he'd lead just a couple of weeks earlier, before the car struck him. He couldn't run or walk on his own. "Something wasn't clicking between my legs and my brain," remembers Makin, and he was acting more like a child than a grown man, which is typical with traumatic brain injury.

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1. The Tree of Life main campus offers a home-like atmosphere on a multi-acre campus in the far west end of Richmond.
2. The Bioness Integrated Therapy System (BITS) is a touch screen rehabilitation tool. Clients engage in a series of activities that challenge memory, problem solving, sustained attention, processing speed, and multi-tasking.
3. Dr. Zasler (left) checks in on a client who is working in the on-site rehabilitation gym with occupational and physical therapists.
4. Tree of Life's residential campus offers plenty of outdoor space for clients.

He would need dedicated and specialized neurological rehabilitation, and the hospital case worker thought Tree of Life's Transitional Neurorehabilitation Program in Richmond would be a fit. "She coordinated with the city and the insurance company to get my therapy covered, and I was taken by ambulance to Richmond to Tree of Life to begin to work on getting my life back," Makin says.

Traumatic Brain Injury Recovery at Tree of Life

Tree of Life is a private facility that was started in 1998 by Nathan Zasler, MD, one of the country's foremost experts on acquired brain injury (ABI) rehabilitation. The program provides transitional as well as long-term specialized care for adult patients who've suffered any form of acquired brain injury which includes trauma, stroke, electric shock as well as lack of oxygen to the brain.

"We have a team of physicians, therapists, neuropsychologists and nurses that provide care for our clients" says Dr. Zasler. "There really isn't anything quite like it in Virginia. Instead of a hospital-like atmosphere, the feel is residential, with an outdoor pool, greenhouse and recreation areas that serve the private group homes where patients like Makin live

during treatment. Dr. Zasler says the program currently has 27 clients with a current capacity for 29 (not including apartments which are also available for higher functioning clients). The program goal is to expand to 40 beds across five group residences by 2022.

The integration of services, and the intensity of therapy, helped Makin recover quickly. "I lived at Tree of Life first, and then I lived in a nearby hotel with my wife, from where she drove me to Tree of Life every day for therapies," he says. "I was there from August to December of 2012, and probably worked 40 hours a week on my recovery."

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Makin says **Tree of Life became like a home** to him, and staff members were committed to his care, and to helping he and his wife cope. **"The counselors would meet with me and my wife, and really dug into things,"** he says. **"Our marriage came out of it stronger than before.** I wonder if all brain injury places address this part of recovery?"



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Nathan Zasler, MD, DAAPM&R, FAAPM&R, FACRM, CBIST

A board-certified rehabilitation physician with fellowship training as well as subspecialization in brain injury medicine. He is the Founder, CEO and Medical Director of the Concussion Care Centre of Virginia and Tree of Life Services, both in Richmond. He is editor in chief of the journal Brain Injury and Chief editor of the major textbook in his field, Brain Injury Medicine: Principles and Practice.

Resources for BRAIN INJURY IN RICHMOND

Tree of Life

3721 Westerre Parkway
Richmond, VA 23233
888.886.5462
info@tree-of-life.com
www.tree-of-life.com

Brain Injury Association of America

1608 Spring Hill Road | Suite 110
Vienna, VA 22182
703.761.0750 | 800.444.6443
www.biausa.org

Brain Injury Association of Virginia

1506 Willow Lawn Drive
Suite 212
Richmond, VA 23220
800.444.6443
www.biav.net

Center for Neurorehabilitation Services

7401 Beaufont Springs Drive
Suite 205
Richmond, VA 23225
804.272.0114
www.centerforneurorehabservices.org

HCA Johnston-Willis Hospital

Neuroscience and Gamma
Knife Center
14001 Johnston-Willis Drive
Richmond, VA 23235
804.483.5000
www.johnstonwillismed.com

Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center

Polytrauma Rehabilitation
Center
1201 Broad Rock Boulevard
Richmond, VA 23249
804.675.6548
www.richmond.va.gov/
services/polytrauma.asp

Sheltering Arms Physical Rehabilitation Centers

Several locations in and around
Greater Richmond.
804.764.1000
www.shelteringarms.com

VCU Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program

1300 E. Marshall Street
Richmond, VA 23298
800.762.6161
www.vcuhealth.org



Josh with K-9 partner, Amos.

Makin first learned how to walk again, and then how to run with a therapist, who began going on jogs with him as he got stronger. His emotions were raw, and his responses sometimes immature for his age, due to his brain injury. He had assistance with speaking and grammar, and on controlling and dealing with his emotions. He improved steadily, and was finally able to return home. But the question of what he would do next in his life still lingered.

Returning to the Police Force Remained Makin's Goal

The police department was inclined to give Makin medical retirement, but Makin was interested in donning a uniform again. Dr. Zasler continued to follow Makin as an outpatient after his discharge from TOL. "He cleared me medically to return to work and helped convince the city that I was fit to return to normal duties," he says. The Virginia Beach

Police Department allowed him back on the force, and first tested the waters by assigning Makin to work with a partner for a month. After his partner reported that he was indeed fit for duties, Makin was on his own. Well, almost on his own. He's now a Master Police Officer and K-9 Handler. He and Amos, his K-9 partner, spend their days responding to calls like traffic stops, robberies and tracking down evidence.

His days have changed from constant therapy to investigating evidence and diaper changes for his almost year-old daughter. But how has the accident changed him? "I hate to say this almost, because so many other people who have traumatic brain injury don't have a miraculous recovery like what I experienced, but it changed me for the better," Josh admits. "I have a different outlook on life. I'm so appreciative, and the world looks different now."

Sarah feels that Tree of Life was a Godsend to their family and was essential to her

“I was humbled by the support at Tree of Life, they were wonderful,” Sarah enthuses. **“We had roundtable meetings where every doctor and therapist was present, deciding on the best way forward. Dr. Zasler also worked with us to make things as accommodating as possible.”**



Sarah and Josh Makin of Virginia Beach with their daughter.

husband's recovery. "I was humbled by the support there, they were wonderful," Sarah enthuses. "We had roundtable meetings where every doctor and therapist was present, deciding on the best way forward. Dr. Zasler also worked with us to make things as accommodating as possible for Josh, even allowing him to live at the hotel with me, even though it wasn't what they normally did."

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"It was about **what was best for Josh.**"

Dr. Zasler regularly receives inquiries regarding patient referrals to TOL. He continues to evaluate the best way to optimize the care rendered and evolve the program to its next stage of growth. He hopes that at some point other payers aside from worker's compensation will see the benefits of such services including Virginia Medicaid and commercial insurances. "One thing that has fascinated me about brain injury is that every injury is different just like every person is different," says Dr. Zasler. "Care needs to involve not just good differential diagnosis but also choosing the right interventions during the right window of time post-injury". He espouses the concept of patient centered treatment and is a strong advocate for both patient and family education following ABI.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR

Nathan Zasler, MD, DAAPM&R, FAAPM&R, FACRM, CBIST is a board-certified rehabilitation physician with fellowship training as well as subspecialization in brain injury medicine. He is the Founder, CEO and Medical Director of the Concussion Care Centre of Virginia and Tree of Life Services, both in Richmond. He is editor in chief of the journal Brain Injury and Chief editor of the major textbook in his field, Brain Injury Medicine: Principles and Practice.



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