

Local man turns to the written word to record lost memories

By Lisa Tallyn
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A recently released book— *Mind the Gap*— by Jonathan (Jake) McMurray chronicles the Georgetown man's tumultuous journey back from a devastating brain injury that erased all of his memories.

McMurray's life changed dramatically on Aug. 28 1995 (he was 22) while heading back to Acadia University in Nova Scotia. He was lying in the back seat of a car sleeping, with his girlfriend at the wheel and a friend in the front passenger seat, when a tire blew and the car flipped over. McMurray, who wasn't wearing a seatbelt, was ejected out of the rear window and landed on his head in the centre median of the Trans-Canada Highway. The driver was unscathed and the passenger suffered minor injuries, said McMurray.

Miraculously, McMurray survived the horrific accident, but he was left with a traumatic brain injury that caused him to forget his entire life—the ability to walk, to remember words, numbers— everyone and ev-

erything. He was rushed to hospital in Quebec where he was in a coma for seven days.

"I [woke] up spitting and babbling all the profanities I have learned over the past 22 years," wrote McMurray in his book. "My dictionary consists of eight to ten words. My vocabulary is crippled; the foul language is pretty much all that remains."

He didn't know his parents or brothers. The only thing that was familiar to him was music. He would recognize certain songs from his CD collection that his family would play for him in the hospital room.

"Music was very important," said McMurray. "It was one of the only things that I remembered, and lyrics helped me rebuild my vocabulary. It also meant that I never got lonely because music was always there."

Songs would spark memories of the place where he first heard it. He said fortunately language came back to him pretty quickly, but his vocabulary was very limited. He was later transferred to a rehabilitation facility in Nova Scotia where he spent three

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'JAKE'
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months in occupational, speech and physiotherapy.

"That's where I started over," he said.

His rehabilitation continued for several months after he returned home as well. His family and friends shared their memories with him to remind him of his past and worked with him on memory exercises.

McMurray's passion for music was intertwined throughout his journey and helped to carry him through to a place where he could find peace in his new life—in which he is married to Allison and a father of two boys, Jack and Quinn.

He was able to complete his university degree and now works part-time at the Beer Store in Georgetown.

"No memories prior to the accident have ever returned, with the exception of music, which wasn't lost in the accident," said McMurray. "Today, I have a poor, moderate working memory. I need notes to help me remember things."

In addition, as a result of the accident, McMurray has visual agnosia, which affects his ability to recognize and identify people visually.

He began working on the book in 1998 and for memories that were stolen in the accident he has tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from pictures, documents and the memories of his families, friends and others involved in his life.

He attended a Writer's Workshop

at Humber College to help with the writing process. He worked on the book on and off and after many rejections from other publishers it was picked up by Three Dogs Press in 2012. He finished the book last year (2013).

His book is available locally at White Rabbit Books (118 Mill St. Georgetown), The Williams Mill Visual Arts Centre (515 Main St. Glen Williams). It is also available online at <http://www.jonathanmcmurray.com> and will be distributed to independent bookstores nationwide in the coming weeks.

A donation of \$1 for every book sold will be made to the Brain Injury Association of Canada.

McMurray is now facing a new challenge in his life. He was recently diagnosed with Stage 3 cancer, has had surgery and is undergoing chemotherapy.



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