

# Local woman 'an inspiration', says her speech pathologist

By **MICHAEL BURTON**  
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In October of 2009 Taylor Shappert of Georgetown was involved in a two-car head-on collision on Trafalgar Road, south of 22 Sideroad.

The then-21-year-old psychology student at the University of Guelph suffered a multitude of injuries, the most serious being a "severe" skull fracture according to St. Michael's Hospital surgeon Dr. Howard Ginsberg who "put the bone pieces back together like a puzzle, connecting them with mini titanium plates and screws" during a two-hour operation.

When discharged from the hospital, Shappert, now 25, had a list of 29 injuries.

After five weeks at St. Michael's Hospital, Shappert was transferred to West Park Health Centre to begin her rehabilitation, which required up to six appointments a week. Shortly after, she moved to Bayshore Therapy.

"Taylor is an extremely intelligent, courageous and mature young lady," said Katie Schinkel, Taylor's occupational therapist and manager of rehabilitation at Bayshore.

*'When I got Dante I was finally able to leave the house by myself.'*



"When I first met Taylor she would ask me, 'When can I do these activities again?' as opposed to 'Will I ever be able to do these activities again?'" Schinkel said.

"She has worked so hard to exceed the initial prognosis of a life dependent on others. She has been successful with increasing her independence with multiple daily activities and her support system has been incredible," she said.

"She still has challenges ahead."

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"For the first year after the accident I was so physically weak," Shappert says. "They call it brain injury fog. I was very confused and had very low energy. That first year I kept saying I wanted to go back to school but I wouldn't have survived. I couldn't last a day without falling asleep."

While those around her wanted her to take more time to recover, Shappert pushed for returning to school and in the fall of 2011— two years after the accident— enrolled at Sheridan College in Oakville.

Natalia Evans, a speech-language pathologist from a private company called Speech in Motion, worked with Shappert to help her succeed at Sheridan.

"Taylor is someone who really took hold of the rehab process and the resources available to her," Evans said. "Taylor's challenge from my perspective was increasing her confidence and independence with her ability to function on her own."

"Visual deficits have been a challenge for her," she said. "The ability to process what she sees visually and make sense of that information has had an impact on how she functions in her environment."

Evans worked with Shappert on higher-level skills. This included things like orga-



Taylor Shappert, 25, poses with her mom Elaine and dad Dale. Photo by Ted Brown

nization, planning and time management which relate to her ability to keep track of school and daily tasks.

"She's an inspiration. She saw that she could get better and has so far accomplished all the goals set out for her."

Her first course at Sheridan was a newspaper-writing course, but she experienced intense fatigue due to her accident. In her second semester she decided to take two more courses, including a photojournalism course that she received an 'A' in.

"I got a call from the awards officer at Sheridan and she told me I had won an award for academic excellence," Shappert said proudly. "I'm just proud that I proved them wrong."

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As a result of the accident and damage to her occipital lobe, Shappert is unable to see left of centre of where she is looking.

She has 11 metal screws holding her skull together, but has taken each challenge one step at a time.

She is still considered to be in recovery.

"I feel much better than I did a year ago," she says. "I still don't have 100 per cent of the mental or physical strength that I used to have. There are minor things I still struggle with like time management and sleep, but I feel happy to be here."

Shappert says her family, friends, and the health professionals she's worked with

are responsible for her recovery, but she also credits Dante, her three-year-old Labrador-shepherd cross.

"Dante keeps me company everywhere I go. Having something to love and take care of got my mind off my situation, and that's when I really started to improve," she said.

When she first came home from the hospital she needed a chaperone to escort her for fear that she would sustain additional injury due to her visual impairment.

"When I got Dante I was finally able to leave the house by myself."

Shappert says the loss of independence is the most challenging aspect of her recovery. She lost the ability to drive independently, but has gone from being unable to leave the house alone, to attending college and taking public transit.

This November Shappert and her occupational therapist will make a presentation together at the Ontario Brain Injury Association conference in Niagara Falls.

"This experience has made me so grateful to be here," says Shappert. "It made me see how fragile life is. I hope that by sharing my story it will inspire others to have hope in similar situations just like mine."

"Taylor's story is one of a miraculous outcome given a potentially life-ending or disabling injury," said Dr. Ginsberg. "It's a testament to the human spirit to endure."

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