

Kellie Pokrifka: Welcome back. I am excited today to have on Darcy Keith!

Kellie Pokrifka: Tell us about your original brain injury.

Darcy Keith: I was rushing with my sorority and we did a rush party and were heading towards Ball State and we were on the highway when we lost control of our car. It spun a couple times and a 3rd semi couldn't stop and hit us. One in the car died of a broken neck. Another walked away with no injuries. I was like a human pinball and was life flighted to the hospital and was unconscious for 6 days. Then I woke up. When I woke up it was a slow wake up process. It was like being on pins and needles. There are 8 stages to waking up. And then I had to learn how to do everything all over again. I was paralyzed on half of my body. My brain swelled and didn't have anywhere to go, this was before they removed part of the skull for pressure, so I had a brain bleed.

Kellie Pokrifka: What was the healing process like?

Darcy Keith: It was painful. With having paralysis you look at someone and they may look fine, but it is like pins and needles where your arm and leg were falling asleep. And concentrating was painful.

Kellie Pokrifka: I think the wildest part of this story is that you returned to college the same semester.

Darcy Keith: The car crash happened in Sept. and I was discharged in Nov. and I returned to school in January. It wasn't my work, just my faith took over and put me where it wanted me.

Kellie Pokrifka: That's amazing. Has faith always been a big part of your journey?

Darcy Keith: Faith has been the best. Without it to rely on I wouldn't have made it this far. My family and friends are there too but the faith has been there for me daily.

Kellie Pokrifka: You have made a career out of your survival?

Darcy Keith: I have. I interned with a company right after my crash and that helped shaped my career. Once I started working for them, then I went to another company where I was promoted, and then to the company I am at now where I have been for 24 years. I couldn't have done what I am doing now without all this. We continue to get better and better and my growth hasn't been capped.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is a favorite misconception of mine. That a 2 year cap exists for brain injury.

Darcy Keith: In college I did events for Ball State and when this crash happened I tried to get back to what I did before and there were other survivors in this care circle but their care givers were talking for them, and about them, and it made me mad. And I spoke up and was like, how do you think we survivors feel? And they were shocked that I spoke! So that motivated me to have a voice and be a voice. I have that ability and I like doing that and it has flourished. I am thankful for that.

Kellie Pokrifka: I love that. Taking agency of your own injury and not letting other people be in the driving seat.

What are your favorite agencies you have spoken for?

Darcy Keith: I spoke for the NFL as part of a working success program. That has been my most fun opportunity. A couple years ago

I spoke for 2500 people in the insurance business. We have the highest designation you can get and it consist of 25 years of work and learning for me to complete and earn this designation. I was selected as a class spokesperson and it was so incredible to talk to 2500 people about my journey about traumatic brain injury. I had to start my education all over after the education and I went the insurance route and I talked about how things aren't over until they are over. Injury or a disability isn't finished. We are still working to get better. An invisible injury doesn't just end.

Kellie Pokrifka: What are steps we can take for that?

Darcy Keith: I have a step formula I have made for myself. I have spoke on it for 18 years now. It is exactly like with this COVID-19 and to apply it now. We all know what quarantine is like now, but a lot of people have had a changed life but where they can seek encouragement is in the steps.

S- surrender and let go of control. I have been a victim of domestic violence from a previous relationship. I had to let go of that and took action. The act of surrender.

T- try not to play the victim attitude. Folks don't like to be around those playing the victim. Take the victim attitude. I wanted to be the victor in my life.

E- exemplify a positive attitude. First in the morning I get up and am grateful to get out of bed. With paralysis I can do that. I had to relearn how to be potty trained. Just find things to be grateful for. There are some things that will try to steal our joy. Keep a positive attitude as much as we can and don't let anything steal our joy.

P- persevere with positive attitude. Having fortitude and strength. I wanted to prove I could get that highest designation and it was sweet to get it at the very end. Or I wanted to walk and working with that grocery cart until I could do it.

S- specifically ask for help when needed. We might think we can do it all but there are a lot of times, for example, with google we need to use it. That is asking for help. Ask Google or Alexa for help when needed. If we are too general we won't get what we necessarily need. If you need food or help, the more specific you are the better it can be. So those are the STEPS on how to live your best life. With those I made it through all my survival opportunities.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is incredible. And you have written books about it.

Darcy Keith: There are 5 books. They are all from different angles. One with Gloria Gaynor is the favorite book that I am in.

Kellie Pokrifka: I love that so much. Another topic you discuss that is so important because of COVID-19 is domestic violence. People might be trapped inside with their abuser. What resources could you give if someone is trapped?

Darcy Keith: I sought help from the prosecutor's office. Or some form of public advocacy. The prosecutor's office may be too far ahead. But there are womens shelters where you can seek out help. It is scary. This is our environment. There are so many things that are unknown. It is hard and scary but I would recommend going to some sort of outreach center for women and take it from there. You are taking steps towards the life you want to lead.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is wonderful. Thank you. You have been through so many things and it is easy to talk about resiliency and strength when feeling good. So in your toughest days and darkest hours, what gives you courage to get through one more day?

Darcy Keith: That would have to be my faith. It has been with me

day by day and it gives me the courage to get through. Next is my family. They give me support. They encourage me. There are boards with post-it notes and encouragement all over. I have problems with dysphasia sometimes and when I have a tough day and I have trouble coming up with a word, my daughter says "calm down mom. Use your words." But my family supports me and they are second after my faith.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is so wonderful. And my next question, your family and people around you helping you Accommodations for people are easy but many people don't know about them. If you have a tough day what helps with work, or school?

Darcy Keith: I would say your support circle. That could be a lot of different forms. Some people support circle could be a Facebook support group or a friend group within Facebook. I would say just having that support, having people around you and the social media aspect of it. You have to determine what is safe for you. For me it is immediate family, they all get it. My husband had to get it before he married me. I didn't tell him about my traumatic brain injury until he wanted to get serious. So he had to be on board.

Kellie Pokrifka: And that is huge. You would hope it is very common. But it is actually rare for that support system.

Darcy Keith: It is rare. After I was injured my mother didn't understand my invisible injury. She thought I was OK. I had recovered so much as was back to college, she thought I was OK. She mentally and physically abused me when she thought I was where she thought I was but I wasn't. You would think she would understand but she didn't understand brain injury and she didn't choose to understand it and that was sad. That is why you have to make sure you surround yourself with people that will support you and allow you to live your

best life.

Kellie Pokrifka: That's incredible. You make it sound easy but it clearly is not. So many skills you have learned. Thank you for sharing them. Do you have any other messages for the invisible disabilities community?

Darcy Keith: We are not invisible. We can do so many more things than people think we can. There is a support system out there to encourage us. Our injuries are not invisible, they are anything but.

Kellie Pokrifka: And if you don't have a supportive family or friends, know that we are here for you. This whole community is here for you. If you need something reach out and let us know. We are here. Thank you so much Darcy, it was incredible with so much wisdom.

Darcy Keith: Thank you for the opportunity. I love helping people.

Kellie Pokrifka: Thank you so much.

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