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LAUGHTER, THE RECIPE FOR TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY



Megan Timothy is on a cross-country bicycle trek promoting her book and speaking to people about brain injuries.

by Jaye Anders-Kukowski

A truly unique, courageous, charming and utterly delightful woman bicycled her way through Tombstone this week. Sixty-two year-old Megan Timothy from Hemet, California, is on a mission--a mission to find herself, again. Born in Rhodesia in southern Africa, Megan came to the US at age twenty-one. After a lifetime of adventures including acting, screenwriting, river rafting, chef and world explorer, Megan found herself suddenly and inexplicably "lost" within herself.

In September of 2003, at the age of 60, Megan suffered a severe brain injury. "My brain blew up," she says with a wry smile. Due to a genetic condition known as arteriovenous malformations in her brain, she experienced a major brain bleed, which resulted in the loss of all ability to communicate. Megan could no longer speak, read or write. Just prior to this, her mother had passed away and several months after, she lost her home in a fire.

For a woman so independent that she had rafted the Mississippi, canoed much of the Amazon and biked alone more than 10,000 miles around Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Megan felt she had lost herself. Rehabilitation in a state facility nearly caused her to lose her sanity. "My friends saved my life," she said with her British accent. And thus began the long road back. Doctors refused to operate until after one year to give her brain time to "settle back down." Meanwhile, friends taught her the alphabet again, word association and writing, one letter at a time. At this point her speech is nearly perfect again but reading and numbers are arduous tasks. Megan began to write a book about her recovery, often it took her over an hour to read one page she had written. "It was something like being behind a one-way window; I was trying to communicate to people, I could see and hear them but they couldn't understand me."

Emotions flooded her, fear, anger, and despair. "I couldn't give in to frustration, it didn't do me any good. I had to just accept the way things are and keep striving to improve."

Megan has now embarked on another journey, a cross-country bicycle trip to promote her book, "Let Me Die Laughing." Biking all alone, often through desolate country, Megan carries all her possessions with her on the bike. On days that she can't arrive in a town by nightfall, she pitches her tent and primitive camps along the road. A vegetarian, she carries her food in a small container on the back of the bike. With her 34 pounds of gear, she is not afraid of being alone; she fears the traffic. "On the smaller roads, there isn't a lot of room on the shoulder for a bike. The big trucks come whizzing by me."

In addition to scheduled book signings, Megan speaks with doctors, nurses and brain injury sufferers along the way to relate her experiences and recovery. "I want friends and families to understand how difficult the rehabilitation is."

In spite of adversity, her sense of humor is alive and well. Her mantra? "If you forget to laugh, you are done for!" Happy Trails, Megan, thanks for the inspiration.