

Speaker Update: Brain Injury Blogger and Author Reflects on his Time in Arizona

Jeff Sebell of Maine is a forty-one-year veteran of the brain injury community. He recently spoke at the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona's (BIAAZ) signature survivor and caregiver conference, Rays of Hope. Keerthi Vemulapalli recently caught up with him to talk about his time in Arizona.

"People see you and mimic how you treat yourself. You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That starts with dignity and respect for yourself."

As a resident of the East Coast of the United States, Jeff has a unique perspective on BIAAZ and the Arizona brain survivor community. Jeff confessed that he usually speaks to professionals, but when he came to Arizona, he spoke mostly to caregivers and brain injury survivors. Jeff said this was a big deal because "it gives brain survivors a voice so they can learn and give back by helping other survivors."

Jeff, a forty-one-year brain survivor, was in a car accident in college and says it all started after he woke up from a coma. Jeff said, "I knew my life was going to be different; I didn't know how it would be different." He stressed the importance of self-discovery outside of the hospital and therapy by having real life experiences. He also said that while might be mad at themselves for not having some of the skills and talents they used to, it is important for them to know it is not their fault. Part of the healing process includes learning to forgive yourself and the situation that led to the brain injury. While humor can be important, especially in the early stages of recovery when survivors are trying to find their footing again, Jeff stated, "there comes a time where we don't want to make ourselves the butt of all the jokes. People see you and mimic how you treat yourself. You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That starts with dignity and respect for yourself."

Jeff had a great time visiting and speaking in Ari-



Rays of Hope speaker Jeff Sebell visits the Grand Canyon

zona, which was one of his biggest engagements yet, and would love to come back. He plans to continue blogging on his site <http://www.tbisurvivor.com/>, speak at events, and spend time with his grandchildren. Although he doesn't know where the future will take him, he hopes to be a continual presence in the brain injury community. "Jeff's has a real gift that he uses to empower others," said Carrie Collins-Fadell, of the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona. "He has a message that is important for everyone to hear, regardless of where they are on their journey after a brain injury."

While in Arizona, Jeff was very generous with his time. He spoke at a Phoenix Professional Network Meeting to professionals, and after Rays of Hope, he also contributed to a special authors' panel that included NFL widow Cyndy Feasel, Chris Hotaling, and Amy Hotaling. For more information on sponsorship or to help plan our 2018 Rays of Hope Conference, please contact operations@biaaz.org to volunteer for our BIAAZ Events Committee.

