



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

Michael Murphy on Defying Death, Embracing Life, and Everything in Between

*Brittany Sweeney-Lawson, Noggin editor and BI-AAZ resource facilitation specialist, had the pleasure to interview survivor Michael Murphy about the recent publishing of his book *The 5 Percenter: Defying Death and Embracing Life*.*

Have you ever met someone who is just downright, irrepressibly cheerful? Someone who can brighten up your day just by talking to you; someone who seems to have a real zest for life and doesn't take a single day for granted? This type of person can often make us realize what is most important in life and inspire us to be our best selves. Michael Murphy is this type of person.

When Michael speaks, it's in a slow, relaxed manner that sharply contrasts with the hectic outside world. It seems only natural that his favorite pastime is golf, a sport often associated with both intense precision and essential relaxation. His current life, when compared with his pre-brain injury days, is also fairly distinct—from successful attorney and self-proclaimed workaholic, to author and health aficionado.

Michael's brain injury, like most, is a unique and interesting story. On October 7, 2011, he was scheduled to fly out of the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York to meet his



Golfing again seemed impossible when Michael collapsed after a business meeting at Trump Tower with Eric Trump and some fellow executives.

wife Pam in Las Vegas to celebrate his 54th birthday after a meeting with Eric Trump, but missed his flight. In the Delta Lounge, where he went to



Mike spent his seven-year survivor anniversary with fellow survivor and the Co-Chair of the BIAAZ Run, Walk, and Roll fundraiser, Jim Ledgewood.

book a new flight, he collapsed unconscious to the floor in front of the reception desk. Cause: a cardiac arrest, which in turn, stopped oxygen flow to his brain, resulting in an anoxic brain injury. "According to my sources, I was actually dead for 50 seconds and was not breathing for several minutes," he recalls. Fortunately for him, there happened to be a nurse who passed by the lounge at the same time he collapsed who was able to perform CPR on him and save his life.

Considering he rarely, if ever, went to the doctor before his incident at the airport, post-injury Michael suddenly found himself thrust into the medical world, constantly surrounded by doctors and specialists. "For several months, I lived at hospitals," he shares. "Doctors were my best friends." Besides spending nearly a month in intensive care, Michael was in acute rehabilitation at NYU Rusk for an additional month, where he received speech, occupational, and physical therapies daily. He was then transferred to Kateri, a sub-acute hospital, to do additional in-patient therapy for yet another month. "I had to relearn everything while in the hospitals—brushing my teeth, tying my shoes, etc.," he shares. In mid-January of 2012, he was finally able to start his out-patient therapies, meaning he was able to live at home, and could attend his therapy appointments a few times a week instead of every day. All in all, Michael and Pam estimate his recovery took about five years.

Only five percent of the people who experience the type of brain injury Michael did end up surviving. It became very clear to him that not only was he lucky, but he needed to take advantage of the second chance life had given him. This included making drastic changes in his lifestyle. Michael admits that before his brain injury, he was not a particularly healthy person—long hours at his law firm, bad eating habits, and little exercise, not to mention excessive stress, had taken their toll on him, and he believes these habits are partially responsible for the heart attack and subsequent brain injury he experienced. Now, Michael enjoys daily exercise, no longer

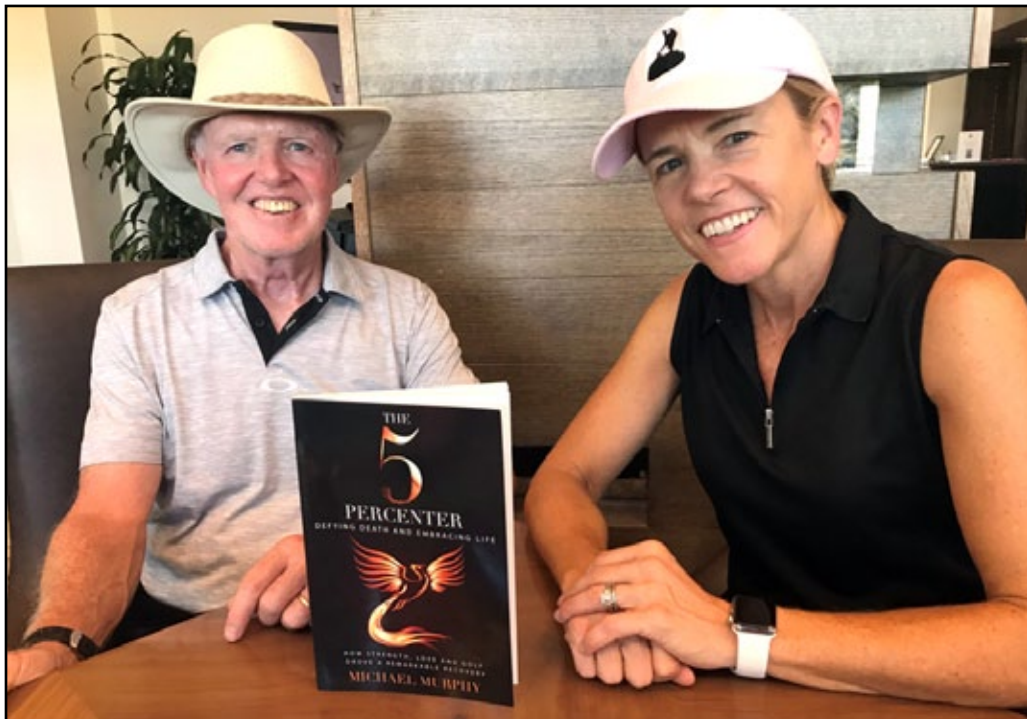
drinks alcohol, and picks healthy foods for his meals. He credits Pam with helping him along in his health and recovery journey. "I have a good wife [who] keeps me happy every day," he says. "She always provides me with so much love and support."

From the fires of his injuries, Michael emerged from the ash with scars that he feels have made him a stronger, and in some ways, a better person. "Before, it was all about working and making money," he says. "Now, it's about being a good husband and having a good life and getting better and making improvements every day." He believes that life is short, and every day should be embraced because "you never know [what can happen]."

"My thought is [survivors] should try to be stronger and better every day."

For Michael, his realization of just how rare the survival rate is for the heart and brain injuries he experienced not only made him grateful—it made him a writer. Based on the statistic that only five percent of people who suffer his same type of injuries make it through to the other side, Michael titled his book *The 5 Percenter: Defying Death and Embracing Life*. He describes it as both a personal history and a detailed account of his recovery journey.

Michael's inspiration for delving into the writing process came from encouragement from Pam, as well as from a golf professional friend of his named Kerry Graham, who in 2017 had written a book of her own about the mental aspects involved in the game of golf, which Michael helped her edit. As a lawyer, Michael had experience writing legal documents and other business-related papers but writing a book was new territory for him.



Michael and Pam are both very active in the lives of Michael's two successful adult sons.

On top of reminding Michael about his miraculous survival, writing his book proved to be therapeutic as well. "It forced me to use my memory and remember events to write them down," he remembers. "It also required a lot of research." With one book publication under his belt, Michael says he's already in the process of starting another, but this time, it's a fictional story, or as he calls it, and adventure-comedy. As his story now stands, Michael thinks it might make a better TV show than a book, and since one of his friends also happens to be a Hollywood TV producer, he's not discounting the idea of seeing his work appear on the small screen one day.

As for advice for other brain injury survivors, Michael feels it's crucial for them to be able to admit their own limitations— what they can and

can't do. He is no longer able to drive and still has a hard time with his speech. But these acknowledgments don't stop him from enjoying doing what he can do and loving his life. "My thought is [survivors] should try to be stronger and better every day," he shares. Even though he used to be what he describes as a "very good golf player" prior to his injury, Michael hasn't let his disability affect his love for the game or willingness to play. "I [still] play golf as often as I can, for the competitive aspect, brain exercise, and discipline that golf requires," he explains. As far as his game is concerned, he feels he is still "pretty good."

He also recommends staying active, stimulating the brain with a variety of games and challenges (his favorites are the computer versions of Backgammon and Scrabble), and healthy eating in order to make the most of each day and feel better overall. He also doesn't believe a survivor's purpose is lessened due to their disability. "[It] isn't the end of your life," he confirms, "it's just a change." In Michael's case, his "change" has helped him better appreciate life. Ever the optimist, Michael says, "I've always been a very positive person, but now, I think I'm even more so. Every day is a good day."

Michael and his wife Pam are avid golfers, and previously lived in New York and Boston. As of two-and-a-half years ago, they became Scottsdale residents, and are thrilled to be able to enjoy the sunshine, quality of life, and the many golf courses Arizona has to offer. For more information on Michael's book, *The 5 Percenter: Defying Death and Embracing Life*, look for it on Amazon.



Mike was thrilled to meet with BIAAZ Executive Director Carrie Collins-Fadell