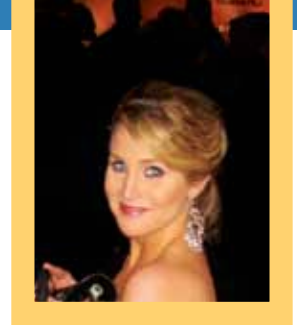


## One Journey Ends, A New One Begins

After a near-fatal car accident left her clinging to life, former Shepherd Center patient Hadley Korn will soon graduate from college.

By Sara Baxter



Nearly seven years ago, Steve Korn got the phone call that every parent dreads. His 16-year-old daughter, Hadley, had been in a car accident.

He was told it was serious. When he arrived at Floyd Medical Center near Rome, Ga., he was whisked into a stark room where medical staff had gathered.

"I thought to myself, 'They're about to tell me that my child is dead,'" he recalls.

Fortunately, Hadley had survived what had been a horrific accident — a truck had plowed into the car in which she and a friend were riding. Her condition, however, was critical.

Steve arranged for his daughter to be airlifted to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston. She had broken her neck, pelvis and several ribs. She also had sustained a traumatic brain injury.

"After a few days, we knew she would live, but we didn't know what condition she would be in when she woke up," Steve says.

It would be a while before they learned. Hadley remained hospitalized in a minimally conscious state for a month until she was admitted to Shepherd Center's Pre-Rehabilitation Education Program (PREP). Another month in a minimally conscious state passed. So the Korns made arrangements to bring Hadley home — standard procedure when a patient doesn't emerge from a minimally conscious state.

On the day before they were scheduled to leave Shepherd, something extraordinary happened. Hadley emerged to the point where she could participate in rehabilitation.

That moment proved to be the first step in a remarkable journey. For the next three months, Hadley spent her days at Shepherd relearning everything — how to walk, talk, eat, count and read.

Even though Hadley was improving, medical professionals cautioned her family that she was at significant risk for long-term cognitive impairments.

But Hadley's determination, resilience and family support along with Shepherd's aggressive therapy, resulted in a remarkable comeback. Soon after she was able to speak, she asked, "Can I still go to boarding school?"

After a year of outpatient therapy at Shepherd Pathways, Hadley left for boarding school at St. George's School in Rhode Island — the very place she was supposed to have gone five days before her accident.

"I was so ready to get on with my life," Hadley recalls. "All my friends were living normal lives with school and activities, and I couldn't do any of that."

The transition to school was harder than she imagined, including the fact that most of the students participated in some sort of team sports after school and Hadley

could not because of the lingering effects of her injury. But Hadley adapted and graduated two years later with honors. Every college that received her application accepted her for admission. "We refused to believe that she would make anything other than a full recovery," says Steve, who spent almost every day of Hadley's 16-month recovery with her. He admits that their attitude was probably "more optimism than realism."

This December, Hadley, now 22, will mark another milestone. She will graduate from the University of Southern California with a degree in communications.

She has already completed internships with the "Dr. Phil Show" and "Larry King Live." She wants to get a job in television production after graduation. Hadley still has a few physical reminders of her 2004 accident — she walks with a limp, has weakness in her left arm and hand and speaks with a slow, raspy voice. She has minimal cognition and memory issues, and has learned to compensate for those challenges.

Steve credits his daughter's willful personality for her recovery. "She's a very headstrong, stubborn young lady," he says. And he is deeply grateful for the care she received at Shepherd Center.

"There is no question Shepherd was the place she needed to be," Steve says. "I think the world of everyone there. It is an invaluable place to have here in Atlanta."



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— Steve Korn, father of former patient Hadley Korn

Former brain injury patient Hadley Korn (back row, center) recently spoke to caregivers attending a workshop sponsored by the Brain Injury Peer Visitors Association. The association was founded by former brain injury patient Ann Boriskie (back row, left).

*Photo Courtesy of Ann Boriskie*