**Opportunity to Become Something More**

**By Alicia (Payne) Murie**

Ever wanted to become part of an organization that not only helped you become a better leader but also gave you opportunities to interact with state and congressional leaders for Oklahoma, learn job skills and literally so much more?! You would have probably never even begun to think that all these opportunities would have come from helping others who have sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury. But they do. Further it would probably astound you to learn that Alicia (Allie) Murie created this when she had been living with a Left-Right Traumatic Brain Injury for barely over four years. But its true and I am here to show others miracles do happen, plus I want to give back and give credit where credit is due.

I started TBI Raiders in January of 2002. Now before I get into the story, let me give you some background. The spring of 2001 I had taken Microcomputer Applications. For the final in class, we had to design a website and develop a presentation as to why the website was needed. I don’t remember the presentation I gave but know I did it on students who had sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury. The summer that followed I created A TBI’s Corner to educate others on Traumatic Brain Injury, how it affected students in K-12, and ways to help them succeed. What was unique about when I created this was I was the student representative for the Oklahoma Association of Higher Education And Disabilities (OK-AHEAD) and also was a member of multiple online Traumatic Brain Injury message boards. I liked doing a lot of searches online for this stuff. It also helped that the State Superintendent, Sandy Garrett, at the time would send me names and numbers of people to contact when I would email her about issues concerning Traumatic Brain Injury.

I started getting an idea of creating an online club but wasn’t quite for sure if I should or not. Enter Ashley Washsauen who is also a Traumatic Brain Injury survivor. We got to talking about how help just disappears once a Traumatic Brain Injury survivor graduates high school. We also discussed how as survivors, students with a Traumatic Brain Injury, needed to band together. So in January of 2002, TBI Raiders was born. TBI is for Traumatic Brain Injury. Raiders are also the mascot for Rose State College, my alma mater. I decided on Raiders because that is what the online club would be doing, raiding coast to coast to educate others about Traumatic Brain Injury. You might be wondering why a sports themed name. I wanted those of us living with a Traumatic Brain Injury to have something to call ‘our own’. I wanted TBI Raiders to be something that survivors could really call their own.

As I began developing the websites and message board, my friends at Rose State College who like me were student leaders nicknamed what I had created as an ‘online city’. I developed a web ring to start bridging together websites dedicated to Traumatic Brain Injury. I also grew to love researching and writing papers that had do with the subject matter of Traumatic Brain Injury. I didn’t really begin to see the need to develop TBI Raiders into something more until July 2004 when I had traveled to Washington D.C. to represent Oklahoma Youth with Disabilities at the National Youth with disabilities Leadership Conference. I remembered the misconceptions I had about disabilities and came to see and hear the misconceptions others had about disabilities but I wasn’t able to pull things together until I really heard the misconceptions youth with disabilities had about those who weren’t disabled.

I wanted to fix this. How could we expect those in politics to really change and help those with disabilities if we weren’t trying to do something ourselves to change it, so when I had returned to Oklahoma, I chose to turn TBI Raiders into a volunteer service, a volunteer service for students living with and without a Traumatic Brain Injury. So when I came back to Oklahoma I started thinking about how to make this opportunity different. I began thinking about why I created TBI Raiders in the first place. I wanted a supportive network for TBI survivors. But how could I expect to really see any changes if I didn’t try myself to do something about it? So when I returned to school and was studying Health Physical Education and Recreation, I also spent time researching opportunities that existed and looked to see what was missing from the equation.

I had a website up and running as well as a name for the service and a mission statement. I just needed to think of the opportunities to offer. Easy…

* Gain skills needed for the workforce
* Learn leadership skills
* Interact with state and congressional leaders for Oklahoma
* Educating others about Traumatic Brain Injury and the potentials/realities of survivors
* Improving their communities
* Improving the schools they attended

Then I started thinking of the volunteer positions that should exist and the committees that this would need. The whole entire time I was doing this I was staying politically active. Then on December 29, 2004 when I was talking to former state representative Danny Morgan, he had asked me to write a paper on disabilities. So I did but I focused the paper on Traumatic Brain Injuries to show what a portion of those with disabilities experience. I had an introduction page along with a section on education, employment, and social security income. I spent a month researching and putting the paper together. Around that time I had created Survived to Vote. At first it only applied to Traumatic Brain Injuries until I came to understand my disability better.

The summer of 2005 I made another trip to D.C. but this time as a representative for the National Youth Leadership Network at the Easter Seals Celebration of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I learned so much from that event. It made me feel like what I was trying to accomplish was that much more important. I became that more determined to get something done. After I had returned home, just like the previous summer I wrote a report on the conferences and how Oklahoma could benefit from what was covered. I sent that report to many of the elected officials for Oklahoma.

As time passed and I would talk to Traumatic Brain Injury survivors, there was an interest in turning TBI Raiders into a non-profit organization. I started to research how to become a 501©3 organization and all the steps for creating a non-profit organization that were involved. As 2006 came around, I was living on my own and devoting close to 24/7 of my time on TBI Raiders. In May of that year I along with Dr. Ruth Azarados were recognized through Oklahoma House Resolution Bill 1126. It was unanimously passed to where it recognized volunteers who helped those who had sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury in their recovery. Then the following September I spoke before the Health and Human Resources committee for the Oklahoma House of Representatives when they did a study on Traumatic Brain Injury.

I would go to college fairs to recruit students for TBI Raiders. I had even listed TBI Raiders on volunteermatch.org. Even though when I was on campuses no one would get back in touch with me about becoming involved, Oklahoma State University is where I would always have the most positive feedback. When I started the newsletter I eventually wanted a sports section. I contacted the The O’Colly at Oklahoma State University about putting some sports articles in the newsletters, they agreed to let me and I gave credit to them naturally.

In the long run I’ve done a load of things no one would have expected a survivor of a near fatal car accident to accomplish. I want to give back to those who’ve helped me get to where I am today. I may not have the energy or endurance I once had, but I am determined enough to show others how I built everything up so the legacy can continue on. If you want to join in on the adventure to help me continue creating something that would be the first of its kind here in the state, you can call 405-698-2403 or send a message to tbiraiders@gmail.com.