

High school senior experiences remarkable recovery from brain injury and makes plans for an adventure. **BY BILL SANDERS**

an ADVENTUROUS FUTURE

Senior year of high school is almost always a mixed bag of emotions. There's plenty of stress and fear of the unknown one moment, then the hopes and dreams of a bright future the next.

For Connor Holmes, senior year at The Westminster School in Atlanta meant all of that – and recovering from a serious brain injury.

Just two months before he was to start his senior year in 2007, Connor was in a car crash while driving home from a family vacation at Edisto Island, S.C.

“I don't remember the crash, but I was told that I was taking a left turn off of a two-lane road onto a busy, four-lane highway,” Connor says. “I saw a car coming and knew I had time to pass in front of it. Another car pulled around that one and hit me as I pulled out.”

Connor, unresponsive at the scene, was airlifted to the Medical University of South Carolina Medical Center in Charleston, where doctors placed him in a medically induced coma.

“They put shunts in my brain to stop the swelling, and then after two and a half weeks, I was flown to Atlanta to Shepherd Center,” Connor says. “I came out of the coma and started getting physical, occupational and speech therapy.”

For nearly six weeks, Connor stayed at Shepherd Center. Then he graduated to the Shepherd Pathways residential rehab program, where he underwent treatment for a month.

Then came the onerous task of going back to school.

“I wasn't at all 100 percent when school started in September,” Connor recalls. “I started with taking just three classes. I had extra time on the tests, and the teachers were really good at staying in touch with the folks at Shepherd, so they knew what I was going through.”

In addition to academic adjustments, Connor had to deal with other changes stemming from the injury – a shaven head and a raspy voice. Those are big deals to 17-year-olds – particularly to those who are lead singers in a rock band.

“I couldn't really sing, so I didn't know what that would mean for the band,” says Connor, who sings with a classic and southern rock group aptly named Southern Comfort. Of course there are plenty of rock singers with raspy voices. But now, Connor's voice has almost returned to the smooth style he wants.

Connor's next 12 months will be an adventure.

“I am headed to Patagonia on a National Outdoor Leadership School trip from September to December, and in the spring, I plan to



Above: Connor Holmes, who sustained a traumatic brain injury in a summer 2007 car crash, has made a remarkable recovery.

go to Australia with a group of students from different countries and travel and work for different families down there,” he explains. “And I've already been accepted at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where I'll enroll in 2009 after my gap year.”

Looking back, Connor knows he was lucky.

“I know my parents worried it was life threatening,” Connor says. “But when I got to Shepherd, I started recovering faster. I felt the whole time things were going to be OK and I would be back.”

Connor's mother, Florence Holmes, says both hospitals were critical to her son's recovery.

“MUSC saved Connor's life, and Shepherd gave him his life back,” Florence says. “For that, we are eternally grateful.”

“At Shepherd, everyone is so positive, and it has a lot to do with James (Shepherd) and his way of approaching his own accident,” she adds. “We saw miracle after miracle with Connor, and now, the average person wouldn't be able to see any difference in Connor. He has his music back, he's got quality of life and he has a future.”