



Martha Childress

Simpsonville, S.C.

When 18-year-old **Martha Childress** of Simpsonville, S.C., arrived at Shepherd Center in October 2013, she was angry.

While waiting for a taxi to take her back to the University of South Carolina campus, she was struck by a stray bullet fired during a nearby argument and she sustained a complete T-11 spinal cord injury.

Martha was paralyzed, shocked and convinced that her life was ruined.

"I was angry at my mother and my family, and I took it out on them," Martha says. "I didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't want to go to therapy. I didn't want to do anything."

"Everyone who works there is happy to be there. I think it felt good because they could see the outcome from what they were doing."

Martha Childress

But she wasn't at Shepherd Center by accident. At the insistence of a family friend, Martha's mother, brother and stepsister visited the hospital to see if it was the right place for her.

"I was terrified when we got there because I knew nothing," recalls Martha's mother, Pam Childress. But after touring the hospital, meeting therapists and watching patients undergoing rehabilitation, Pam says: "I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. Everyone was so positive. We met (co-founder) Mrs. Alana Shepherd, and she and all of the staff, regardless of their roles, were all so positive. It was phenomenal."

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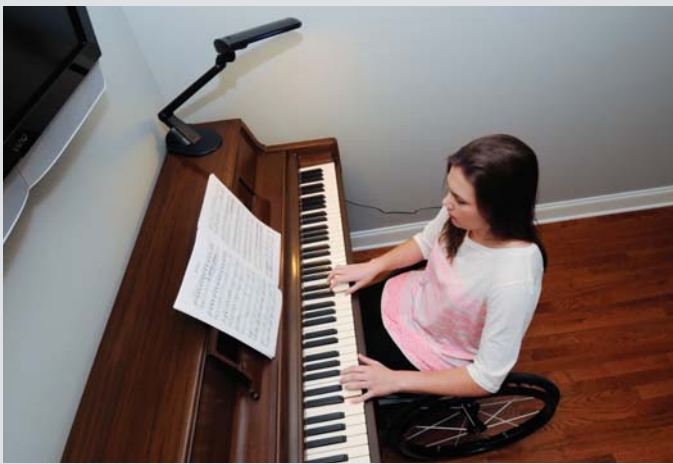
MARTHA CHILDRESS CONTINUED

Although it took some time, Martha eventually agreed with her mother.

"It was scary at first," Martha says. "I didn't think I could do anything. I thought I would never be out on my own or go back to school. It was terrifying."

But the therapists on her rehabilitation team convinced Martha to channel her anger into therapy, and she began to see changes.

"I had no idea how grueling it would be," Martha says. "It takes a toll mentally and physically, working that hard, but it was the best place I could have been. The therapists pushed me to be the best I could be. And they made it fun. They made me smile and laugh, and they've helped me have a better and more fulfilling life."



"Everyone who works there is happy to be there," she adds. "I think it felt good because they could see the outcome from what they were doing."

After eight weeks, Martha went home and began the transition to a new way of life. She found she could do most of the things she did before, but in a new way.

"There was a mixture of excitement and being nervous and anxious," she says. "I wanted to be home with my friends, but Shepherd Center is like a bubble. You feel so safe there, and people are used to seeing people in a chair. It was scary at first, getting out in public at home. People were surprised to see me. They didn't think I'd want to be out and have such a good attitude. It's been fun to shock people."

Martha has continued her therapy and enrolled in two online courses at USC. She began driving and, in keeping with her self-described Type A behavior, says: "I'm getting out a lot. I'd drive myself crazy if I had to stay home all the time. I have appointments just about every day."

She has also returned to Shepherd Center and had lunch with her therapists. "I'm so thankful for everybody there," she says. "They changed my life. I'll be forever grateful for what they did for me."

Pam Childress is grateful, too.

"I went back to visit the trauma surgeon and told him he saved Martha's life," Pam says. "The team at Shepherd Center gave her back to me."

To read more about **Martha Childress** and view a video interview with her, visit: news.shepherd.org/back-on-campus-patient-profile-martha-childress





Mike Moberg

Nashville, Tenn.

Aside from building up strength, learning about daily care and how to perform specific tasks in a wheelchair, **Mike Moberg** had to learn how to do one more thing during his time at Shepherd Center – lose weight.

Mike, 32, of Nashville, Tenn., figures he was at his highest weight ever when he sustained a T-10 to -11 spinal cord injury in an auto accident in January 2009. He carried about 310 pounds on his 6-foot, 1-inch frame.

“As soon as I went from a power wheelchair to a manual chair, I realized that the less I weighed, the easier it would be for me to transfer in and out,” Mike says.

“The therapists worked me pretty hard. I was always tired at the end of each day, but also feeling better because I knew I was making progress.”

Mike Moberg

For aerobic exercise, his therapists had him push his chair through the Shepherd Center parking garage. He was also assigned a dietician who was able to give him helpful nutritional information and how to make healthy choices with food.

When Mike returned home to Nashville after three months at Shepherd, he found a nearby, six-level garage that did not have too much traffic.

“I would go there in the afternoons and start on the ground floor and push up the inclined portions of each level until I reached the rooftop level,” he says. “Once I was

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MIKE MOBERG CONTINUED



on top, I would do a few laps around that level and then take the elevators back down to the ground floor and do it all over again, usually five or six times. I also improved my diet. The pounds started to come off.”

He stepped up his efforts dramatically in summer 2012 when Shepherd awarded him a scholarship for an intensive, 12-week activity-based program called Beyond Therapy®.

“It was really like a boot camp – the program consisted of a mixture of exercise and activity-based therapy, using various techniques and equipment for three hours a day three times a week,” Mike explains. “The therapists worked me pretty hard. I was always tired at the end of each day, but also feeling better because I knew I was making progress.”

Indeed, Mike has made huge progress – dropping from 310 pounds to a range now of 155 to 160. To maintain his weight, he works out at gym, doing strength training and upper-body exercises, most of which he learned during his time at Shepherd and Beyond Therapy.

He’s also found a new sport to keep him motivated – cycling.

“Since I started riding with a handcycle a few years ago, I have completed two full marathons and a several shorter bike races,” he says. “The races help me because I see them as a fun way of exercising, and they provide motivation to train and get out and ride more because I’m working towards something. I always want to do my best on race day.”

Mike is also trying his hand at wheelchair racing, though he says he is still in the early stages and feels he has a lot to work on.

Read more about **Mike Moberg** and watch a video interview with him at: news.shepherd.org/fit-for-life/





Jitka Virag

Greenville, N.C.

On Jan. 25, 2014, **Jitka Virag, Ph.D.**, went skiing on her 44th birthday. It was something she'd never thought she'd be able to do after being hit by a car while riding her bike home after work in October 2007.

The accident left her with a T-4 complete spinal cord injury. For the last seven years, Jitka, an assistant professor of physiology at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., has been living life from a wheelchair as a busy working mother of two. She recently decided to try adaptive sports.

"It was fabulous!" she says of the trip to Massanutten, Va., with Mark Andrews of Therapeutic Adventures. "It wasn't nearly as complicated, scary or disastrous as I thought it might be, and when I did wipe out, I couldn't stop laughing! I felt so wonderfully alive!"

“My husband is undeterred by adversity. If there is a way to get around it, he will find it. We share the view that things are only impossible if you let them be.”

Jitka Virag, Ph.D.

After her accident, Jitka spent three months at Shepherd Center, where she appreciated the team treatment approach, she says. A physical therapist helped get her left arm – injured in the accident – functioning and pain-free again. She was taught basic home skills, such as cooking, laundry and shopping, that she would need to help care for her baby and 3-year-old son. Shepherd Center's recreation therapy program introduced her to the possibilities of the outdoor activities she loved, including skiing.

Jitka has experienced her share of adjustments, too. At her position in the medical school at East Carolina University, Jitka studies ways to repair damaged cardiac tissue after

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JITKA VIRAG CONTINUED



a heart attack. Part of her research includes performing microsurgery, and the university eased her return to work by providing support staff and lowering the worktable in her lab. Jitka also learned to juggle errands and tasks, such as taking her children – who are now 7 and 10 – to their activities. She credits her husband, Jani, for handling most duties at home.

At Shepherd, therapists tested her tolerance for a standing chair in the future. That became a reality in spring 2013, when, with help from North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Services, she got a Lifestand Helium standing manual wheelchair, which she now uses mainly for lecturing and at seminars and conferences. It has been particularly challenging and frustrating to Jitka that she was not always communicating at eye level with students and colleagues.

“The standing chair has really helped with that,” she says. “Unfortunately, it is not quite as maneuverable or easy to get into and out of in my van, so I don’t use it as often as I would like.”

Jitka credits Shepherd Center for getting her to where she is now and her husband for helping her maintain a positive attitude.

“My husband is undeterred by adversity,” Jitka says. “If there is a way to get around it, he will find it. We share the view that things are only impossible if you let them be.”

What’s next on Jitka’s list? Scuba diving.

Read more about **Jitka Virag** at:
news.shepherd.org/designed-for-women

