

Candace's Comeback – Philadelphia News  
Friday, September 05, 2008 | 7:34 PM

<http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section=news/health&id=6373030#bodyText>

by Lisa Thomas-Laury, reporter; Dawn Heefner, producer

UNIV. OF PA.; September 5, 2008 (WPVI) -- When we think of big local comebacks, we think of Rocky, of course. But none of it compares to the extraordinary recovery of a Berwyn woman, who nearly died 3 years ago, who in 2 days will compete as an all-star athlete.

"I'm glad to be back here to say thank you," Candace Gantt says as she stands at the nurses' station.

The 51-yr-old Gantt received an especially warm welcome when she stopped by the Penn Center for Brain Injury this week.

It was her first time back, since she arrived 3 summers ago, with life-threatening injuries.

Candace was training on her bike, in July 2005, when a construction truck hit her, shattering her skull, and more.

"I broke facial bones, cheek bones. And I broke my clavicle," she says.

Her husband was told her prognosis was extremely poor.

"They told him originally I would not walk or talk."

A large part of her skull had been removed, and it wasn't till a year later that she would receive titanium and plastic plates to replace the missing bone.

After 2 weeks, she emerged from a coma, and began the long road to regaining what she had lost.

But WALKING that road wasn't good enough. Candace wanted to RUN, and RIDE again. She told Action News, "It's my joy, it's a piece of me."

Slowly, and amazingly...she returned to competition.

Sunday, she'll compete in a 'half-iron' triathlon in Bear, Delaware – 70 miles of running, biking, swimming, & raising money for Penn's brain injury center.

Candace says she is still working to restore her thinking skills and memory. In the early stages, she had to run with a physical therapist at her side, to be sure she didn't fall, or lose her way, during her training session. her body was recovering, but her thinking and memory wre lagging behind.

One memory gap involves her hospital stay – she was surprised by her photo in the brain injury unit.

Candace says, "Oh, my gosh. I never attached my accident to someone who was in such bad shape."

Candace may be competing for "iron, but to the staff of the brain injury center at Penn, seeing her NOW is solid gold.

Donnamarie Schuele, BSN, RN, told us, "It validates everything we do, and why we're here, and why we come to work."

Dr. Doug Smith, the director of the center, says "For her to come back, and do a competition, I'm in pretty good shape, and I can't do that competition."

Lisa Fidyk, BSN, RN, says, "It's just amazing to see them walk through the door."

Donnamarie adds, "It makes a big difference to see them whole. I'm going to cry."

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