

SURVIVOR NEWS

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SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT

Survivor Spotlight: Steve Charest

My name is Steve Charest, and I am a skier, climber, guide, father, husband, business owner, and trauma survivor.

I was introduced to the adventures that turned into a career at a young age, and have had incredible mentors and instructors, and family and community that have always supported my lifestyle choices. As a kid, I had dreams of ski racing on the world cup, climbing Everest, and playing in the mountains as much as humanly possible.

I was able to pursue these dreams and ambitions to college (NVU) where I received a degree in Outdoor Education and Environmental Education. I was introduced to guides and mentors, and industry

organizations like NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School), the AMGA (American Mountain Guides Association), and AIARE (American Institute of Avalanche Research & Education). In 2000, I needed to complete an internship to finish my degree and became involved in the beginning stages of a new climbing gym and mountaineering school called Petra Cliffs.

Petra Cliffs and its community of members, staff and clients have made me feel more welcomed and included than anywhere else I have traveled. Previous owners supported me and my goals. I met my wife, a co-worker at the gym, and we dated, adventured and pursued climbing and skiing together throughout the world. I've been able to introduce people to climbing and skiing who have taken them to literal world-record accomplishments and they've become nationally influential people who protect climbing access and help protect our mountain resources/environment.

Ten years ago my wife and I had the opportunity to purchase Petra Cliffs, and we continue to grow, support and cultivate the climbing community. I've been fortunate enough to become a fully Certified AMGA Rock and Ski Mountaineering Guide. I have one final Alpine exam to pursue for an international guiding certification. We have even planned and permitted Petra Cliffs' next evolution into an entirely new facility. Most importantly, I've become a father and introduced our little one into the Petra community, where she has been free to pursue these adventures. *(continued on page 2)*



Survivor Spotlight

Continued from page 1

An unexpected curveball

On December 27th, 2018 I had a pair of clients out for an Introduction to Ice Climbing day, and after a whole day of instruction, I transferred my rope to an existing fixed rappel anchor for descent (a routine I've done hundreds of times) and awoke in the hospital a month later. I had fallen 60 feet and badly broke my ankle, wrist, jaw, face and skull, had abdominal trauma and a moderate traumatic brain injury (thank goodness I was wearing a helmet).

Luckily, we had other guides in the area who helped initiate rescue, and the Smugglers' Notch Ski Patrol and the DART heli team got me out of the woods and into the extremely capable hands of the UVM Medical Center Team. They put me back together and they constantly responded to my common question, "When can I return to the mountains?" Wheel chair bound, I fought to get up. Wrist in a cast and I begged to return to a pull up bar, and anyone who would listen I sprayed endlessly about returning to the mountains.

I was surrounded by doctors, rehab specialists, family and a climbing community that pushed my ambitions. The moment I could walk in a cast boot, I climbed at the gym. I couldn't look up without having terrible double vision, but prisms "belay glasses" borrowed from a member solved the problem. The moment I could jam my ankle into a ski boot, friends and family took me on a ski tour. For my 40th birthday I visited some of my closest climbing partners and friends in Red Rock Canyon, Las Vegas and got back on moderate missions of climbing and descending 800+ feet. I returned to guiding day trips and being back involved at Petra Cliffs. Everything was not perfect but moving forward. The new climbing gym was back on track to start construction; I exceeded everyone's expectation of my recovery.....except my own. I am not the alpinist I was before the accident, and often it is my own expectations or comparisons to the past that make the present difficult.

Doctors and specialists have been shocked with my recovery, and often I get complimented on the fact that I am in "better shape than the average 42 year old American male." I have returned to skiing, ski mountaineering and teaching in the mountains. I climb, not quite the same as pre-accident, but I can get up the usual routes. Some dreams and life goals have been put on the back burner, like my IFMGA goals, but the goal of pursuing this dream has only grown. The community is stoked and shocked by my progression, and they encourage me to continue to test the limits.

My daily crux is to better define my own goals: Find the fun in all pursuits, and manage the PTSD of traumatic injury. I continue to join past clients, members, friends and family on adventures whenever possible and try not to have too many unrealistic expectations. Yes, all of these pursuits carry inherent danger, but honestly, when managed well, that is part of the fun. The fun is where I am trying to redefine my own expectation. So for now, I plan to keep climbing with my friends and family, and sow the seeds of alpinism for as many as I can. I've made many of my parenting and business decisions with the same risk evaluation tools I've used in the mountains. All I can recommend is to find what really makes you happy and never stop pursuing it. I look forward to joining you in the mountains again!



Nutrition and Mental Health

By Emily Clairmont, MS, RD, CD



In the last 5 years a great amount of progress has been made regarding what we know and understand about how our mood and emotions are connected to what we eat. There is a strong connection between our brain and our gut, known as the “gut-brain axis.” This area of research is relatively new and is ongoing, but without a doubt there is a relationship here that we didn’t know enough about until recent.

As with many dietary recommendations, eating for optimal mental health and emotions means paying attention the amount and frequency of which we consume high added sugar foods, refined grains, and low nutrient quality processed foods. These foods increase inflammation all over the body, including the brain, and do not supply us with the nutrients we need to help our body heal and work the way we expect it to.

The resources below help to explain in detail which foods impair our brain and which foods empower our brain.

- o Uma Naidoo, MD – [What to Eat for Optimal Mental Health](#); author of “This is Your Brain on Food”
- o Drew Ramsey, MD – [Brain Food Quiz](#); author of “What to Eat to Beat Depression and Anxiety”
- o MIND Diet – [Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay](#)

Yoga for Chronic Pain

By Jen Peterson, E-RYT 500HR, YACEP, Reiki Practitioner

Chronic pain is so much more than ongoing sensations of physical pain. It is a multi-dimensional systemic response that includes our anatomy, physiology, nervous system, mental health, and spirit. There may have been one precipitating event such as an injury or accident that triggers it or it may develop over time based on patterns of movement and lifestyle. Whichever the source, parts of our nervous system, our body’s communication network, gets its wires crossed and muscles become chronically tensed, tissues remain inflamed, and breathing becomes dysregulated. Energy levels and mindset are also negatively influenced. Because our inner world is out of harmony, our outer world usually suffers as well and our lives and relationships are disrupted.



Yoga is a system that focuses on our whole being so it is a great practice for reintegrating and finding more coherence which helps to ease and even eliminate chronic pain. In the West, we tend to think of Yoga as being about increasing our flexibility and strength. At its core, however, Yoga is an ancient practice from south Asia based on thousands of years of study. Its primary goal is calming the fluctuations of the mind which is considered the root of all suffering. It is a comprehensive tool box including ethical behaviors, asanas (postures), pranayama (breathwork), and dhyana (meditation) among other practices that are designed to establish and maintain health and a sense of balance (literally and figuratively). Modern scientific research confirms that when applied consistently and carefully based on the individual’s ability and needs, Yoga practices help to:

- re-regulate the nervous system,
- relax dysfunctional breath and movement patterns,
- reduce inflammation,
- calm the mind, and shift unsupportive patterns of thinking.

(continued on page 4)

Dealing with Stress

By Zoe M. F. Brier, MA

Recovering from a traumatic injury can be stressful and challenging, particularly when dealing with both physical and mental health difficulties. It's important to remember that these mental health difficulties following a trauma are typical, and most people experience symptoms of stress immediately after the event. There are ways to practice stress reduction on your own.

One simple tool is a technique called square breathing. It might be helpful to do this type of breathing in a comfortable chair, though it can be practiced anywhere. First, exhale out all of your air. Then, while counting slowly to four, inhale through your nose. Hold this breath for another four seconds, and exhale out of your mouth while again counting to four. After you have exhaled, count to four again and hold. This technique can be repeated multiple times. It may be helpful to hold a calming image in your mind while practicing your square breathing.

Another helpful skill to practice is progressive muscle relaxation, which is optimally done while lying in bed. During this exercise, you will tense each muscle group for approximately four to ten seconds, and then then relax it for ten to twenty seconds. You can work each muscle group in whichever order you would like, though it may be helpful to start at the top or bottom of your body and work through each group of muscles in that order.

It can be helpful during this time to practice activities that you may typically enjoy, such as spending time with loved ones and taking short walks. If you are seeing a therapist or counselor, it is also important to talk with them about difficulties you may be having.

For more information, check out <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225>



Chronic Pain and Yoga

Continued from page 3



The result of this harmonizing effect is a feeling of wellbeing and peacefulness. This makes healing easier and helps us to have a different relationship with our pain.

Contrary to popular belief you don't have to be flexible to do Yoga. There are classes available online and in person that are accessible for people of all abilities and ranges of motion. Plus, as noted above, not all Yoga practices involve postures. For people struggling with chronic pain a great option is to work one-to-one with a Yoga teacher that specializes in adapting poses carefully for you depending on the severity and restrictions that chronic pain is imposing. Private instruction ensures the Yoga practice that you do will be designed to meet your needs and that you have the understanding and support you need to practice safely. Then you have a personalized practice to do at home on your own and the more you practice the more the benefits are amplified—even if you only practice 20 minutes/day!

[Yoga Alliance](#) and the [International Association of Yoga Therapists](#) both have directories on their websites where you can locate experienced certified Yoga teachers near you. For a free phone consult with a local therapeutically trained Yoga teacher who can help you find the Yoga practice that's right for you, set up an appointment at yogagraca.as.me/phoneconsult

Meet the Trauma Team:

Toby Rockwood, Clinical Case Manager

Toby RN,BSN,CCM, has been a case manager with the trauma service for 6 years and the University of Vermont Medical Center for 20 years. Her job is to work with trauma patients and their families as they navigate an unexpected admission and complex medical system of care. She provides support, compassion, advocacy and assistance with connections to any post hospital services no matter what level of need.

To many of our survivors and families, Toby is the equivalent of a super hero. Toby was awarded the 2021 award for Excellence in Trauma Care. To quote one of the many nominations she received. "When I am caring for a trauma patient with unique and challenging needs, I am always relieved when Toby appears to the bedside. I have frequently thought, "Thank goodness Toby is here to help me navigate this situation." One might find Toby talking a patient through a deep breathing or mindfulness exercise while a provider is performing a bedside procedure and the nurse is assisting. One might also find Toby consoling a worried and overwhelmed family member. Toby has always gone the extra mile to perform both excellent closed loop and open communication with patients, their loved ones, and providers."



Trauma Awareness Month

By Abby Beerman

May is National Trauma Awareness Month, hosted by the American Trauma Society and the Society of Trauma Nurses. It was first recognized in 1988 by Ronald Reagan as a way to increase the awareness of traumatic injuries and prevention activities. The most important part of Trauma Awareness Month 2022 is National Trauma Survivors Day on May 18th!

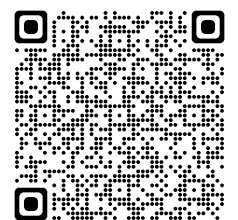
How to celebrate National Trauma Survivors Day:

- Take a picture of you, your family, or your friends holding a [#TraumaSurvivorsDay Sign](#) (page 6) and post it on social media with the same hashtag or with the hashtag #NTSD! Posting a message of hope, support, or inspiration can aid those struggling through the recovery process.
- Register to attend the Third Annual Life After Trauma: Celebrating Survivors Celebration with the University of Vermont Medical Center on Wednesday, May 18th at 6 pm. This virtual event brings together survivors, their families,

and the health care professionals who treated them to celebrate the road to recovery. The highlight of the event is survivors sharing their stories and an award ceremony for those in the community and in the medical field who are making an impact on traumatic injury. Register today by scanning the QR code or at forms.office.com/r/chbAkAfd5Y



- Join the [Race to Rebuild](#), a virtual Walk/Run/Cycle/Roll event to raise awareness and support for trauma survivors. The event is hosted by the American Trauma Society and the national Trauma Survivors Network. Register today by scanning the QR code. Trauma Survivors can use the code **SURVIVOR2022** for 50% off registration.
- Nominate someone to receive the Excellence in Trauma Care Award or the Community Champion for Trauma Award by April 29th! forms.office.com/r/6yfbgAy8z



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#TraumaSurvivorsDay