

A Miraculous Recovery for Pilgrim's Youngest Patient Ever

How It All Began

On a rainy, foggy Thanksgiving Eve 2007, just after 6:30 PM, athletic Aubrie Ceres, then 21, decided to dash across the street from her home to Dunkin' Donuts for coffee. Instead, as she later told *The Salem News*, "My life changed in the blink of an eye." Hit by a car, she was tossed into the air, crashed into the car's windshield, and eventually landed on the pavement 60 feet away.

Barely alive, Aubrie was airlifted from Lawrence General Hospital to Beth Israel Deaconess in Boston. The catalog of her injuries was extensive: traumatic brain injury, 13 breaks to her ribs, a bruised heart and kidneys, collapsed lung, and more—much more. About the only body part unscathed was her left arm. Aubrie, then 21, wasn't expected to survive the night. But survive she did.

Kept for weeks in a medically induced coma so she could heal, Aubrie awoke on Christmas Eve, unable to walk, and experiencing difficulty speaking, swallowing, and eating.

A Lucky Connection

After weeks in the hospital and then a rehab facility, Aubrie arrived at Pilgrim Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing Center in Peabody on March 3, 2008. Longtime family friend Melissa McGrail, Pilgrim's admissions director, paved the way. McGrail's the one who suggested that Aubrie's family apply for MassHealth (Medicaid) benefits for her. That turned out to be great advice, because the driver's insurance and then Aubrie's own health insurance benefits quickly ran out.

McGrail was also the one who convinced Pilgrim to accept Aubrie, even though she didn't fit the typical patient profile. And she got Pilgrim, in keeping with its nonprofit mission, to donate the three hours of rehab services Aubrie needed each day.

An Intensive Treatment Plan

While Aubrie's physical injuries eventually healed, her brain injury severely impaired her



Against All Odds

Proving the doctors wrong, Aubrie Ceres (left, with speech therapist Ann Ritchmyer) lives and walks again.

memory, speech, and ability to control how her body moved. Her 10 months of intensive rehab at Pilgrim included:

- Daily physical therapy to help her mind and body relearn how to work together. Within two months, she progressed from her wheelchair to standing to a walker—and later, to walking.
- Occupational therapy to help her reestablish eye-hand coordination so she could perform her own activities of daily living, like feeding herself and putting on makeup.
- Speech therapy exercises to help her improve her speech, memory, and ability to swallow.

Reaching a Remarkable Goal

Told by doctors that she would likely never walk again, Aubrie never gave up. Neither did the team at Pilgrim. On January 20, 2009, Aubrie proved the doctors wrong when she walked out of

Pilgrim and into the last phase of her recovery: a group home where she'll work on gaining greater independence.

To look at her today, you'd never know what she's been through. A few telltale signs remain: some slurred speech, a little difficulty walking, and a right arm that remains nerve-damaged. Aubrie still has a lot of work ahead of her, but as she told *The Salem News*, "My plan right now is to get better." The fact that she can say that is nothing short of a miracle.

Aubrie's Parting Words

As Aubrie prepared to leave Pilgrim, she had this to say about her stay: "The people here are amazing. They made me do things that I couldn't do before. They pushed me to do better. They got me where I am today." ▲