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Susan Etters

HealthSouth Helps Woman to Put Life Back Together

By **Janice Lane Palko**
As seen in **Northern Connections Magazine**

On December 16, 2009, Susan Etters' life was shattered. Etters, 58, who has been totally blind as a complication of her premature birth, remembers stepping off the bus upon arriving in Sewickley after a day of work at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh. After that, she has no recollection. When she stepped off the bus, Etters was struck by a car. "The last thing I remember was stepping off the bus at Beaver and Boundary Streets. The next thing I remembered was waking up hours later in the Trauma Unit at West Penn Allegheny General Hospital," Etters said

Etters sustained a broken fibula, tibia, a fractured right knee, a cracked pelvis and a concussion. She spent five days in the hospital, only to return for surgery on January 6. After surgery, she was discharged to a nursing home. "I was in bed for three months," Etters said, "so I needed extensive occupational and physical therapy." She began the road back to regaining her life at HealthSouth Sewickley, receiving inpatient therapy there from March 23 until her discharge on April 8. Etters cannot praise HealthSouth enough.

"Since I am blind, that complicated my therapy. While those with sight could see the exercises being demonstrated that I needed to do, the therapists had to verbally explain everything to me. They were always so loving and patient with me," Etters said. She received occupational therapy, such as doing tactile exercises. "One of the therapies was taking navy beans from a jar and putting them in rows on a board. As I was leaving in my wheelchair, I bumped the board scattering the beans everywhere. I was so upset, but my therapists just laughed and told me not to worry about it. They would make picking up beans someone else's therapy.

On March 15, Etters reached a major milestone; she achieved weight-bearing status, meaning she was now far along enough in her recovery to put some weight on her feet. "The first time my foot touched carpeting, I was thrilled," Etters said.

"When I began walking with a walker, they had to give me directions like turn right; it just made things a bit more challenging," Etters said. She also performed many exercises like building puzzles and playing "Wheel of Fortune" while standing to build strength. "The reason I learned those things were included as part of my therapy is that no one stands around just doing nothing. Everything works together when you are in therapy."

She had to relearn how to walk, but her therapy and hard work are paying off. Since her discharge, she has been living with her sister, Karen, in Sewickley. "My sister and her family have been just wonderful to me." On May 4, Etters and her sister went on a bit of an excursion. "We went back to my apartment. I hadn't been there since December 16, and I couldn't remember if I had made my bed that day. It's almost as if time came to a halt," Etters said.



Time may have seemed to have come to a standstill, but Etters certainly hasn't. She's come a long way since that fateful day in December, and she's determined to keep on improving. "I'm really looking forward to outpatient therapy at HealthSouth," she said. When she is able, Etters would like to speak to groups, especially the elderly, about accidents and how common they are, and if one should occur, never to give up. "I received so much encouragement at HealthSouth, I'd like to pass that along to others," Etters said.

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