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Woman overcomes injuries to help other as a
personal trainer
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PALESTINE — Late one June afternoon with light rain just beginning to fall, Tamara Barnett saw her life change forever when her vehicle was "T-boned" by a dually pickup hauling a horse trailer.

Her three children, who ranged in age from 4 to 6 at the time, escaped relatively unscathed. One had a minor concussion, but that was it.

Barnett, who was 25 at the time, was lucky to survive, however.

The June 2001 wreck in Athens left her with a

wide assortment of injuries, including a broken neck, a broken pelvis in two places, six injured discs, torn knee ligaments, a concussion and some internal injuries.

After spending three days in the local ICU and another week in a Tyler hospital, Barnett spent the next few years trying to manage the pain through a variety of medical techniques.

First, there was a neurotomy to her neck in an effort to block the pain. Then she had an occipital nerve stimulator implanted in her body.

In between, there were steroid and cortisone injections.

Barnett wore a neck brace for approximately four months; required someone to bathe her for eight weeks; and saw her formerly well-defined physique shrink from a women's 7/8 dress size to a 2/3.

"They shaved me from ear-to-ear," said Barnett, recalling the stimulator. "...After a year, I just said, 'Take it (the stimulator) out. I don't want anything else, no needles, no nothing.'"

By her own admission, Barnett was an active person prior to the wreck. A cheerleader in high school, she was a 25-year-old stay-at-home mom who stayed in shape through running and other forms of exercise.

Over time, Barnett returned to her physically active roots as she gradually rebuilt her strength and confidence.

She began lifting 5-pound dumbbells and graduated to speed walking and biking before participating in an organized 5K run in Austin.

Soon, Barnett was doing 8-mile runs and her pain had virtually gone away.

"I'd say my pain went from an 8 to a 4," Barnett said. "...The more I worked out, the better I felt."

Ultimately, Barnett, who limped for almost three years following the wreck, decided to get her personal trainer's certification in 2005 at the reknowned Cooper Institute in Dallas.

Today, Barnett is a personal trainer who does one-on-one training, in addition to teaching boot camp classes, kick boxing, Zumba (which combines Latin dance with cardio exercise) and other activities.

She performs personal training at Snap Fitness in the Palestine Plaza, in addition to Athens.

"I believe this happened in my life," Barnett said, "to allow me to see what other people go through and to help them.

"I can relate to a lot of people's pain," she continued. "I can help a lot of people by what I've been through."

She believes that exercise can add a positive dimension to anyone's life, advising there is "always hope," do not be consumed by your fears and "take the step and the rest will come."

After her brush with death, Barnett vowed not to take her mobility for granted ever again. Her life, for whatever reason, was spared and she hopes to share her gifts with others.

"God allowed me to be here for my children," Barnett, now 35, said. "My journey's not finished."

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