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Hope house provides a place to heal

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Just seven months into the young couple's marriage, their lives were rocked when doctors told Danielle Davis they believed it was time to pull the plug on her husband's life-support equipment.

Matt and Danielle Davis, who are from Savannah and moved to Vinings recently, have been on a roller-coaster since 2011, struggling with Matt's recovery from a motorcycle accident that eventually landed the couple in Powder Springs at the Bullock Hope House, where they were able to stay for free while he underwent therapy in Atlanta.

Matt Davis, now 24, hit an illegally parked car in a merge lane while attempting to get onto Interstate 16 in Savannah on July 11, 2011.

He was rushed to a local hospital and suffered fractures to his femur, ribs, clavicle, jaw and skull, along with a lacerated liver and a traumatic brain injury. The wreck caused him to enter a coma.

Doctors told Danielle that her husband had a Severe Diffuse Axonal Injury, which is the most common and devastating type of traumatic brain injury, and means that damage occurred over a more widespread area of the brain.

“Matt was basically given no hope,” said the 26-year-old. “I was asked to pull the plug on the ninth day (July 20, 2011) and that there was a 90 percent chance that he’s never going to respond or wake up again.”

She didn’t want to give up on her husband.

Danielle took Matt to her mother’s home in North Carolina and they lived in a garage apartment while she cared for her husband and waited to see if, or when, he’d awake from the coma.

“He started waking up after three months,” Danielle said. “He didn’t know who I was and still doesn’t remember marrying me or dating me before the accident, even to this day. ... He doesn’t remember our life from before (the accident).”

On the hunt for help

About two years after his accident, Matt came to metro Atlanta to receive continued therapy at the Shepherd Center.

The only problem was that it required more therapy than is covered by the couple's insurance: approximately nine hours per week at \$100 per hour.

"We couldn't afford therapy on top of a place to stay," she said. "I was Googling and found the Bullock Hope House, which literally saved our lives because not only did they house us and give us a place to live, but his therapy at Shepherd would not be possible without them because there is no way I could have afforded both."

The Bullock Hope House, a two-bedroom cottage located off Austell Powder Springs Road in west Cobb, was originally built in 1946 and was Randall Bullock's childhood home, but in 2005 it became a temporary home for families with loved ones like Matt who need assistance at area hospitals or rehabilitation centers.

The couple moved into the Bullock Hope House on March 10 and lived there for two months.

"The Bullock Hope House is important to us because it's the first place that we lived just the two of us together as a married couple, since before the accident," Danielle said.

And the home seemed to help heal Matt, she said.

"His mental and physical abilities started to progress rapidly. ... Less than 5 percent of people with his injury ever do what he's doing right now, ever again," she said. "Even 15 to 20 years later."

Matt still uses a wheelchair but can walk with the assistance of crutches or a walker, and his communication skills are almost like they were before the accident.

"If you speak to him, you would never know he had an accident," she said. "And his mind, he's sharp!"

The couple moved out of the Bullock Hope House in mid-May after finding a home in the Vinings area. Danielle was also able to get a job working as a nanny part-time for a family in Buckhead that allowed her to earn a full-time salary.

“It all worked out perfectly,” she said. “God created this job specifically for me and my husband because I can’t go to work 9-5. This is a once in a lifetime job that nannies try to get in their careers.”

Bullock Hope House becomes a community effort

Randall Bullock’s wife, Connie, said that anywhere from two to eight families live in the home each year for free.

The cost of bills, gas and meals is paid for with assistance from an annual golf tournament fundraiser and help from local civic groups or communities like the nearby Silver Springs Village subdivision, the Powder Springs Women’s Club and Lost Mountain Kiwanis Club, who all pitch in by preparing meals or donating gas cards for people during their stay.

Myra Pfisterer, who serves as the secretary for the board of directors at Bullock Hope House and is one of 150 homeowners who lives in Silver Springs, said they all take turns giving back to the Bullock program.

“We are just people with big hearts, particularly when we are dealing with young people in the house. ... They tug at the heartstrings of the grandfathers and grandmothers in Silver Springs,” she said.

Also serving with the Powder Springs Women’s Club, Pfisterer said her organization has voted to support any families that live in the home temporarily.

“It’s such a blessing for our community and I don’t think many people know about it, but if one of us were to draw the short straw, it’s something we may need as well,” she said.

Marie Cetrulo, with the Lost Mountain Kiwanis Club, started her work with the house this past year after she was asked to help out providing meals for Matt and Danielle Davis.

“I got a call that this young couple needed help with meals and I thought I could definitely do that,” she said. “I belong to Kiwanis, so I am volunteer-oriented.”

After meeting the Davises and learning about the service the house provides, Cetrulo was hooked and has been helping out however she can.

“There’s not enough places like that for people who are in need,” she said. “When you’re going through something like that, there’s so much other stuff that goes through your head and housing becomes second. It’s just less burdensome for them not to have to think about things like meals. I hope that we can continue to help people there.”

