

## RENÉ READY

AUTHOR  
PHOTOGRAPHER  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

www.ReneReady.com    Rene@ReneReady.com

### About the book

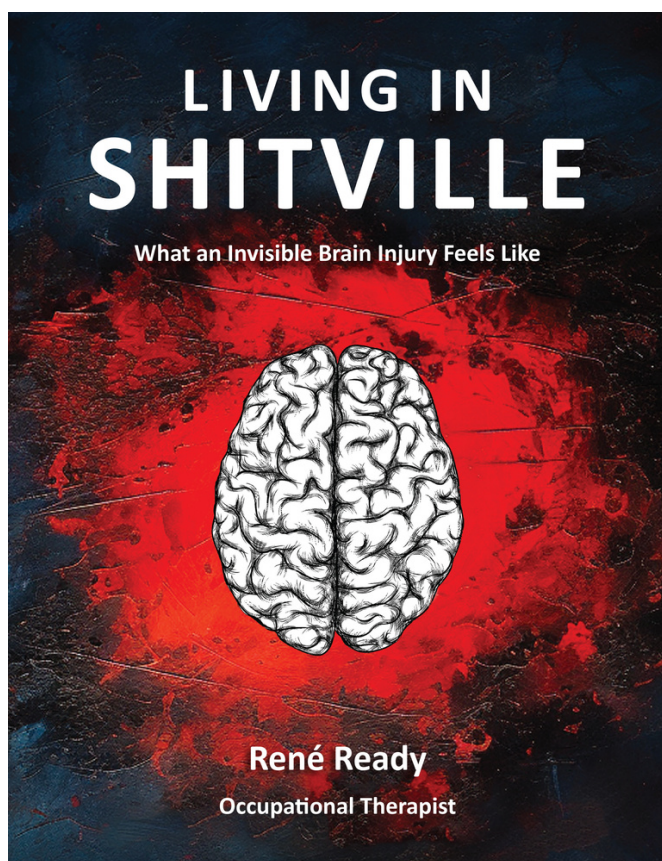
How do you explain a brain injury to someone when your symptoms are invisible?

In May 2018, a compressed air accident at the dentist sent me home with a brain injury. My 31-year career as an occupational therapist was over. Welcome to life in Shitville. Living with brain injury and reading about it in textbooks were not the same thing.

I hope to provide family members, friends, coworkers, professionals, caregivers, anyone, with insights into the daily struggles of living with brain injury while looking normal.

I hope the easy-to-read layout will help others with visual processing difficulties to read about brain injury.

This is a story about the grueling stages of anger, frustration, grief, and sadness to find the new “you”. It took a 9,461-mile solo road trip and time away from home to find my new identity, meaning, and purpose in life.



**Title:** Living In Shitville – What an Invisible Brain Injury Feels Like

**Author:** René Ready

**Publishing company:** Pictures and Words Publishing

**ISBN:** Paperback - 978-0-9995345-7-1, Ebook 978-0-9995345-8-8

**Formats:** Paperback, ebook

**Page count:** 208

**Price:** \$37.99, \$9.99

**Publication date:** February 15, 2024

**Available from:** Amazon, Ingram Spark

[Download media kit,  
book cover and  
author headshot here](#)

## About the author



René Ready, an occupational therapist, is the author of the memoir “Living in Shitville - What an Invisible Brain Injury Feels Like.”

She graduated from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa in 1987 with a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy. Her clinical background provides a unique perspective of the daily struggles of living with an invisible brain injury.

Retired after a brain injury in 2018 during a dentist visit, she now travels in a converted minivan exploring and photographing the western USA.

René lives in Washington State with her husband and four wiener dogs. She grows tomatoes in summer, plans road trips and learns to drive the school bus.

## Reviews

**Anne McLaughlin,  
Former Attorney**

“As someone who developed cognitive issues after chemo, I was blown away by how well René describes how it feels to wake up one day with a whole new brain.

Nothing is where you left it, and you can no longer rely on being able to take short-cuts. Instead of getting mired in Shitville, she offers a road map to leave self-pity behind and to continue with life, enjoying new dreams and old passions.

It’s an invigorating and awe-inspiring journey. I highly recommend this unique book”.

**Lori, proofreader**  
“I couldn’t put it down.”

**Emily, MOT/S student**  
“Coolest OT on the planet.”

**Lauren Woods, PhD, OTR/L**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**University of Tennessee Health Science Center**  
**College of Health Professions**

This story is one of hope and resilience derived from unexpected hurdles in life. René uses prose and imagery that takes the reader on her journey from brain injury to living in a van as she travels across the country to find her new identity.

René demonstrates the characteristics of resilience I have found over the years as I have dealt with the impact of brain injury personally and professionally. The fact that she was willing to take on the daunting task of driving across the country alone is an experience many people would be afraid of (without the added visual-perceptual and language challenges Rene faced).

She also showed us her van turned into a camper. The van alone was a testament to her independence, ingenuity, and drive to accomplish her goal.

René's story resonated with me. I too am an occupational therapist and had a mild brain injury when I was in a car wreck at age 18. Since then, I have experienced vestibular and vision issues related to perception and motion sickness.

I have worked with many individuals with brain injury who have similar stories that needed to be told.

René's story is told in a way that allows the reader to gain a first-hand account of experiences many face after brain injury.

It serves as an inspiration to those individuals and their caregivers who may not be able to express how their lives have been impacted.

## TROUBLE READING

Looking at the words on the page  
The font is too small  
Too many words  
Very hard to look at the swimming words  
Starting at the beginning of a paragraph  
Slowing down  
Looking at every word  
Going faster and faster  
Skipping over words and lines.  
It's too much  
too many words  
too much effort  
I can't find my place  
Eye pain  
Read a sentence  
The words by themselves make sense  
Re-reading a sentence, a paragraph  
What does it say?  
Read it again  
And again  
The words weigh heavier and heavier  
Pulling me under  
Drowning the meaning.



## DRIVING

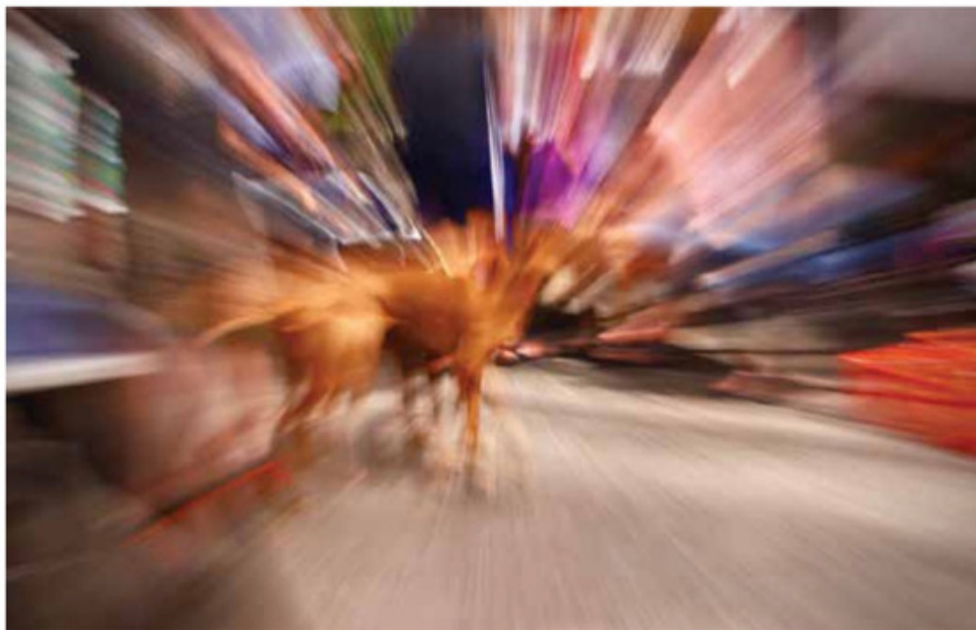
Cars moving  
People moving  
Sick feeling to my stomach  
Am I moving?  
Or not?

Car lights  
too sharp  
too much

Pay attention  
Don't space out

Poles, shadows, fences, trees  
flashing by  
Exhausting to block out

Dizziness  
Feeling disconnected  
Off balance after driving



## BASIC DAILY STUFF

Found money in the fridge  
Found dishes in the garbage can  
Found the coffee cup in the freezer  
Put an empty pot on a burner on high and walked away  
Can't find the pot scrubber, my brain doesn't see it.

Put clothes in the washer, but didn't turn it on  
A note in the bathroom "brush your teeth"  
Forgot to buy dog food  
Took the wrong medication  
Three Ambien instead of thyroid pills  
Got in the car and went to the gym  
Lost my earplugs  
Have you seen my bra?  
Can't find my sunglasses  
Where are the van keys?

Need a list of shopping tasks in sequence  
I can't plan and sequence on demand.

Frustrated  
Angry  
Can't read  
Irritated  
Fuming  
Can't find my words  
Distractible  
Overwhelmed

I don't have value  
I don't have a job  
An income  
Who would want to be married to me?



On May 23rd, 2018, I suffered a compressed air accident at the dentist's office and went home with a brain injury.

It was the beginning of a new life I didn't like.  
Multiple complications from the injury.  
Severe chest pain, shortness of breath,  
swallowing problems, cardiac dysfunction,  
dizziness, blurred vision,  
poor balance, visual processing problems,  
difficulty reading, memory problems,  
language processing problems,  
and finally, a diagnosis of a brain injury.

I fell out of the sky and landed in Shitville.  
A town of trouble  
A hellhole  
Population: One  
I was stuck with all the physical  
and cognitive problems.  
No way out.  
Three years of endless physical, occupational, speech,  
and vision therapies, counseling,  
multiple medical appointments,  
and then the bottom line:

"Your injury is very unusual,  
too complicated,  
and too expensive to take on for a lawsuit."  
No lawyer wanted to take the case.  
The statute of limitations ran out.

## DAY 19 / MARCH 8

A beautiful morning with clear blue skies.  
Ready to head back to Death Valley.  
Stopped at the Lone Pine Welcome Center  
to fix the inverter problem.  
It took a lot less time to get the necessary stuff  
out of the way to get to the loose wire.  
Disconnected the battery terminal.  
Put the wire back on without "shocking details".  
Stuffed some firmer items behind the smaller battery  
to prevent it from having room to slide on rough roads  
and pull the wire loose.  
Put everything back in the van  
and turned the breakers back on.

Nothing.

The inverter was as dead as a door nail.

Well, how about that.  
And I was so impressed with myself for "fixing" it.

Well, shit. What now?  
Kept driving and thought about it.  
Drove about 30 minutes thinking  
I blew up the inverter.  
Buy a new one?  
How would I get it delivered to my location?  
What tools would I need to install it?

Maybe I could wait until Mark met me in Texas  
and he could fix it?  
Should he ship the tools to Texas?  
And then

"Oh my God, you dumb shit!"

I never turned the power switch  
on the control box back on.  
Reached down, flipped the switch, the inverter beeped.  
The sound I have been waiting to hear.





## DAY 81 / MAY 9

I put in Google Maps to avoid highways.  
Which it did.  
I was driving next to the interstate  
on a dirt road.  
Should have known better.  
Snowed some the night before  
and it was significantly colder.



On my way to the Bonneville Salt Flats.  
Hwy 174.  
The road got quieter  
and quieter.  
Made my hair stand on end.  
Very creepy feeling.  
It would be the place to do 100 mph  
and there would be no one  
to write the speeding ticket.



Out of nowhere  
the pavement stopped.  
It was a dirt road.  
I stopped to check the map.  
All I could see on the off-line map  
was The Pony Express Highway.  
And I didn't have a cell signal.  
I couldn't call or text Mark.  
Sat there, debating,  
keep going, or go back to highway 6?

That was how the people you read about on Facebook  
disappeared because they followed GPS  
and were found dead two weeks later.

A semi-truck appeared from a side road.  
I jumped out of the van, tried to flag the driver down.  
He gave me one look and kept driving.

The situation scared the living daylights out of me.  
My legs were shaking, and my heart was beating too fast.

### **What gave you the idea of this book?**

I was experimenting with an app that modified my pictures into creative oil paintings. I wrote notes about how they reminded me of how the symptoms of brain injury feel e.g. dizziness. I couldn't remember the next day what it was, so I wrote them down.

### **How did the name come about?**

I went from being healthy and working full-time to 3 medical appointments per week after the injury for more than a year. I told the doctor I felt like I had fallen out of the sky into a town full of trouble and no roads leading out of the town. A town called Shitville.

### **What motivated you to write this book?**

I read regularly on Facebook in the brain injury support groups, people complaining about how hard it was to explain invisible brain injury symptoms to spouses, family members, friends, and co-workers. They had to put up with people thinking they were lazy, faking it and making it up. When I thought of giving up on the book idea, it motivated me to keep going. It's my last contribution from a professional perspective. I'm no longer licensed to work.

### **What makes this different than other books about brain injury?**

I don't read books anymore. I imagine there are a lot of people with brain injuries who can't read a regular book. It's too difficult to track from line to line. That's why I wrote in columns with short phrases and sentences. It's written in a sans-serif font, with wider line spacing.

### **Why so many pictures?**

Don't need a lot of words if you can look at a picture.

### **How did being an occupational therapist make you look at living with brain injury differently?**

I understand the brain injury symptoms as I treated many patients, especially those with visual processing problems. And I am living with those symptoms every day. I also have an instinct for modifying activities to make them more user-friendly.

### **Who is going to benefit from this book?**

Anyone with someone with a brain injury in their life. Those with brain injury will not feel so alone. The mother of someone with a brain injury told me she had a note in the bathroom to brush her teeth. I didn't feel so alone when I heard about it. The professionals working with brain injuries, especially occupational therapists. Any professionals dealing with brain injury, therapists, counselors, lawyers, and social workers. I want to change someone's life. To find hope and purpose despite the frustration of life with a brain injury.

### **How does someone with a brain injury self-publish a book?**

With a lot of help. And everything takes much longer to accomplish. It's exhausting and draining to the point of giving up. Lots of feelings of frustration and heart attacks. And a lot of swearing. And crying.

### **What does your writing environment look like?**

I wrote the book on my iPad. And processed the pictures on my iPad with iPhoto on my bed. With the 5 dogs sleeping and snoring on the bed for company. I got a laptop once the first draft was done. It was easier to edit with a mouse.