



## Steven Smith

INTERVIEW BY PAGE BISHOP-FREER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HARRY R. HINDMARSH

**A**s the nation's foremost brain injury litigator, Stephen Smith has built his 36-year legal career upon a thorough understanding of the human mind. But after speaking with the famed attorney, it's clear that his dedication to his clients comes straight from the heart. Here are excerpts from Smith's recent interview with *The Health Journal*.

**My father** always wanted me to be a doctor, but I ended up with a bachelor's degree in psychology. But from there I followed in his footsteps and went to law school. After graduating from William and Mary I went to work in a New York City law firm where I had the chance to work on some pretty high-profile cases. I came back a few years later and joined my father's personal injury law firm in Old Wythe [in Hampton]. I remember one case involved a woman who suffered a closed head injury. It really caught my attention and made me want to take on other cases involving head inju-

*"The human brain is an amazing organ. It can choose to remember; it can choose to forget."*

ries. I just became fascinated by the human brain. I began taking brain injury clients all over the country, and then internationally.

**I don't live** a traditional life. I'm up in the air all the time—I live eight minutes from Norfolk International Airport—and I've probably sacrificed a lot in my personal life to further my career.

**I'm lucky that** my profession allows me to actually help people and make a good living doing it. It's emotionally and personally rewarding. I'm internationally known and respected among my peers. Sure, I've had my shares of failures—things I would do over again. But I have the opportunity to work with some of the most brilliant people in the world, in one of the most esoteric areas.

**What has made me** a good lawyer was realizing one thing: You can't change the facts. It's so simple, but it's true.

**Eighty-five to 90 percent** of people who suffer a brain injury have no lasting effects. I get the 10 to 15 percent who do.

**I've represented** doctors, lawyers, police officers—down to the blue-collar worker who gets injured on the job. Most of my clients look perfectly normal. You'd never guess that some had a disability.

**It's sad to see** someone lose the ability to do what they love due to neurological damage. They're fatigued easily, or they may have sensitivity to light and sound. Simple things they could do before—read things and remember the details, form short-term memories, learn new skills or even multitask—be-

**Name:** Stephen M. Smith, Esq.

**Occupation:** Brain Injury Lawyer

**Family:** divorced; two adult sons

**Hometown:** Newport News

**Currently Resides:** Norfolk; has offices in Hampton and Richmond

**Education:** undergraduate degree in Psychology and law degree from the College of William and Mary; graduate of Marquette University, College of Health Sciences

**Professional Affiliations:** president, Association of Brain Injury Trial Lawyers of America; past president, Brain Injury Association of Virginia; American Board of Trial Lawyers; chair, Traumatic Brain Injury Litigation Group of the American Association of Justice; national board member for Public Justice and Belli Society

**Recent Awards:** "The Best Lawyers in America" 2010; "Super Lawyers" 2010; "DC's Best Lawyers of 2010," by *The Washington Post*; Diplomat status, American Board of Trial Advocates

**Volunteer Activities:** founder, Helmets for Kids

**Famous for:** winning the world's largest mild traumatic brain injury verdict and the largest personal injury verdict ever awarded in Virginia

come difficult or impossible. Right now I am representing an Army colonel who lost his flight privileges, and he's having trouble accepting that.

**What I can offer most,** besides an understanding of the physiology of the brain, is an understanding of the impact a brain injury can have on a person's life. My job is to protect my client and to offer them hope.

**I urge my clients** to get involved in brain injury support groups, which are critical because it helps them realize that they're not crazy—they've just got a brain injury.

**Brain injuries** are often called the invisible injury, or a silent epidemic. In most cases the injuries could have been prevented if only the person was wearing a helmet. As a community service project, we're giving free helmets to anyone under the age of 19. All they have to do is call our office [757-650-9818] between now and Dec. 31. The best cure for brain injury is prevention. **HJ**