

## **BROOKE ELLISON**

“One of the few guarantees in life is that it will never turn out the way we expect. But, rather than let the events in our lives define who we are, we can make the decision to define the possibilities in our lives.”

Brooke Ellison has lived her life by that idea, and has worked to instill it those she meets. Brooke grew up on Long Island, and for the first 11 years of her life, was involved in so many of the activities that characterize childhood. She studied dance and karate. She sang in the church choir and played the cello. She played little league baseball and soccer. All of that changed on September 4, 1990, when she was hit by a car while she was on her way home from school. The accident left her paralyzed from the neck down and dependent on a ventilator. Despite her physical situation, Brooke was determined to continue with her life, and continue to make a difference. After spending nearly one year in the hospital, recovering from her injuries and adjusting to her new life, Brooke returned home and focused on her education.

When Brooke returned to school, she was welcomed by friends she had missed and found an environment that allowed her to thrive. In 2000, ten years after her accident, Brooke graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University. Brooke graduated with a degree in cognitive neuroscience, a combined major of psychology and biology. She gave a commencement address for her Harvard graduation in June of 2000.

In January of 2002, Brooke and her mother, Jean Ellison, published a book entitled The Brooke Ellison Story, which documents their family’s experiences from the day of Brooke’s accident until their graduation from Harvard in 2000. Their book subsequently was made into a movie, directed by Christopher Reeve, which first aired on A&E on October 25, 2004. Brooke has continued her education by graduating from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government with a master’s degree in public policy.

Since her graduation from Harvard in 2000, Brooke has worked as a public speaker, delivering the message of hope and motivation and strength in the face of obstacles. Her audiences have been many and diverse, as she has spoken to members of the medical community, business corporations, politicians, community members, students, and nonprofit organizations, traveling across the country to do so. Brooke’s recent and most notable engagements have included such opportunities as delivering a congressional briefing, serving as commencement speaker, and participation in Bob Benia’s “Smart Talk” Women’s Speaker Series. Although the specific message differs from audience to audience, Brooke focuses her attention on hope and motivation, using her own experiences as a vehicle to convey the message.

In November of 2006, Brooke ran for New York State Senate, focusing her attention on the issues of health care, education, and funding for stem cell research. Her campaign was endorsed by the New York Times, and was highlighted on the TODAY Show. Just as Brooke had overcome challenges in her life, she sought to help the state of New York overcome its challenges. Brooke based her campaign on restoring a sense of hope to

politics, with the belief that government has an important and problem-solving role in our lives.

Since the field of human embryonic stem cell research has been in existence, Brooke has been a steadfast advocate and supporter of this promising work. Appearing on Larry King Live in 2004, Brooke spoke at length about the importance of public funding for embryonic stem cell research. During her 2006 State Senate campaign, Brooke campaigned extensively on the stem cell funding issue, holding press conferences and public events with gubernatorial candidate Eliot Spitzer and lieutenant gubernatorial candidate David Paterson. In 2007, Brooke delivered the keynote address at the World Stem Cell Summit in Boston, MA, before an audience of leading stem cell scientists, policymakers, advocates, and pharmaceutical representatives.

Brooke has continued her work as a stem cell research advocate and public speaker by founding a nonprofit organization, The Brooke Ellison Project, which works to further this cause. Through the work of this organization, Brooke has conducted many speeches and community forums on the basics of stem cell research and its promise for the future of medicine. Speeches and public events include presentations given at Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, Stony Brook University, Rutgers University, Amherst College, The New School, SUNY Farmingdale, and Suffolk County Community College. Working with director Jimmy Siegel from A-Political Productions, The Brooke Ellison Project has produced a documentary both about the research and the lives it stands to benefit. This documentary film has been screened all across the country. The film was the recipient of the Humanitarian Award in the Long Island Film Festival and The “Mass Impact” Award in the Boston Film Festival.

Brooke’s work as a stem cell research advocate precipitated her involvement in a public forum event conducted by the Harvard Stem Cell Institute and several similar events conducted by the New York Stem Cell Foundation. As a result of this work Brooke was inducted into the Suffolk County Women’s Hall Of Fame, was presented with the Inspiration Award at the 2008 World Stem Cell Summit, and was announced as a New York State Woman of Distinction. In May of 2011, Brooke received an honorary doctorate from Rutgers University as a result of the work she has done in this field. During the 2008 presidential election, Brooke was approached by the Obama campaign to offer input on recommendations for a federal stem cell policy. In 2010, Brooke held a press conference with Congressman Steve Israel at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories on the importance of congressional action on stem cell policy. Brooke has written and been interviewed extensively on this issue, appearing on News 12, NBC News, WPIX, and Channel 55, and opinion pieces running in Newsday, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Daily Kos.

In addition to her professional pursuits in the area of stem cell research, Brooke has received two gubernatorial appointments in New York State in relation to it. In April of 2007, Brooke was appointed to the New York State Spinal Cord Injury Research Board, which provides grants for spinal cord injury research. In August of that same year, Brooke was appointed to serve on the Ethics Committee of the Empire State Stem Cell

Research Board, which oversees New York's \$600 million stem cell research initiative. Through both of these appointments Brooke hopes to help advance a cause she has long worked to promote.

Now Brooke Ellison is the newly-appointed Director of Education and Ethics at the Stony Brook University Stem Cell Research Facility Center. Dr. Ellison has been immersed in the stem cell field for over 15 years, viewing this from legislative, ethical, and social standpoints. Completing her PhD in 2012 from Stony Brook University, Dr. Ellison wrote a dissertation entitled, "Lifelines: Stem Cell Research in a Globalized World", which investigated the development of stem cell research policy in the US, UK, Germany, and China. In addition to serving as Director of Education and Ethics, Dr. Ellison is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor in Stony Brook University's School of Health Technology and Management's (SHTM) Health Care Policy and Management department. Dr. Ellison is also affiliated with SHTM's PhD in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. In addition, Brooke is on faculty at Stony Brook University's Center for Compassion Care, Medical Humanities, and Bioethics, teaching a course called The Ethics of Hope to second-year medical students. Brooke writes and speaks about the importance of hope frequently and has applied this concept to the healing process.

The details of Brooke's life have been widely covered in such publications as The New York Times, People magazine, USA Today, Newsday, Biography Magazine, and the International Herald Tribune, as well as, such programs as Entertainment Tonight, Access Hollywood, the TODAY Show, Good Morning America, the Early Show, and Larry King Live. In each of these appearances, Brooke has expressed her desire to have an impact on the world, stating "wherever there is a condition of discouragement or inopportunity, that's where I hope to be".

For more information about Brooke Ellison, please visit her web site:  
[www.brookeellison.com](http://www.brookeellison.com).