



HANK MORGAN

**Indomitable spirit:** Patients at Gaylord Hospital, where the attack victim stayed, work to 'normalize' their days

# How the Brain Recovers

Medical advances helped the 'Central Park jogger' start jogging again

BY DAVID GELMAN

**A**t around 9:30 on an overcast Saturday morning last June, a frail-looking young woman joined a group of disabled runners who regularly work out at the Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford, Conn. After introducing herself, the woman set out along the string of blacktopped roadways that wind through the hospital grounds, with a staff member at her side and two other runners close behind. Jogging a few steps, then walking, stopping frequently to rest, she managed two loops around the course, perhaps half a mile in all.

No one seemed to mind that she took just about forever. By the time she finished, nearly everyone was watching, silently cheering her on. For as one witness recalls, "That was a great day"—the day the wom-

an who had come to be known as the Central Park jogger took her first, faltering steps back to the world she had nearly lost.

The young woman, whose name has not been revealed publicly, had been brought to New York's Metropolitan Hospital early on April 20, 1989, the victim of an assault so brutal it made her an instant symbol of urban violence at its most vicious. Jogging through Central Park the night before, she had been set upon by young toughs who, according to police, attacked her with fists, a brick and a pipe, and then raped her.

At Metropolitan, doctors found her close to death from traumatic brain injury (TBI), registering barely 4 on a measurement of brain functioning that scores 3 just for being alive. At best, it was thought she might pull through with severe brain damage. Yet seven months after the attack, she was back at work and living on her own—something only a small percentage of people

with severe head trauma manage to achieve. There are reports that she might even testify at the forthcoming trial of her alleged assailants. Doctors considered her recovery, if not a miracle, little short of "astounding." In truth, confides one, "we would have been happy if she could work as a volunteer in the coffee shop."

The young woman's comeback is a tribute to an indomitable spirit. Associates say she had always been highly motivated, even "driven," and doctors agree she had some measure of "extra stuff" that may have helped her beat the odds. Beyond that there was the remarkable medical technology that enabled doctors to pinpoint her injuries swiftly. The wonder is she's alive at all. A decade ago only 10 percent of all victims of severe head traumas could expect to live. But advances in emergency response and care—one happy dividend of the Vietnam War—along with diagnostic tools like CAT