

# BOOK REVIEW

## An Inside Perspective of Stroke: “My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist’s Personal Journey”

Jill Bolte Taylor, PhD. Viking USA; 2008

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Life can change in an instant. For Jill Bolte Taylor, that instant was 7:00 a.m. on December 10, 1996 when a congenital arteriovenous malformation in her brain ruptured. Taylor, a neuroanatomist holding a post-doctoral position at Harvard University at the time, had dedicated her life to studying the human brain and was now witnessing the disintegration of her neural functioning firsthand. At only 37-years-old, she was experiencing a hemorrhagic stroke.

*“By the end of that morning, I could not walk, talk, read, write or recall any of my life,” she writes. “Curled up into a little fetal ball, I felt my spirit surrender to my death, and it certainly never dawned on me that I would ever be capable of sharing my story with anyone.”*

Taylor takes us on her eight-year journey of recovery, from the obstacles of rehabilitation to the spiritual insight she has gained from her experience. Taylor’s narrative of the morning of her stroke is fascinating, especially for medical students and physicians. It is a rare opportunity to read a minute-by-minute account of the hopes and fears of someone experiencing an acute brain injury. It is with this inside perspective that Taylor gives us a glimpse into a world we cannot begin to imagine. As she slowly loses the ability to speak or understand language, she continues to map her stroke, correlating each loss of function with the growing hemorrhage in her brain.

Taylor’s recovery in hospital, much like her description of the stroke itself, is riveting. She helps her readers understand the experiences of people with traumatic brain injuries, from the sensory assault of the hospital lights and sounds, to the challenges of trying to communicate with her family and physicians. Her experience gives the medical community a remarkable opportunity to learn how to better meet the needs of stroke patients during treatment and recovery. Taylor offers up a plethora of suggestions in the chapter entitled “What I Needed Most” and even lists the top

40 things she valued during recovery in the appendix of her book.

*“If I stumbled, then we could celebrate when I was upright. If I was drooling, we could celebrate swallowing! It was way too easy to focus on my disabilities because they were vast. I needed people to celebrate the triumphs I made every day because my successes, no matter how small, inspired me.”*

A large part of this book, particularly the latter section, is focused on the spiritual experience of her stroke. Taylor writes that she experienced a state of inner peace due to what she refers to as “right hemisphere consciousness”. This part of “My Stroke of Insight” delves into the metaphysical theories of hemispheric function and begins to feel like a new-age self-help book. The bottom line is if you can look past the spiritual mysticism of this memoir then there are many valuable lessons to be learned from Taylor’s experience: the plasticity of the human brain, its incredible ability to heal, and the unique needs of stroke patients during recovery.