

BOOK REVIEW

MY STROKE OF INSIGHT A BRAIN SCIENTIST'S PERSONAL JOURNEY

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MY STROKE OF INSIGHT

A BRAIN SCIENTIST'S PERSONAL JOURNEY

Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D.

First Viking edition

Published in 2008 by Viking Penguin, New York, USA

183 pages

This fascinating book describes the perceptions of a stroke patient and portrays an exciting journey through the world of the normal and abnormal functions of the brain.

The writer begins the story with the details of her life before her stroke, a baseline for what is to follow. The next two chapters include a short and easily understandable account of the brain and its working mechanisms, as enjoyable for the random reader as for the specialist. This section is especially important if one is to understand the way patients perceive doctor's scientific explanations. After this preparative stage, the writer depicts her own experience with a stroke.

This story is described poignantly, especially when scientists tend to believe that such events would never occur to them. The author describes step by step the vanishing functioning of her brain, a dramatic story from which there is much to learn. We read that her stroke came on gradually: it began as a striking headache in the morning as she awoke and as her symptoms progressed, she tried to find an explanation for what was happening. She became aware that she could not move or speak. As her right side becomes paralyzed, she infers that

she is having a stroke. She details her stroke by using scientific knowledge and, in the process, explains where in the brain the various functions are located and how they are linked and related to one another. She correlates her inability to move with the involvement of the motor cortex, her sensory alterations to the inner and outer parts of the sensory cortex, and her speech disorder to involvement of Broca's area and Wernicke's areas. She is ambivalent toward her symptoms because she fulfills a double role: a stroke victim with strong feelings of fear, weakness, and panic, and, at the same time, a scientist who has studied the innermost workings of the brain.

In the later chapters we follow her adventure as she regains her skills and abilities, one by one, with unbelievable curiosity and effort. She tells the story of her recovery related to all disrupted areas of her damaged brain in considerable detail. We learn what can be achieved by a sympathetic caregiver; not about changing the impossible to the possible, but by a continuous and effective effort, a miracle when done with love.

The writer tells the differences between functions of two hemispheres: the inner perception of herself and of the environment, as she experiences an interesting shift from the right brain to the left with real time changes in her personality. It is a compelling and moving book that could help physicians empathize with their patients' experiences.