



Mission: A newsletter for Individuals with Aphasia and for the community

Created by Individuals with Aphasia

Supported by the University of Washington Speech & Hearing Clinic

Eight Years With Aphasia



Jean Williams

B--A--L--L. It was May 18, 1994. I had had a stroke ten days before, resulting in aphasia. Janice, my hospital speech therapist, was helping me learn my first word. It was so terribly humiliating that I didn't even know the word Ball or any other word for that matter.

On May 18, 2002, I was in London talking to people I had never met before. Most of the time we were in conversation and not realizing that 8 years ago, I was trying to learn the word Ball.

Aphasia—what is it? Why can't I talk cogently? Because I have disturbances in language caused by brain damage -- disturbances in comprehension (it is better now, but reading and writing are still slow) and naming or finding the right word. This, believe me, is frustrating to the extreme.

In these eight years I have felt close to suicide sometimes, but then I would find a glimmer of hope. Sometimes that hope would become elation -- and then I would realize that YES, my life is really worth while.

The best thing that happened after my stroke was that I learned about our aphasia group. I could hardly wait to

Inside this Issue:

Eight Years With Aphasia	1
My Relationship With Music	2
Aphasia:What Happened To Us?	3
“Ask Me About Aphasia”	4
Publisher’s Note:	4

go to the first meeting (that was Feb. 1995).

Our meeting was even better than I had expected. Not only did Nancy, our speech pathologist help us with our speech, but also we had interesting conversations. I am still going to our aphasia group to this day, and people say I am doing better and better.

There have been many depressive lows. I feel so isolated occasionally, and think that no one understands what I'm saying. Several times, I have had hospital stays (for different problems), where I couldn't speak because of aphasia so I wasn't able to get the help I needed. In other situations I haven't been able to communicate with people because they are talking too fast or not talking at all—as though I were invisible.

But eventually, the bad times were few and the good times many. There was an especially good time when I went to London. I have gone to other Elderhostel (elder = 55 yrs old or

(Continued on page 3)

My Relationship with Music

A person affected by aphasia may be helped with the therapeutic use of music. Over the years, I have heard intriguing but random incidents involving aphasia and music. Following my stroke seven years ago, I discovered the inconvenience of aphasia. During a long rehabilitation, I had therapy sessions for writing, reading, hearing, even visual presentations, but never involving music. In retrospect, the absence of music as a part of the recovery process is strange. To be sure, music as entertainment is readily available, but the deliberate introduction of music as therapy appears relatively rare.

As a start, I will describe my experience with aphasia and music. During the first and second years following my stroke my ability to communicate were disrupted. Pronouncing even simple words were a challenge. If I was aware of music it was another noise to avoid.

My memory of that period is murky. I remember a constant dull sense of being punctuated with a few distinct events. I remember the struggle to understand conversations or speak meaningful sounds.

At the same time I was very aware of a constant background of static, as if two or more radio stations, all out of tune, were competing for attention. Every sound echoed in my head. Any noise, words, music, everything, was reduced to a monotonous hum. My capacity to process incoming signals was quickly overwhelmed. There was no pattern to the sounds. Indeed, there was no focus to my thoughts.

In the past, I was very active in the local music scene. Among my activities

included a variety of season tickets and memberships. Attending musical events were a prominent portion of my entertainment time. Over the years I developed a critical appreciation of the performing arts.

Now, everything sounded the same. Music was nothing but another competing garbled message. I could not identify a melody even with a simple and familiar tune. With generous assistance from friends and family I was able to attend professional performances but I could not react. Although I was physically present, my mind was elsewhere. The music was a distraction.

At some point, I became aware that I could identify a melody. I think that it was about two years, maybe a little more, since my stroke. In any case, I could recognize the melody. I remember that it was a simple tune, at the level of a nursery song or a commercial jingle. Nevertheless, I could understand the music.

I cannot emphasize the impact of comprehending music. To be sure, I was aware of the physical sound from the start but the transition from noise to music was a revelation. It was as if a bright light was turned on in a dark room. It took time to adjust to my new capacity. Like a kid with a new toy, I played my collection of tapes and CD's. No doubt my neighbors were entertained. From the perspective of seven years of experience, I would like to continue to make some observations.

By Ted Paluchowski

* * * * *

Editor's Note: We anticipate a future article from Ted on his love of music and how it was affected by his stroke, and his journey of self discovery.

(Continued from page 1)

older; hostel = lodging place) programs in the United States; two of them were after my stroke. I enjoyed them, but I was still tired during the day and having aphasia, I was hesitant to talk. But this time when I went to London, I did talk—EUREKA—and what's more, since I could talk, my self confidence soared. Now, though I have aphasia, I know that I can do whatever I want. Between our aphasia group and our persistence we can learn more and more.

By Jean Williams

* * * * *

Aphasia - What Happened to Us?

I've had aphasia for two years. I soon joined weekly meetings with other Stroke Survivors who also have aphasia. This has been both enjoyable and helpful to me. Aside from being a friendly, supportive group of people, they have encouraged my recovery from aphasia. It is wonderful to see that we all have improved our capabilities over time.

As I became more able to communicate, it became clear to me that aphasia affected each of us differently. Now I'm even more interested in finding out more about aphasia.

The left side of our brains control logic, rational thought, language and mathematics as well as the right side of our body. Similarly, the right half of the brain controls our left side, music, and creativity.

For almost all people right-handed and about half of those left-handed, injury to the left side of the brain causes aphasia¹. What had happened to me was injury to the left side of my brain, so I had lost much of my ability to communicate with my wife, my family and friends. It was as though I had been distanced from them and it was difficult to reach them.

Communication between people is very

important to all of us and speech and writing is unique to humans.

Aphasia is the loss of some (or all) of the language communications channels: producing or understanding intelligible speech or reading or writing. Aphasia can affect us mildly or very severely; it can affect just one of the communications channels but usually affects more than one. The NAA estimates that over one million Americans are living with aphasia; annually, 80,000 new cases of aphasia occur².

It seems that when I find an answer to my question, I find more questions: are there suggested ways to continue our recovery; what is the relationship between stroke and aphasia; what are the different kinds of aphasia and why, and more. I look forward to finding out more about my aphasia.



Bob Anderson

Some of the information in this article came from the following sources:

Notes:

1. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
1-800-638-8255 www.asha.org
2. National Aphasia Association.
1-800-922-4622 www.aphasia.org

By Bob Anderson

* * * * *

Editor's Note: Knowing Bob, we are certain he will divulge more interesting information in future issues.

Mission: A Newsletter for Individuals with Aphasia and for the community

Created by Individuals with Aphasia

Supported by the University of Washington Speech & Hearing Clinic

University of Washington
Speech and Hearing Clinic
4131 15th Ave, NE
Seattle, WA 98105

Phone: (206) 543-5440
Fax: (206) 616-1185
<http://depts.washington.edu/sphsc/clinic.html>



Bob Hay, shown here with his son, proudly displays his Scottish heritage as well as his "Ask Me About Aphasia" button during the Seattle Scottish Highland Games in July 2002. He learned that several other members of his clan have aphasia and he was pleased to talk to people about it. Bob had his stroke in July 2000.

Publisher's Note

This is an exciting issue of "In Search of..." for a number of reasons. We have three well-crafted articles written by individuals with aphasia. In addition, we have formed a new group, the Writer's Guild, at the U.W. Speech & Hearing Clinic that we hope to continue for a long time to come.

The Writer's Guild began in July of 2002 to provide a setting for stroke survivors to strengthen their writing skills and to expand upon the "In Search of..." newsletter. The four members of this guild, each with aphasia, can attest to the struggles and rewards that stem from writing. In addition, the guild has become a place where members work on their conversation and organization skills. Guild members have formed a cohesive unit supporting one another in their writing and personal journeys. This guild was designed as a vehicle for stroke survivors to find satisfaction in writing and to inform the community about aphasia. The group has moved far beyond our original expectations and we look forward to continuing the journey.

We sincerely hope you enjoy this issue of "In Search of..." as three guild members share their personal perspectives on aphasia.