National Aphasia Awareness Month

My Path to Recovery
by Arlie (May 12th)

Arlie recently joined our Support Group and is the new kid on our block. He started out observant but quiet, and hesitant about joining in the conversation.

We were pleasantly surprised when he mentioned that he is again comfortable with his computer. So, Arlie agreed to write his first document for us on it—and here it is.

On May 15, almost a year ago, I woke in the morning, still sometimes everything seem different. I didn’t know what was different, but I had a stroke, I didn’t know it at the time.

After 7 days in the hospital, poked and prodded, I went home. I couldn’t speak.

The first weeks after coming home my wife and worked with flashcards at the kitchen table. Then I went to a speech therapist, Rebecca, for five months, two times a week. My wife accompanied me and Rebecca encouraged family and friends to visit also. We prepared a book to cover all the names that I needed to know.

There was I computer, since was already to write, and the simple things To do and I haven’t got a clue were to begin. Now I am begin there to I slowing. Get things figure out.

Currently I attend the Conversation Group at the University; a Game Group at Northwest Rehab and a weekly coffee with a couple friends.

We look forward to more examples of success with recovery from Arlie and others of our Group.

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“What’s past is prologue”
- Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act 2, Scene 1

What has happened to us (the past) just sets the stage for the present—our Act 1—for us to choose which path we will take and how we will travel it. There are many paths. And no path is easy. We learn from the difficulties we meet (Act 2) and set ourselves to recovery (Act 3).

A Stroke Center—for Recovery

A future plan for the Speech & Hearing Clinic was noted in Newsletter #28, Fall, 2008. It asked for suggestions; some received, please send more. There will be more articles forthcoming. In the meantime:

Highlighting this special Aphasia Awareness Month, note the icon below. It is as a magnet that will apply to cars, refrigerators, and elsewhere. It would be used appropriately to spread the knowledge about aphasia.

These are for sale in the clinic for $5 and we are likely to run out quickly. You can also fax an order, adding $5 for shipping. Or, just drop by the front desk of the clinic to pick them up.
Those Who Help With Recovery

Each college quarter of our Group, we get a chance to be seen (observed) by students. We see and speak to a student class who are exploring communication problems. And, normally, we have one or two students who are soon to be graduated clinicians. Some are married, some have children, some are not: all show their desire and talent to be patient, pleasant, thoughtful, informed, and helpful.

School gets harder; it leaves little free time. A student told me that there’s a near place for good (enough) sandwiches—in 5 minutes—between classes, meetings, and work assignments.

We find that there is such a thing as spare time and extent may vary but recovery demands time. It took Dr. Taylor eight years before resuming her (professional) life.

All of the visitors and medical personnel can be put into three groups. First, there are people who made a positive impact. For example, the hospital nurse and a friend who walked with Dr. Taylor over local trails. Second, there were people who sent cards or made short visits. They had a cumulative positive impact. At the same time, they dispersed (left her alone) after the initial crisis. Third, there were people who were “energy vampires.” Obviously, they had negative impacts.

Dr. Taylor’s mother was alerted and flew to Boston to join her daughter in the hospital there. Her mother immediately provided her both physical and emotional comfort. After Dr. Taylor’s condition was stabilized, surgery was recommended, but she was hesitant because of the uncertain result of brain surgery and a significant chance of a stroke. She felt lowered physical and cognitive capacity, while facing a momentous decision. Her mother evaluated the situation and actively eased her decision.

Dr. Taylor had the operation—it proved to be a success. But then her mother suddenly had a completely dependent person on her hands again. And now, she could teach her child from scratch—again.

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In Search Of …

Issue #30 — Spring, 2009

Book Review on Recovery by Ted

A partial review of Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor’s book My Stroke of Insight was printed in the Winter Issue #29. This completes my review.

The second critical factor in Dr. Taylor’s recovery was a supporting environment. She benefited from excellent medical personnel and continuing support from friends and colleagues. Her mother became her primary caretaker and was instrumental in her recovery.

Any recovery effort must acknowledge the consequences of a stroke. There is an immediate need for sleep. Dr. Taylor constantly sought sleep. Even after eight years she needed extra sleep. Her mother recognized the therapeutic (therapeutic, or, healing) value of sleep and sheltered her from extraneous distractions.

Another consequence of a stroke is the persistent low level of energy. Even simple tasks, including conversation, resulted in exhaustion. Dr. Taylor describes an intriguing example. When she was hospitalized for surgery, she met a nurse. The nurse spoke with a gentle voice and a slow, even pace. Dr. Taylor was able to process the information and respond. Therefore, she enjoyed their meetings and looked ahead for more.

In contrast, Dr. Taylor encountered a young doctor who overwhelmed her capacity to respond. Apparently, the young doctor was determined to display his medical knowledge and engage her in a cross examination. Before her stroke, Dr. Taylor was qualified to teach at a medical school. After her stroke, she was grasping at fragments of the conversation. Dr. Taylor called him an “energy vampire”, since the encounter left her exhausted. Afterward, she made a point to avoid that doctor.

Finally, a consequence of a stroke is the need for time. As Dr. Taylor stated, “I am wounded…. I need time to heal.” The human body has a great capacity to heal itself. The
The comfort and support we have gotten from such people gives us the pride and pleasure to recognize and congratulate students who will now be **graduated** clinicians. We will miss them but have great memories.

My daughter suffered a hemorrhagic stroke at the age of 19, with no warning signs, symptoms or family history. Our experience was a sudden attack on our family. Our learning curve was high and we became educated quickly - stroke is not restricted to the elderly.

We lived in the bewildering fog in the days and months following the stroke. In hindsight, I have had a chance to reflect on what happened and how we have been impacted.

Previous to her stroke, I was a passive person content with life and very appreciative of what had been given to our family. We fought this stroke on all levels: socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically. What the hospital could not provide, we searched for elsewhere. I believed it would have been counter-productive to Janel’s recovery to rail away at a system and its perceived inadequacies.

Anger and pity were not options for us as we chose to simply focus on the well being of Janel. We took strength from one another and I learned so much from the experience.

I have come to appreciate the great strength demonstrated by the individuals most affected by this stroke experience.

I was, and continue to be, in awe of my daughter’s strength of mind and her perseverance as she fought to get her life, as she knew it, back. She refused to settle for anything less.

I was in awe of the strength my husband demonstrated as he returned to work soon after Janel’s stroke, in order to provide our family with some semblance of normalcy after our lives had been turned upside-down.

I now know that my greatest strength is in providing support. I became an advocate for my daughter and discovered how best to support her in a time of crisis. I possess a greater belief that everything will turn out well; we’ve been to the bottom and know how to find our way back.

I learned that we are not alone. We received enormous support and prayers from our family and friends.

*What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger*  
by Roxanne Nadeau

*(This article is one of many in the book* **BRAIN ATTACK - THE JOURNEY BACK** —A Unique Collection of Creative Writing about Stroke Recovery by Liz Pearl, editor)*

Like many parents worst nightmare the story began with police officers standing at our door. Thus began our long journey.

(Continued on page 4)
**Long Road of Recovery**
by Nancy Alarcon

It’s June once again, and this means national “Aphasia Awareness” efforts are happening from coast to coast! As Bob Anderson has highlighted in this issue, we’re advocating for individuals with Aphasia through the sale of Aphasia magnets!! We’re hoping to touch many, many people in our community. Just think – if I drive my car with my aphasia magnet on it, and I am passed by 100 cars on the way to work or to shopping, I may have been “read” by 10% or more of those drivers! That’s right, I could impact even 10 drivers, and WHAT IF each one of our stroke survivors and their families had a magnet and they passed 10 drivers....... Well, you do that math and the outreach is amazing! Yes, we can make a difference, increasing awareness of aphasia!

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Recovery is a thread in this month’s issue—speaking to us about the journey of several stroke survivors. When our communication group meets each quarter, we share about renewed growth and personal discoveries along the road to recovery, along with the side-journeys, bumps and interruptions along the way. I am always so moved at the spirit of each stroke survivor individual and couple I meet along the way—their earnest efforts to stay on the path of recovery and, at the same time, to reach out and support others along the way. So many of the folks I meet are truly inspiration to each of us.

My aunt, Sue, has just celebrated four years in her journey from the day of her stroke in June 2005. I was thinking of her this week as she travels now by herself in New Zealand and Australia! Yes, she along with ankle-foot brace and cane in hand and loads of tenacity, is charting new territory for herself. She took a “side-trip” 4 years ago—one that nearly took her from us, but now she is back and stronger in spirit than ever. Life is not the same for her, and getting about is not the same, but that hasn’t stopped her from building new dreams and setting new personal objectives.

Dennis, whom many of you know, is celebrating 25 years since his stroke! Bob and Ted recently spent several hours with him talking about his long journey. We’ll hear Dennis’ reflections in the months ahead.

I think so often of the hundreds and hundreds of survivors and their family members that I’ve met along the way. They are the epitome of the journey in recovery—finding courage, spirit and daily strength as they seek renewed growth in life.

I am so very proud of YOU, our stroke survivors and families! Thank you for sharing your lives with us!

(Continued from page 3)

I learned that we took strength from one another, we pulled together and we got through it.

I learned that there is enormous potential for recovery and that the human spirit cannot be measured.

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