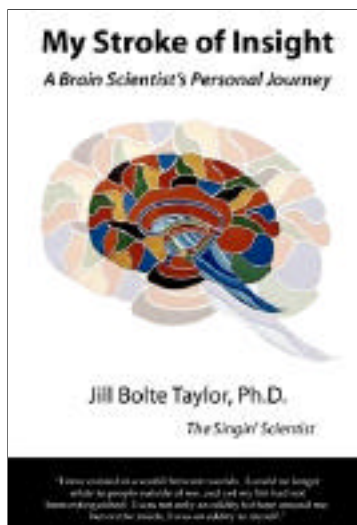


MY STROKE OF INSIGHT: A BRAIN SCIENTIST'S PERSONAL JOURNEY

BY JILL BOLTE TAYLOR

Reviewed by: Sana Shoukat and Ahmed Itrat



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'I was literally thrown off balance when my right arm dropped completely paralyzed against my side. In that moment I knew. Oh my gosh, I'm having a stroke! I'm having a stroke! And in the next instant, the thought flashed through my mind, Wow, this is so cool'

All neuroscientists, physicians and individuals who have seen it happening to someone around them have had no option but to feel intrigued by the presentation and course of this disease called 'Stroke'. However, for the most part, we concentrate on the changes of outward behavior or the lack thereof after a part of the brain dies with no blood supply. What is even more exciting is the inner mental turmoil of the sufferer himself who tries to connect with the outside world with gaps in cognition, power and memory, and at the same time rebels to regain the lost.

This book, 'My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey' deals with this very aspect of the disease.

Jill Bolte Taylor, a Harvard trained neuroanatomist, faculty at the Indiana University School of Medicine, a leading member of NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) and known as the 'Singing Scientist' for being the National Spokesperson for the Mentally Ill for the Harvard Brain Tissue Resource Center narrates her own story as she 'experienced' (and not 'suffered') stroke at the age of thirty seven. This book is a journey of her life from the heights of a successful scientist to a dramatic onset of verbal and physical disability and back to a miraculous recovery in eight years.

The book is divided into 20 chapters; the first three describing her pre-stroke life, the functioning and enigmatic properties of the brain. Then follows a detailed account of the 'morning of the stroke' and the next eight chapters of her treatment period. The account of her recovery and realization of a new life follows in the next chapters.

This memoir through the eyes of a brain expert explains stroke in a whole new way, as Jill masterfully relates her scientific knowledge to her experiences of the disease. Therefore, besides being a very moving account, it can prove to be re assuring and most importantly, educating to the readers.

Jill has shared her recommendations for recovery and the insight she developed into the unique functions of the two halves of her brain. After losing the left brain, she takes her consciousness far away from the normal reality of the world where she feels "at one with the universe." She helps those who are fighting a similar battle rebuild their brains from trauma, and helps those of us with normal brains better understand how we can consciously influence the neural circuitry underlying what we think, how we feel and how we react to life's circumstances. For health professionals and scientists, it enlightens what the neuro-medicine books and years of clinical dealing with stroke patients may still fail to do - empathizing and understanding the event as the sufferer does. The book renews ones' appreciation for the wonder, complexity and incredible power of the human brain. It is a great guide for the care givers teaching them how to handle a survivor and ensure their steps, no matter how small, towards recovery.

A survivor from stroke is not wounded or stupid. He or she is fighting a great battle where winning is difficult not only because of the preciousness of the circuits in the brain but also because the damaged brain loves the debilitated life in itself and resists recovery. They deserve respect, very gentle treatment and most importantly our patience.

We have learnt a lot from this book and highly recommend all doctors and medical students to enjoy the book and share it with the survivors and caregivers.