

## Sharon Deering Essay # 2

It was 6:30 in the morning, a day like any other day—I thought. I was in my Vista-mode which was up and at ‘em bright and early. My daughter was up also, which was unusual, but we had places to go and people to see and this was Lubbock, the hometown I had grown up in and was now coming to make a play for the school district’s business for foreign language books. I had stayed up the night before, as had she, working on the presentation for this morning. I thought we were going to discuss things one more time, but instead she said, “Mother...”—she rarely called me mother and I should have been forewarned— “you’re having a stroke.”

Now, you’d think I would rant and rave and say that I’m not having a stroke, or maybe rush around thinking what I could do to get ready to go to the hospital, or something. But no, I coolly and calmly sat down on the couch and waited for the ambulance to arrive. I don’t know what I was thinking. I’m sure I was in shock. Bad things had been happening all year, starting with my husband of forty-six years suddenly dying. Now this! I am pretty sure that I thought this couldn’t be happening, that we’d get to the hospital and it would be a hoax or at least a mild stroke with “menos sequelas.” (That is one of the things that’s happened since the stroke. Sometimes I can’t think of the word except in Portuguese or Spanish. Usually it’s one of those words that sounds better or expresses the concept better in Portuguese or Spanish than in English.)

I was still sitting on the couch in the motel room when the ambulance arrived. I don’t know, but I think climbed on the gurney by myself, just the EMT’s sort of as a backup. I just know that for the next few hours I sank deeper and deeper into myself and didn’t say anything to speak of. I know my daughter answered questions for me. I was worried about my blood pressure. It didn’t seem to want to come down no matter what they did, and I was afraid it was never going “abaixar.” (I did that one on purpose. I’m getting my old sense of humor back.) Interestingly enough, I was not concerned about the Vista presentation. It is a tribute to Alana that I trust her enough to know that it was taken care of, and it was right.

I don’t know what caused the stroke; people rarely do. What about the fact that I had gone almost a year non-stop with Vista Higher Learning? What about the fact that when I stopped, it was to bury my husband? How about the fact that I had a genetic predisposition to stroke? And how about the fact that I was overweight and out of shape? It could have been any of those things, most likely a combination of any or all of them. I don’t think it matters except to scientists who try to figure stuff like this out. In a practical sense, what matters is that you move on from the point of the stroke and begin again.

I had known about the “clot buster” for a long time, but when push came to shove, I didn’t ask for it. I don’t know why—at least I didn’t know for a long time. I know now that there is much danger involved in that, and it might not been the best thing for me. Of course, my oldest son-in-law wanted to sue for medical malpractice in that they did they not triage me right, but he settled down after a while because he works in a medical institution and knows that medicine is part science and part art. He was just looking out for his mama.

I don't know when I knew I could not speak. It seems like I should have known from the get-go because the doctors and my daughter were asking me questions I couldn't respond to, but somehow I thought my speech would come back in a little bit. It's been a year and a half now, and while I have made good progress, I have a long way to go yet. But by the second day I knew I had started a whole new chapter in my life—getting my speech back.

Sometime in the first or second day I knew a few more things. I knew that I would be on blood pressure medicine, cholesterol medicine, and blood thinner maybe for the rest of my life. I knew I would be in therapy for a long time. I knew it would be speech therapy, but I didn't know what else. I didn't know that it would be hard to get me into more than just speech therapy, but it was. I didn't qualify for insurance purposes. After all, that's the way insurance companies work. (I still believe we have the most accurate and fastest system in the world, a system that puts the patients' well-being first and payment second. I'm just saying . . .)

Perhaps you would like to know how far I had to come back. When I finally got to therapy, I could say six of seven days of the week, eight out twelve months of the year, and 22 out of 26 letters of the alphabet. I couldn't say my name or birthday, although I could write it. In the description of a picture, I could say one clause with help. Most of the time I could generate 2 or 3 word phrases, but I could not follow 3-step directions. I had to write down biographical information so as to refer to it when I got stuck. It took seven tries for me to come up with subject-verb-object sentence, and that with a lot of help. I couldn't work, drive, use the computer, do meal prep, play the piano, crocheted, or bake. I had a lot of work to do!

For purposes of the "essay," I decided that I would gather as many facts and feelings as I could from the different members of the family and what they felt at the time of my stroke. That way you, the reader, could see what my family saw, hear what the family heard, and see how different people's perspectives are. To do so, though, I ought to introduce you to my family. You see, there are a lot of them, and you might get them mixed up unless I do the proper introductions.

As I said before, Alana was with me from the beginning, so you've already met her. If she had not been with me, I probably would have died. It's just the way of things. If I had not had her to call 911 and take care of things from the get-go, I would have been lost. She called Jonathan, her husband, who called Richard and Cole, the others two girls husbands. (They have a thing where, when something goes wrong with one of us, they always call the guys who break the news to their wives.) She got the things from Vista ready, and meanwhile got me to the hospital and into the doctor's capable hands all at the same time. Jonathan joined us by ten o'clock from Arlington. It turned out that the children were already with us, although I had forgotten that. They had gone to stay in Lubbock with Jonathan's sister while we did the presentation. For future reference, their names are Juliana (11), Makena (6), Gunner (4), and Hunter (almost a year.) Juliana said that she didn't know what a stroke was, but she knew it was bad. Makena and Gunner didn't remember much. Ah, the joys of youth! Gunner did remember that he was to get Mommy or Daddy if I had another one. Smart kid for a four-year-old!

The next family to know about the stroke was Ginger's family. Ginger is the oldest and has three children, Rivir (21), Dawna (17), and Katie (8). Her husband's name is Richard. They were in Arlington where we all live, and he said that he was just concerned about the rest of the family, telling them without panic, getting them to where they could get off from school, as not only are the two youngest ones in school, but my daughter is a school teacher, getting himself off from work, having the car gassed and ready. (This is a sentence I could be proud of! I used to write sentences like this all the time and then have to go back and edit them because they were too long.) Ginger mentioned that the information coming out from the hospital was confusing, and Alana and Dawn confirmed it. Apparently they said it was a stroke, then they said it wasn't, and it was again. Nobody could get a handle on what was happening for a while. Dawna said that she was scared, an emotion that was reflected on the faces of most everybody. Rivir confirmed what nobody would say but everybody was thinking. I could die. He was relieved, I guess, when the word came that I had not died and was, in fact, on the mend.

The last family to learn of my stroke were Dawn and Cole and their four children, Connor (11), Hayley (8), Kinsey (5), and Ansley (3). There was something strange about how they acted and I soon came to believe they had lost the baby they were carrying. It really is the only thing that would keep them away, and they did stay away. This would be the second time in three years they had lost a baby, and I hurt for them in every way and for myself that they couldn't come to me. They did come as soon as I got home, and we shared both my hurt from the stroke and their hurt at losing the baby. Cole said that he was equally worried about Dawn and me and that they did intend to head to Lubbock as soon as they got through with the appointment at the doctor's. Of course, that changed when they found out they were miscarrying. I said to Dawn that I knew that only a problem with the baby could keep them away from the hospital, and she said, "I'm glad." It was all that needed to be said between us. The children didn't remember much about the stroke, probably because they were not with me, but they did remember that I came back different than when I went away. They were so forgiving, helpful, and mindful of what I needed, sometimes more than the adults.

We got home, and the children made arrangements for taking turns staying with me. Alana took the lead, and it soon became evident that the solution for the time being was that they move in with me. That has had its challenges as well. Jonathan said it was like living out of a suitcase for a year, and Alana said that the challenges came as we tried to work out the schedules, especially when I had seizures and couldn't go anywhere by myself. Hunter came into our lives and brought joy where there had been only sadness for so long. They're have moved now, which is bittersweet. It's time for them to be moving on to the next phase of their lives, and it's time to get on with mine, as well. Since they moved out I have gone back to driving, have taken care of many of my own needs, and have branched out into some new things as well. I plan to start a book club in the near future, and I have been invited to read Startalk grants in the fall. I remain forever grateful for their interruption to their lives when I needed them the most. Now on with the next chapter!