

Sharon Deering – The Stroke

It's a disconcerting thing—having your speech taken away. More than disconcerting, really. Because with speech comes identity. You can't say where you are, what you have come to do, what design you have on a given moment—nothing. On a day in the spring on 2017, I had my speech taken away in almost a twinkling of an eye. I was getting ready for textbook day for foreign language, I had a stroke, and nothing was ever the same again.

When the speech therapy started, 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, crochet, or bake.

I had a lot of work to do. I grabbed recovery inch by inch, word by word, and step by step—until now. But we're not here to talk about how far I have come, although that's a part of it. I'm here to talk about how far I have to go. What's next? How can I grab the next piece of life? How can I get past where I am now, always thinking about me and my predicament, ever centered on the same old thing and nothing more.

Well, I need to start where I've always started—from the beginning. I need to start from my spiritual roots. And for that I need some deep introspection. Why did I have a stroke in the first place? My husband had died in February before I had a stroke in April, and that had something to do with it. I was physically out of shape, and that had something to do with it, as well. But a lot of people lose their spouses and don't have strokes. A lot of people are physically out of shape—a lot worse than I was—and don't have strokes. I knew there was something else. More than any time in my life, I had lost the spiritual roots that anchored me since I was a child. I didn't know where to go or what to do. I was literally and absolutely lost.

This was a sobering thought indeed. In the midst of a stroke and all that that entailed, I had lost the only hope I had ever had.

¹¹Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire ¹³a still small voice.

That the way it was with me. In a still, small voice—at the back of my mind, at first—came from the lostness a peace that all would be well.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

That what I needed to learn and am still learning today. He who promised is faithful. So as I got back my speech somewhat, I knew He would be faithful. As I wrote, I knew He would be faithful. Even today, I know He is faithful to *do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. Ephesians 3:20*

So where do we go from here? What next on the agenda? Well, I'm going to write a book on how the teachers should be treated in the classroom. I don't know how it will turn out; it's not a skill I had before, so it wasn't lost in the stroke. But I'm going to try. I may try to write an expansion on essay I wrote a couple of years ago that talks directly about recovering from stroke through a patient's perspective. It doesn't matter, really, what I find to do with my hand. It matters that I am faithful, as He is faithful, to do all to the glory of God.

I realize that is sort of churchy-themed message and many of you may not know what I'm talking about. That's all right. I invite you to write to me so we can begin a conversation about this. I would love to hear from you.