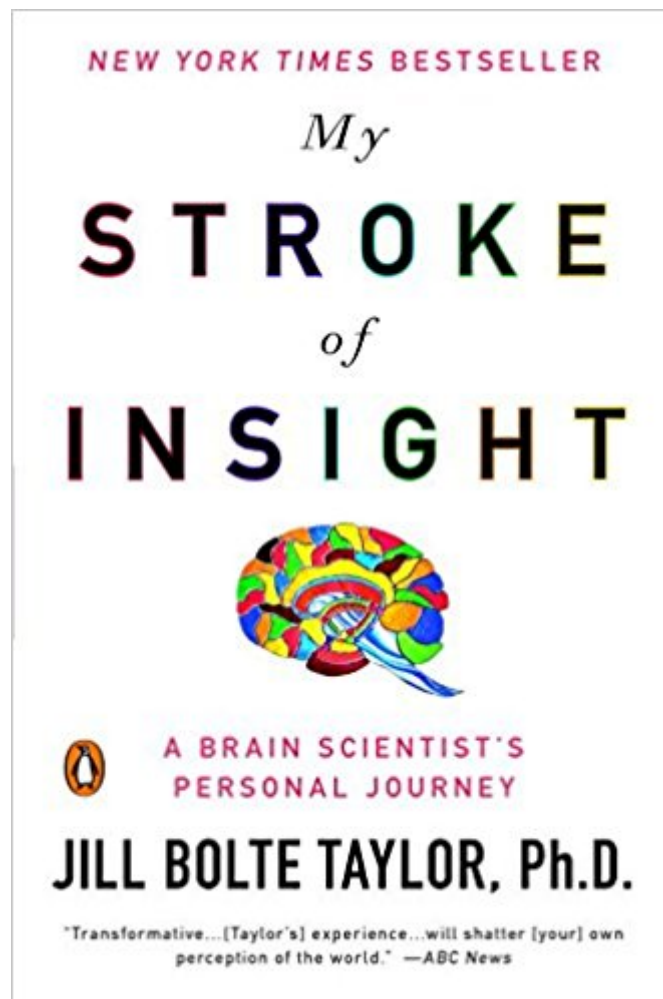




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# My Stroke Of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey



## Synopsis

The astonishing New York Times bestseller that chronicles how a brain scientist's own stroke led to enlightenment On December 10, 1996, Jill Bolte Taylor, a thirty-seven-year-old Harvard-trained brain scientist experienced a massive stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain. As she observed her mind deteriorate to the point that she could not walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life-all within four hours-Taylor alternated between the euphoria of the intuitive and kinesthetic right brain, in which she felt a sense of complete well-being and peace, and the logical, sequential left brain, which recognized she was having a stroke and enabled her to seek help before she was completely lost. It would take her eight years to fully recover. For Taylor, her stroke was a blessing and a revelation. It taught her that by "stepping to the right" of our left brains, we can uncover feelings of well-being that are often sidelined by "brain chatter." Reaching wide audiences through her talk at the Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) conference and her appearance on Oprah's online Soul Series, Taylor provides a valuable recovery guide for those touched by brain injury and an inspiring testimony that inner peace is accessible to anyone.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A brain scientist's journey from a debilitating stroke to full recovery becomes an inspiring exploration of human consciousness and its possibilities On the morning of December 10, 1996, Jill Bolte Taylor, a thirty-seven-year-old Harvard-trained brain scientist, experienced a massive stroke when a blood vessel exploded in the left side of her brain. A neuroanatomist by profession, she observed

her own mind completely deteriorate to the point that she could not walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life, all within the space of four brief hours. As the damaged left side of her brain--the rational, grounded, detail- and time-oriented side--swung in and out of function, Taylor alternated between two distinct and opposite realities: the euphoric nirvana of the intuitive and kinesthetic right brain, in which she felt a sense of complete well-being and peace; and the logical, sequential left brain, which recognized Jill was having a stroke, and enabled her to seek help before she was lost completely. In *My Stroke of Insight*, Taylor shares her unique perspective on the brain and its capacity for recovery, and the sense of omniscient understanding she gained from this unusual and inspiring voyage out of the abyss of a wounded brain. It would take eight years for Taylor to heal completely. Because of her knowledge of how the brain works, her respect for the cells composing her human form, and most of all an amazing mother, Taylor completely repaired her mind and recalibrated her understanding of the world according to the insights gained from her right brain that morning of December 10th. Today Taylor is convinced that the stroke was the best thing that could have happened to her. It has taught her that the feeling of nirvana is never more than a mere thought away. By stepping to the right of our left brains, we can all uncover the feelings of well-being and peace that are so often sidelined by our own brain chatter. A fascinating journey into the mechanics of the human mind, *My Stroke of Insight* is both a valuable recovery guide for anyone touched by a brain injury, and an emotionally stirring testimony that deep internal peace truly is accessible to anyone, at any time.

Questions for Jill Bolte Taylor .com: Your first reaction when you realized what was happening to your body was one you would expect: "Oh my gosh, I'm having a stroke!" Your second, though, was a little more surprising: "Wow, this is so cool!" What could be cool about a stroke? Taylor: I grew up to study the brain because I have a brother who is only 18 months older than I am. He was very different in the way he perceived experiences and then chose to behave. As a result, I became fascinated with the human brain and how it creates our perception of reality. He was eventually diagnosed with the brain disorder schizophrenia, and I dedicated my career to the postmortem investigation of the human brain in an attempt to understand, at a biological level, what are the differences between my brain and my brother's brain. On the morning of the stroke, I realized that my brain was no longer functioning like a "normal" brain and this insight into my brother's reality excited me. I was fascinated to intimately understand what it might be like on the inside for someone who would not be diagnosed as normal. Through the eyes of a curious scientist, this was an absolutely rare and fascinating experience for me to witness the breakdown of my own mind. .com: What did you learn about the brain from your stroke and your recovery that your scientific training hadn't prepared you for? Taylor: My scientific training did not

teach me anything about the human spirit and the value of compassion. I had been trained as a scientist, not as a clinician. I can only hope that we are teaching our future physicians about compassion in medicine, and I know that some medical schools, including the Indiana University School of Medicine, have created a curriculum with this intention. My training as a scientist, however, did provide me with a roadmap to how the body and brain work. And although I lost my left cognitive mind that thinks in language, I retained my right hemisphere that thinks in pictures. As a result, although I could not communicate with the external world, I had an intuitive understanding about what I needed to do in order to create an environment in which the cells in my brain could be happy and healthy enough that they could regain their function. In addition, because of my training, I had an innate trust in the ability of my brain to be able to recover itself and my mother and I respected the organ by listening to it. For example, when I was tired, I allowed my brain to sleep, and when I was fresh and capable of focusing my attention, we gave me age-appropriate toys and tools with which to work. .com: Your stroke affected functions in your left brain, leaving you to what you call the "la-la land" of your right hemisphere. What was it like to live in your right brain, and then to rebuild your left? Taylor: When the cells in my left brain became nonfunctional because they were swimming in a pool of blood, they lost their ability to inhibit the cells in my right hemisphere. In my right brain, I shifted into the consciousness of the present moment. I was in the right here, right now awareness, with no memories of my past and no perception of the future. The beauty of La-la land (my right hemisphere experience of the present moment) was that everything was an explosion of magnificent stimulation and I dwelled in a space of euphoria. This is great way to exist if you don't have to communicate with the external world or care whether or not you have the capacity to learn. I found that in order for me to be able to learn anything, however, I had to take information from the last moment and apply it to the present moment. When my left hemisphere was completely nonfunctional early on, it was impossible for me to learn, which was okay with me, but I am sure it was frustrating for those around me. A simple example of this was trying to put on my shoes and socks. I eventually became physically capable of putting my shoes and socks on, but I had no ability to understand why I would have to put my socks on before my shoes. To me they were simply independent actions that were not related and I did not have the cognitive ability to figure out the appropriate sequencing of the events. Over time, I regained the ability to weave moments back together to create an expanse of time, and with this ability came the ability to learn methodically again. Life in La-la land will always be just a thought away, but I am truly grateful for the ability to think with linearity once again. .com: What can we learn about our brains and ourselves from your experience, even if we haven't lived through the kind of brain trauma you have? Taylor: I learned

that I have much more say about what goes on between my ears than I was ever taught and I believe that this is true for all of us. I used to understand that I had the ability to stop thinking about one thing by consciously choosing to preoccupy my mind with thinking about something else. But I had no idea that it only took 90 seconds for me to have an emotional circuit triggered, flush a physiological response through my body and then flush completely out of me. We can all learn that we can take full responsibility for what thoughts we are thinking and what emotional circuitry we are feeling. Knowing this and acting on this can lead us into feeling a wonderful sense of well-being and peacefulness. .com: You are the "Singin' Scientist" for Harvard's Brain Bank (just as you were before your stroke). Could you tell us about the Brain Bank (in song or not)? Taylor: There is a long-term shortage of brain tissue donated for research into the severe mental illnesses. Most people don't realize that when you sign the back of your license as an organ donor, the brain is not included. If you would like to donate your brain for research, you must contact a brain bank directly. There is also a shortage of "normal control" tissue for research. The bottom line reality is that if there were more tissue available for research, then more scientists would be dedicating their careers to the study of the severe mental illnesses and we would have more answers about what is going on with these disorders. The numbers of mentally ill individuals in our society are staggering. The most serious and disabling conditions affect about 6 percent--or one in 17--adults and 9-13 percent of children in the United States. Half of all lifetime conditions of mental illness start by age 14 years, and three-fourths by age 24 years. For more information about brain donation to the Harvard brain bank, please call 1-800-BRAINBANK or visit them at: [www.brainbank.mclean.org](http://www.brainbank.mclean.org) If you would like to hear me sing the brain bank jingle, please visit [www.drjilltaylor.com](http://www.drjilltaylor.com)! --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 1996, 37-year-old neuroanatomist Taylor experienced a massive stroke that erased her abilities to walk, talk, do mathematics, read, or remember details. Her remarkable story details her slow recovery of those abilities (and the cultivation of new ones) and recounts exactly what happened with her brain. Read proficiently by the author, this is a fascinating memoir of the brain's remarkable resiliency and of one woman's determination to regain her faculties and recount her experience for the benefit of others. Taylor repeatedly describes her "stroke of insight"-a tremendous gratitude for, and connection with, the cells of her body and of every living thing-and says that although she is fully recovered, she is not the same driven, type-A scientist that she was before the stroke. Her holistic approach to healing will be valuable to stroke survivors and their caregivers, who can pick up suggestions from Taylor's moving accounts of how her mother faithfully loved her back to life. A

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I heard of *My Stroke of Insight* by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor after attending a stroke support group meeting as an assignment while I was a student in a Physical Therapist Assistant program. My father also had a stroke in 2008 so I was interested in reading about a medical professional's account of what was happening to their body as they themselves were experiencing a stroke. This book was much more than I was expecting. As a medical professional myself now I wasn't sure if Dr. Bolte Taylor would sound very clinical and dive into lecturing, but it was quite the opposite. Dr. Bolte Taylor did explain some neuro anatomy and structures affected during her stroke but she expressed her thoughts in such detail they were so powerful, human and gripping. As I read, I was so moved by her courage and determination to push through and focus on her recovery. I loved how she reflected on relearning everything and appreciated her right hemisphere where creativity lies waiting to be explored and how she embraced her artistic side after her stroke. This is a fantastic book I highly recommend for anyone even if you don't have a relative who's had a stroke or even if you don't work in the medical field Dr. Bolte Taylor explains her story in a way that's so moving any reader will walk away from it with compassion and so many lessons.

This is the second time I bought this book. This time, being older, I could relate to deaths in my family and understand the book from beginning to end. It is awesome and provides so many pointers subtle clues for working with and just as important being with people who are not only having strokes but who are getting senile or having memory loss problems. While the later 2 are not directly addressed, the information is there. It's a wonderful book. I think it also helps in the quest to dwell in silence, stillness and relaxing space. Highly recommended.

Recommended to me by my father. My mother had a brain tumor and stroke -- my Dad and I both regret not understanding what might be going on in someone's brain when they are not responsive to you. This is a truly remarkable real life story that should be mandatory reading for anyone dealing with a stroke patient. It is uplifting and enlightening. It is a spiritual book -- one that in ways scientifically explains the make up of our physical body and our brain -- and what happens in our brain becomes our reality and experience of life. I've looked up Jill Bolte Taylor on YouTube videos

and to hear her speak is amazing.

It was an absolutely correct blow by blow of my stroke. It was so overwhelming to relive that morning that I cried....hard. I had to walk away for awhile to prepare myself. It proved to be an excellent tool to use in my ongoing recovery. After reading it, I highly recommend it. I know my memory and focus are going to come back strong. It gave me a lot of hope.

In this real-life, insightful book, we are able to see and experience the intricate relationships of arguably the most complex organ in the human body during a major traumatic event from the victim herself who is also an expert on the brain. Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor gives us a very rare point of view, in the fact that she is the sister of a mentally impaired person, a Harvard trained neuroanatomist, an advocate for the mentally impaired, a published researcher, a victim of major brain trauma, and a recovering mentally impaired person. Through her well trained brain and perspective she gives us a detailed understanding of her left and right brain interactions before, during, and after her hemorrhagic stroke. This leads to one of the most intriguing neuroscience books I have ever read, which is why I gave it 5 out of 5 stars. After Taylor tells her history of becoming a well-respected researcher and advocate for schizophrenic minds with the NAMI, she goes into detail on basic brain anatomy. She does a great job of describing basic neuroanatomy from the cerebral cortex to the aneurysm. The "Hemispheric Asymmetries" chapter was really interesting where she was able to give the readers great examples to be able to understand the differences between the two hemispheres. For instance, on page 30, she says that our right brain thinks in pictures and our left-brain "thrives on details, details, and more details about those details." I was able to use the connections that she made between the two hemispheres throughout the book to keep track of why she could not perform certain tasks during her stroke, which I think was her main goal of that chapter. The pictures, along with her tendency to avoid or explain jargon really well, allow anyone with some knowledge of the brain to understand what she was talking about. It is my opinion that someone who has never studied the brain could get a good idea or understanding of the brain as it relates to stroke so they could follow the rest of the book without missing a beat. Beginning in the chapter "Morning of the Stroke," the reader sees her thinking process and how certain aspects, that is normally associated with the left side of the brain where the stroke is occurring, starts to fade. I find it very hard to believe that she was thinking things like, "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!" However, I have never experienced a stroke so it could be plausible. I loved how she was able to

walk the readers through her thought process. It is interesting to see that she could relate the parts of her brain that were affected based on what motor function she was losing (pg. 39). I also liked how during the next few chapters, she gave the readers examples of how her left brain was taking a back seat to her right brain. For example in "Orchestrating my Rescue" (pg 52), she says that she didn't call 911 because "the neurons that coded 911 were now swimming in a pool of blood, so the concept simply didn't exist for me anymore." And even after the stroke when the doctor asked her who the president of the USA was, she had to think about each word and process the entire question, which took hours. The details from her left mind could not be accessed so she eventually gave up. She said it was because she could only think of pictures that the right mind had and not generate the details that the left mind had. Also, she gave the readers insight into things I have never thought about for instance on page 103 when she says that her mother had to tell her about color before she was able to understand or use that as a tool and the same went for 3-D perspectives. She had to be told that things could be positioned in front of other things. As someone who had a grandmother who was severely affected by a stroke, the chapters 4-13 gave me a large amount of insight into what my grandmother might have been experiencing that day. I can understand that she had no idea what was going on or what was happening to her because it even took Dr. Taylor several minutes to figure this out. These chapters are great for anyone who know or knew someone who had a stroke. It allows the reader into their shoes, and it allows them to understand what they were thinking during their stroke. This is something that is hard to obtain from any other source. It is possible here because Dr. Taylor understood exactly what was going on during each phase of her brain trauma. This is what makes the book so invaluable to families of stroke victims because understanding what she said in these few chapters could go a long way for families or friends of stroke victims. The rest of the book talks about how she recovered, how she changed her thinking, and how she found inner piece. My favorite was the chapter entitled "My Right and Left Mind." I really enjoyed how she was able to document how her right mind thought differently than her left and how she coped and learned from her left mind as it started to recover. She was about to gain a deep understanding of the characteristics of both sides and then able to learn how to integrate more of her right brain into her everyday life as her left mind healed. It is amazing to see how someone appreciates the brain so much even while it is letting her down to some extent. All in all, I think that this book accomplished its goal, which was to give a stroke of insight to a wide range of individuals. It is for those who have had a family member or close friend who has had a stroke to researchers who study brain trauma. It is both suitable for the scientist or layperson's mind that will both be intrigued and will gain something from the book. I would



recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand the brain during trauma because these same types of processes occur during any brain trauma not just stroke. From the perspective of someone who studies traumatic brain injury, stroke rehabilitation, and neuroscience and someone who had a grandmother who suffered from a terrible stroke, this book has allowed me to appreciate my research more. It made me realize why my work is so important while also allowing me to understand what my grandmother went through and understand what was going on with her during her stroke. This is a life-changing read.

*My Stroke of Insight* is an unusual book in that the "recipient" of the neurological damage in the form of a stroke actually listened to her brain and knew what was going on even if her time lines were skewed. I think this book would be of interest to both the medical (neurology) and non medical community as a quick read. Interestingly I saw her in video a couple of days after I finished the book and even though she claimed to be completely recovered, I could tell she was NOT 100% in the normal range even though her speech was clear.

I bought this book because I had a friend who has had 4 strokes now. The last was more severe. I wanted my friend and her daughter to understand how recovery happens and timing. My friend is 76 and runs a business. She needed to accept she would not be driving, running her business or living alone for a long time if ever. The fog comes and goes and she has conditions that make her high risk for more strokes.

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