

Chapter 2 Summary: Everything Can Fail

Debra starts her acute inpatient rehab at a new hospital. Steve heads back to work and returns to a more regular routine. Debra still has no speech. She is terrified because she still cannot talk. Her speech therapist helps her hum and then sing simple songs. She finally produces her first words! He uses melody and rhythm to help her say, “My name is Debra Meyerson.” She repeats it over and over. This breakthrough comes with tears of joy. Debra explains to the reader that “there is no cure for stroke.” Each stroke is different. It is hard for patients to know what their recovery will be. There are fears about loss of control of the body and of having another stroke. She writes about **Sean Maloney**, a former Intel executive whose stroke left him with aphasia and a paralyzed right side. He describes it as a shattering loss of wholeness. He realized that “everything can fail.”

Debra makes good progress with her walking and talking for two weeks. But one morning it is harder to talk again. A CT shows another stroke in her speech centers and Debra is transferred back to Stanford. Medical complications lead to more time in the ICU. She is furious at this set back. She is still planning to be back at work in two weeks. The doctors discover the second stroke was caused by a clot that formed behind the tear in her carotid artery. The family agrees to a risky surgery to put in a stent. They worry when the surgery takes much longer than expected but are relieved when it is a success. Debra is soon back at the acute rehab hospital working on her recovery. One morning, her son, Danny, arrives to find his mom face down on the floor. Debra could not move or call for help. She would not admit to the nurses or Danny that she decided to try walking on her own. She was sure her willpower would be enough to make her body work. All her life, she has overcome challenges and met her goals. Debra shares that early after her stroke, she was still holding on to her old identity. Stroke changes your capabilities in an instant. Some survivors, like Debra, stay in denial for a long time. Others adjust more quickly to the losses. Her sense of self was now threatened. Debra says, she “was a teacher without words.”

Chapter 2 Highlights: Everything Can Fail

1. **Debra starts rehab** at her 4th hospital, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. **Steve returns to work** which **helps him feel a sense of routine and some normalcy again**.
2. Debra's son, **Danny**, is **there for her first session** with a new **speech therapist**, Jonathan. **Danny can tell Debra is terrified** and desperately **wants to talk**. She can **barely make a sound**.
3. Jonathan starts by **asking Debra to hum** along to the tune **Happy Birthday**. He moves her arms to the rhythm. She **starts to hum** and finally she **gets out her first word**, "You." She was **overjoyed**. He quickly gets her to **practice other simple tunes**. She **gets more words**.
4. Next, he makes up a tune for her to **chant the phrase**, "My name is Debra Myerson." After a few tries, **she can say/sing** the phrase. **Debra practices** saying it over and over. The melody and rhythm are a powerful way to unlock her fluency.
5. Later, **Danny shares an update** in their CaringBridge blog about his **mom's joy at her first words**. He describes the tears of joy streaming down her face while she **practiced**.
6. Debra quotes a medical researcher who says "**There is no cure**" for **stroke**. Through brain scans and medical history, we know that every stroke is different.
7. The nature of how **strokes happen** can **damage a person's sense of self**. Strokes often **strike without warning**. The **cause** is often **unknown or random**. We do not know how much or how fast survivors will recover. **Losing control over your body** can feel **frightening** and like a failure.

8. Debra tells how Intel Executive, **Sean Maloney's stroke** left him **unable to speak or use his right side**. Many years later, he still **remembers** the "shattering loss of wholeness and control" after his stroke. It was hard to realize that "**everything can fail.**"
9. Stroke survivor **Andrea Helft** told Debra that she was **afraid of having another stroke**. It could be life threatening. It is **hard to live with uncertainty and lack of control.**
10. **Debra made good progress** for two weeks. She could walk down the hall. She could say more and more words. But **one morning**, her **speech came out garbled** again. She tried desperately to prove everything was okay, but she **could not get the words out.**
11. **Steve** quickly **got** a hold of the **doctor**. A new **CT scan** confirmed a **second stroke**. They **felt devastated**. Debra was sent **back to Stanford**.
12. **Doctors discovered** the **tear in the carotid artery caused** another **clot**. Low blood pressure and low platelets **kept her in the ICU**.
13. **Debra kept** the **physical strength** she had regained, but the new stroke was in her speech center. She **lost her speech again**.
14. **Debra was furious** about the set back. She wanted therapy in the ICU, but it was limited. Her **family tried to help** her with **PT and Speech exercises**. Her husband compared stroke recovery to a **series of steps forward** and then a **few backwards**.
15. **Debra could not make a sound**, but she wanted to work on speech. She was determined to be back at work in two weeks. She **still saw herself as Professor Meyerson**.

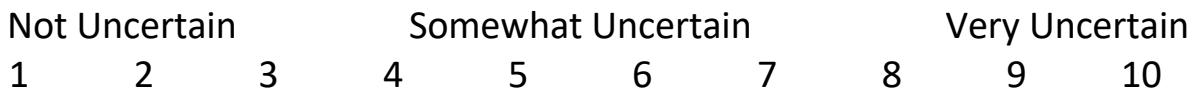
16. Doctors recommended that the family consider **brain surgery** to put in a small stent to prevent another blood clot. The doctors said it was a **risky procedure**. But **not doing the surgery was risky too**. It was a very **hard decision**. The family decided to **do the surgery**.
17. The **family waited** while **Debra was in surgery**. It was supposed to take 2-3 hours, but it **took over 5 hours**. The **family worried** something went wrong. Finally, they learned the **surgery was a success**. Soon, Debra **headed back** to Valley Medical Center for **more rehab**.
18. Danny went to **visit his mom** but was shocked to **find her face down on the floor**. Debra had **fallen** and **could not move** by herself or call for help. He tried to help her up, but she pushed him away. Debra kept saying the only word she could, ‘No, no, no, no.’
19. Debra would not admit it to Danny or the nurses, but she had **decided to get up on her own and walk**. While her **determination was an asset**, her **denial could have caused a terrible injury**.
20. Debra did not understand yet that her **condition would be long lasting**. She assumed it would just **take effort to get everything back**. Debra had **always worked hard** and met her goals.
21. Debra discusses that **many people** have a **hard time accepting changes in their capabilities post stroke**. They cling to what they could do pre-stroke.
22. Debra admits it is a **hard adjustment**. **Determination keeps you working on your recovery**. But **denial of the changes** in your abilities can **keep you stuck** on your old identity **instead of rebuilding a new identity**.
23. **Some people** seem to **adjust quickly**. Many **others stay in denial** for a long time before **struggling with who they were and who they are now**. **Debra realized she was** now a **teacher without words**.

Chapter 2: Points for Reflection

1. Debra remembers her **first words** after the stroke. How well do you remember your first words?



2. Debra speaks about **feeling uncertain** after a stroke because no one can tell you for sure how much you will recover or how fast. How uncertain did you feel at first?



3. Debra's husband, Steve, says that you can take **steps forward and backwards** during stroke recovery. Did you feel like there were many ups and downs during your recovery?



4. Debra said Steve's return to work helped him regain an **everyday routine**. **How important was it to you and your family to get back to a sense of normal?**



5. Debra talks about the challenge to **balance determination and realistic expectations**, especially early after the stroke. **Did you find this a difficult balance? Have your feelings changed with time?**

6. Why do you think **Debra denied** that she tried to get up and walk away from her wheelchair? **Did you ever do** something after your stroke that **you realize now was not a safe idea?**

7. Debra describes **singing songs** as part of her **early speech therapy**. **What were** some of **your early experiences** in speech therapy?

8. Debra still could not talk, but she wanted to be back at work in two weeks. What was **your adjustment process** like? How quickly did you realize your changes in abilities?

9. What part of this chapter **resonated the most** with you as you think back on the time right after your stroke?