

## *Identity Theft: Rediscovering Ourselves After Stroke*

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### **Chapter 13 Summary: Activities Adapted**

Skiing has always been an important activity for Debra’s family. She recounts the story of her family ski trip to Utah in 2005. Once Debra’s family reaches the top of the slope, she is worried that it will be too challenging for her 10-year-old daughter Sarah. However, Sarah does not want to be left behind and successfully skis the slope. Debra reflects that she is now the one left behind on ski trips.

Our activities are an essential part of our identities. According to Debra, the activities we do are “one of the purest expressions of what we care about and how we define ourselves.” For Debra, many of these activities are outdoorsy: skiing, sailing, biking, and more. She recalls how passionate and competitive she became about sailing at a young age. For many stroke survivors, these beloved activities are often out of reach. Losing the ability to continue these activities is painful. She revisits **Malik Thoma**, who shares that he was active and successful before his stroke. He continues to focus on what he has lost instead of looking forward.

Debra believes that it is important to try to understand the reasons why these activities are so important for us. By doing this, we can search for new ways to fill that need. Even though Debra can’t run every day anymore, she has come to enjoy walking, swimming and tandem bike riding with her husband Steve. She even skis occasionally now, though she is careful not to risk injury. These activities allow Debra to hold on to her identity as an athlete.

Debra shares the story of **Anthony Santos**, a 19-year-old boy who had a stroke after a surgery. Before his stroke, Anthony’s life revolved around sports. After his stroke, he used a wheelchair. However, he continues to make progress every day. Now he can walk independently and was able to enjoy touring Mexico on foot. He is relearning to wakeboard. Debra acknowledges that

adapting to new activities can feel inadequate. She would rather be able to take solo rides on her bike, but she celebrates that she can still participate in bike riding. While her activities look different now, their importance to her identity remain the same. Debra and her family plan to complete a cross-country bike ride to raise money and awareness for stroke prevention and rehabilitation.

## Chapter 13 Highlights: Activities Adapted

1. Debra's family took a ski trip to Utah in 2005. Her kids were 10, 14, and 16 at the time. Debra worried that the slope was too challenging for her 10-year-old daughter Sarah. Sarah did not want to be left behind. She successfully skied the slope. Debra is now the one who gets left behind.
2. The activities we choose to do help to define ourselves. We cannot choose our family or friends, but we can choose our activities. Losing the ability to do these activities is very challenging.
3. Debra has sailed competitively from a young age. She was young, confident and did not like to be told that she could not do something.
4. People are happiest when they do activities that are stimulating and challenging. This might be music, sports or other physical activities. We build our lives around these activities. For many stroke survivors, these activities can be out of reach.
5. **Malik Thoma** shared that he used to be athletic and successful. He believes that his old self is gone. Malik unfortunately still looks back on what he has lost. He has not found a way to look forward.
6. **Intentional sensemaking** can help stroke survivors move past the initial trauma of stroke. We can think about why activities are so important to us. Then we can look for ways to fill that need. This can mean participating in new or modified activities.
7. Debra is a lifelong athlete. Debra used to jog daily. Now she gets exercise by walking, swimming, and tandem bike riding with her husband Steve. She enjoys being a sailing instructor to her children. These activities help Debra hold on to her identity as an athlete.

8. Debra introduces **Anthony Santos**. Anthony had a stroke after a surgery at the age of 19. Before his stroke, he was athletic. After his stroke, he had to use a wheelchair. He has made a lot of progress. He can walk independently, and he is learning how to wakeboard again. Anthony says he continued to make progress after the “12 month cutoff.” His mother reflects that Anthony is much happier now that he can participate in sports again.
9. Debra acknowledges that adapting activities can feel inadequate. She enjoys tandem bike riding with Steve, but she still misses riding alone. However, she is grateful that she can still participate in bike riding. It remains a regular part of her life.
10. Debra recalls **Trish Hambridge**. Trish used to play softball and soccer. Now she plays golf. Her father made a special golf club for her. She misses softball and soccer, but she found new activities that bring her joy.
11. Debra considers how activities require trade-offs after stroke. Her physical therapist warned her against skiing. Debra uses a lot of caution to avoid injury. She believes that physical recovery is only part of the journey. Stroke survivors work to rebuild their entire lives. Some activities may be different now, but their importance is still the same. She has found new ways to enjoy being an athlete.
12. For Debra, it is important to acknowledge her identity as a stroke survivor. She works with the Pacific Stroke Association. This organization helps survivors thrive after a stroke. Debra can still do what she loves: making a difference in the world. She and her family plan to take a cross-country bike ride to raise money and awareness for stroke prevention and rehabilitation.

## Chapter 13 Points for Reflection: Activities Adapted

- Debra says that “the activities that we fill our time with are one of the purest expressions of what we care about and how we define ourselves.” How **important** are your **activities** to your **identity**?

|               |   |   |                    |   |   |   |                |   |    |
|---------------|---|---|--------------------|---|---|---|----------------|---|----|
| Not Important |   |   | Somewhat Important |   |   |   | Very Important |   |    |
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4                  | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8              | 9 | 10 |

- Debra has many athletic hobbies. What are some of your **favorite activities**?

|                   |                |            |           |
|-------------------|----------------|------------|-----------|
| Movies/Television | Art            | Reading    | Traveling |
| Nature            |                |            | Music     |
|                   | Cooking/Baking |            |           |
| Family            |                |            |           |
|                   | Games          | Collecting | Sports    |
| Crafting          |                |            | Other     |

- How much have the **activities** you engage with **changed** since your stroke?

|            |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |   |    |
|------------|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|---|----|
| Not at All |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |   |    |
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          | 9 | 10 |

4. Debra acknowledges that **adapting to new activities** sometimes feels **inadequate**. Do you **feel this way**, too?

Not at All

Somewhat

Completely

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

5. How have your changed activities **impacted your identity**?

6. Debra says, “Instead of mourning the loss of an activity forever, we can analyze the reasons why it is so important and search for new ways to fill that need.” Are there **other activities** that might fill you with a **similar sense of fulfilment**?

7. What are some **new activities** that you have found after your stroke?

8. What is your biggest **take-away** from this chapter?