

Identity Theft: Rediscovering Ourselves After Stroke

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Chapter 5 Summary: The Grind of Therapy

Four months after her stroke, Debra said her first spontaneous word outside of therapy. She popped out with the word “Babe” when her family tried to remember the movie name. Debra and her family were excited. This was the first time Deb had on her own generated a word without a prompt. It felt like a breakthrough moment. Most of her recovery has been slow and steady.

Debra worked harder than she was told to after her stroke. She believes that the word recovery does not mean just passively letting the body heal. It is rigorous work and training. She still goes to multiple therapies and starts every day with exercises. She feels that even when full recovery is not likely, therapy continues because small improvements are worth fighting for. It is a grind, but there are moments of inspiration.

Working hard every day is difficult. Debra shares the stroke recovery story of Intel executive **Sean Maloney**. Sean also worked nonstop after his stroke, saying it was the “hardest full-time job” he’s ever had. Since stroke recovery is often unpredictable, positive thinking is really important. When Sean heard a doctor say he’d never row again, he made his wife stop at the rowing club. He took his boat out, and even though he rowed mostly in circles, he had to prove to himself he could do it. Both Debra and Sean learned that it is important to celebrate small wins. Small wins are the little victories that can keep you motivated. These **small wins add up to big changes**. She now sees this recovery process as a marathon, not a sprint.

She tells the story of veteran **Jim Indelicato**. He led an active life pre-stroke. Jim lost his vision, balance, and the ability to walk, swallow, read, and breathe. Like Debra and Sean, he also worked hard to recover. His medical providers said he was “crazy,” but Jim was still determined. Even if he is not where he was before his stroke, Jim has come a long way. His wife believes his attitude has played a big role. Now, he works to motivate other survivors and therapists. He still lives an active life and focuses on the small wins.

Chapter 5 Highlights: The Grind of Therapy

1. Debra's family was eating breakfast one morning. They were talking about movies and could not remember the name of one. When Debra said "Babe," they were all shocked and excited. This was her first word outside of therapy.
2. This was a rare and dramatic breakthrough moment. Most of the time Debra's progress is slow but steady. Sometimes she does not notice improvements until someone sees her after a long time.
3. Rehab is a full-time job after stroke. Recovery means time and rest, but also rigorous work and training. It is a grind: hard and dull work that is important. Progress can seem small, but it is worth fighting for.
4. All she wanted at first was to get back to her old life. Even when Debra was not in therapy, she worked on rehab on her own.
5. Debra learned was that no one had answers. Her doctors could not tell her what was good or expected progress. This looked different for everyone. It was difficult for her to stay positive without these answers.
6. One way she and other survivors stay positive is by focusing on small wins. It is easy to see the big picture and forget the progress. Celebrating these small changes is important for mental health. They can also help survivors motivate each other through the grind of therapy. Recovery is now part of her identity.
7. She talked about stroke survivor and Intel Executive **Sean Maloney**. He said that therapy was the "hardest full-time job he'd ever had." After his stroke, he also wanted to go back to his old life. Sean worked on therapy 7 days a week, but realized it was okay to take days off.

8. Sean was angry when he overheard the doctor tell his medical team that he wouldn't row again. He made his wife stop at the rowing club on the way home. He needed lots of help, but he got the boat in the water. He mostly rowed in circles but had to prove to himself that he could do it.
9. Debra also learned that just doing more wasn't enough, form counted. She needed both determination and discipline. She had to do the exercises right. She and Steve developed the motto: ***Sometimes you have to go slow to recover fast.***
10. Debra spoke of a survivor named **Jim Indelicato**. Jim had been a fitness instructor in the military. He had a very bad stroke in 2010. He lost his vision, balance, and the ability to walk, swallow, read, and breathe. When he left the hospital after many months, he was on a feeding tube, a trach, and a ventilator at night.
11. He did not let this stop him and focused on small wins. It took several different approaches, but four years later, he ate his first solid food and then got off the ventilator. He surprised his doctors over and over again. Today, Jim is able to lead an active life and motivate other survivors. He looks not at his losses but all he has gained back.
12. Debra made working hard at recovery a priority but says it's important to regain other elements of your life. She advises that "time for friends, family, other activities, vacations, and joy have to be built alongside the rehab."
13. Debra, Jim, and Sean were all warned of the 12 month plateau—when progress would level out. They all found it to be a myth. Debra says, "It takes determination and creativity, but progress does not stop after twelve months."
14. Debra, Jim, and Sean all recognized that rehab was a long process. Sometimes they would even take a step backward. They see each step as another small win to be celebrated and remember how far they have come.

Chapter 5 Points for Reflection: The Grind of Therapy

1. Debra wanted to return to her old life after her stroke. She worked harder than she was asked in the first years. Did you set **extra practice goals** for yourself after your stroke?

Never					Sometimes					All the Time!
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

2. Debra learned that focusing on other parts of her life **outside** of rehab was important. She now takes days for her loved ones and fun activities. How important is building in time for people and things that bring you meaning, relaxation, and fun?

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

3. What are some areas **outside** of therapy that you like to focus on?

	Family				Hobbies				
Music				Friends				Vacations	
		Sports			Other				

4. Debra talks about the importance of having both **determination** and **discipline** during recovery. Have you been able to find a **balance** between the two?

Not at All					Sort Of					Definitely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

