

Identity Theft: Rediscovering Ourselves After Stroke

By Debra E. Meyerson, PhD with Danny Zuckerman

Chapter 4: Moving Forward

1. When Debra agrees to speak at a Pacific Stroke Association event four years after her stroke, she surprises herself by, “saying a sentence I hadn’t prepared at all: ‘I am a happier person now.’” (p. 43)
 - a. Were you surprised to read that Debra considered herself a happier person at the time of the speech?
 - b. Has your survivor mentioned aspects of life that feel more positive after their stroke?
 - c. Do you observe any other positive changes in/for your survivor?
 - d. Is there anything in your own life or your family’s life that is more positive after your survivor’s stroke?

2. Stroke survivor and activist Julia Fox Garrison describes herself as a “survivor,” explaining “There’s a victim, and there’s a survivor, and it’s a true choice.” (p. 46) Debra notes that this choice goes far beyond semantics.
 - a. How does Garrison’s decision to identify herself as a “survivor” affect her recovery and her outlook?
 - b. Do you feel your survivor naturally identifies as a survivor?
 - i. If not, how might you support them to do so?
 - c. Do you naturally identify as a carepartner?
 - i. If this continues to be a struggle for you, will you seek resources for support?
 - d. Has your survivor ever expressed feeling invisible because of their disabilities?
 - i. If so, how might you help your survivor understand the importance of advocating for themselves?
 - e. Have you observed your survivor being disregarded or disrespected

because of their disabilities?

i. How did your survivor respond?

ii. How did you respond

f. Does your survivor's communication skills or aphasia impact their ability to advocate for themselves?

i. If so, how?

ii. How does this impact you?

3. Health researchers Dr. Kuluski and her colleagues refer to the process of "narrative reconstruction", with the three common frames of mind in chronic illness being the Chaos Narrative (loss of hope), the Restitution Narrative (focus on recovery) and the Quest Narrative (belief that illness is an opportunity for growth). (pg. 44)

a. As a care partner, which narrative do you tend to embrace?

i. Why?

b. Do you fluctuate between the three narratives, or tend to combine them?

i. Has there been a natural transition between them over time?

c. Is your dominant narrative as carepartner the same as your survivor's narrative?

i. Is it important that they be the same?

ii. Why or why not?

d. Have you encountered barriers to embracing the Quest Narrative?

i. If so, have you utilized any strategies described in the book or other ones to overcome them?

e. Can you envision fully embracing as a growth opportunity a recovery that also includes ongoing limitations for your survivor?

4. Debra states, "reminding myself to look ahead and focus on progressive small wins in the future rather than comparisons to the past is key to continued progress." (p.45)

- a. When do you find your stroke survivor or yourself most likely to look backwards?
 - i. What is it about those situations that compels you to focus on the past?
 - b. Do you think focusing on the past is harmful?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - c. What are some examples of when looking forward to an event or goal helped you or your survivor post-stroke?
 - d. Are there events or small/big goals in your and your survivor's life that you're looking forward to now?
 - e. Have you or could you use meaningful goals centered around future events to motivate yourself or your survivor?
5. Debra states, "Growth that is exciting and even novel—like letting go of my career stress—makes my progress more than just clawing back what I've lost, it's deeply rewarding." (p. 46)
- a. Many of the people profiled in the book state that they found new interests and developed new insights about themselves because of their stroke experience. Did any examples stand out to you?
 - i. Which ones and why?
 - b. Has your survivor developed any new interests during their recovery?
 - i. Do you feel that they would have developed these if they hadn't had a stroke?
 - c. Have you developed any new interests?
 - i. Are any of these interests ones that you might not have developed if you were not a carepartner?
 - d. Do you have the resources—time, financial, emotional, and someone to help with your survivor's care—to explore new interests?
 - i. Are there other barriers that currently prevent you from exploring new interests?

- e. Are there additional ways you might help yourself and/or your survivor overcome any barriers and explore new interests?
6. Debra states that, “Recovery does not have to mean rebuilding exactly what was lost.” (p. 49)
- a. Do you agree with this statement?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - b. How well do you understand the deeper values that motivate you?
 - c. How well do you understand the deeper values that motivate your survivor?
 - d. Do you or can you envision embracing recovery as a growth opportunity if it also includes ongoing limitations for your survivor?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - e. Do you or can you envision embracing your survivor’s recovery as a growth opportunity if it also includes ongoing limitations for you?
 - i. Why or why not?