

## INTRODUCTION



Hi, I'm Maureen Twomey. When I was only 33, June 6, 2000, I had a stroke. It was HUGE. (?!?)

I didn't expect it. (Well . . . no one *does*.) I was healthy, fit, had low blood sugar, etc. So what happened?

It turns out that I had a rare type of stroke: a "stroke secondary to fibromuscular dysplasia," which usually occurs in young females. Some people who have fibromuscular dysplasia do NOT GET A STROKE. But I did . . . lucky me (rrrrrrrr).

The stroke caused a tear in my internal carotid artery.

**Stroke secondary to fibromuscular dysplasia:**

Damage to brain tissue caused by fibromuscular dysplasia, an inherited disorder that leads to the destruction of arterial blood vessels, which can cause bleeding in the brain.

It was June 6, 2000, and I was at work on my computer. And all of a sudden, I was on the floor. “What’s happening to me!?” I asked. “Am I having a stroke?” My coworkers didn’t know.

Soon the emergency team came and took me to the hospital, where they did a CAT Scan of my brain. But fibromuscular dysplasia is lower (arterial), and they didn’t check that low at first. So they told me they were going to do some more tests . . .

They didn’t find the stroke until the next day: June 7, 2000.

It’s not the hospital’s fault whatsoever. It’s my ARTERY and my BRAIN’S fault. I would sue, but I can’t.

Damn it!

Anyway, I’m doing much better now, but I still have a ways to go . . .

June 22, 2000, I finally understood that I'd had a stroke. My first thought was

“AAAAAAAAAAH!”

The second thing I thought was,

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Then—not immediately, but after a while—the third thing I thought was: “Hey, I have a GREAT story to tell!”

The problem was, I couldn't tell it. The stroke had taken everything away. I couldn't read or write or even speak. I couldn't tell my story at all . . .

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

“Well hey,” I thought, “I'm not a genius, but I am gifted . . .”

**Gifted:** *Talented; a special, often creative or artistic, aptitude . . .*

“ . . . So two weeks from now—three weeks tops—I'll be 100 percent

better,” I decided. “And soon I will be done with my book. A story about how I did it.

“After all, many people have a stroke or experience a brain injury and lose the ability to read or write . . . but in time, a lot of them recover those abilities,” I thought.

Well, I not only had a stroke caused by fibromuscular dysplasia, I also developed dysgraphia AND aphasia AND apraxia AND brain injury AND cognitive deficits.

Hmmmm . . . Well, maybe it would take longer to write my story than I first thought.

Now, more than a decade later, I am able to read and write and speak much better than I could at first, but I am still not as accomplished at these things as I was before my stroke (not yet, anyway!).

So some people helped me along the way, of course. Ellen Gilbert, MS, my reading, writing, speech, and language teacher, helped me tremendously at first as I worked to re-learn these skills.

When I first got started, I mostly dictated and Ellen typed what I said. Then I got better at writing, so I

**Re-Le ARN:** *to learn again  
what has been partly or  
completely forgotten.*

started typing myself. (Franklin and Talk are key . . . More on this later.)

Of course, I'm typing with only ONE hand on the computer now, because my right arm doesn't work anymore. If you wrote a book with only one hand, YOU would be slow too! (Duh.)

Chuck and MaryAnn LaMere, my uncle and aunt, also helped me when I was getting started. ("Chuck, how do you spell . . ." "MaryAnn, how do you spell . . ." "MaryAnn or Chuck, how do you spell . . ." blab, blab, blab . . .)

When you see Jack Twomey's (my dad's) letters to everyone in the following pages, it is truly Jack/Dad who wrote them. And many more people wrote stuff for this memoir, too.

Mostly, though, I wrote this book. Maybe someone else could tell the story of what happened much better than I can. Maybe my writing isn't as good as it was before. But I've accomplished so much that I want to write it—not have someone else do it for me.

So if this book doesn't come  
CLOSE to that of a great writer like  
J.D. Salinger or Harper Lee or Anne  
Lamott, it is ONLY because—well,  
YOU know.

Anyway, hopefully you'll enjoy  
this book. I would say, "If not, maybe  
you can contact the publisher and  
say you want your money back," but  
I'm self-publishing . . . so if you don't  
like my book, maybe just sell it on  
Amazon or eBay?

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**P.S.:** By the way: As you can see, I'm  
writing only on one half of the page.  
It's not because I want to use some  
fancy style, but because I can't see on  
the right. (I lost vision on the right  
side in both eyes after my stroke.)

When I was fine I could see all the way across the page . . .

.....  
.....

Now, as I write this, I am not able to  
see the right side of this page. Some  
people who have had a stroke have  
this difficulty too. So, I have purposely  
chosen to use this formatting . . .

Well, I CAN physically turn my head to the right and see there is still print so I can read some more. But in order to do that, I have to turn my head

back

and back

and back

It's like a

Back

Back

AAAAAAAH!

and forth

and forth

and forth . . .

tennis match.

and forth . . .

and forth . . .

I can't take it!

I'll make you a deal:

- ⌘ When I am writing about the time before the stroke, I will make the words go entirely across the page.
- ⌘ When I include writing from my dad, the hospital, friends, etc., you'll know that it's not me writing, because it will also go across the page.
- ⌘ But when I'm writing about everything that happened after the stroke, I'll stick to this half-page formatting. It reinforces the idea that now I can't see the right side.

So that means that while this book at first seems really long, it's actually only 40 pages total.

(Well, maybe a bit more.)

