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My Stroke of Insight by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D.

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***My Stroke of Insight* by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D.**

Jeff Eliason

One of the great pleasures of the final year of medical school is it affords the time to pursue activities that may be considered mundane by the average person, but are seen as a celebratory opportunity for me after the rigors of the first three years of school. One of my most valued of these activities is reading; you know, like, books. In the past few months, I have plowed through a number of books, ranging across fiction and non-fiction, from scientific to historical to biblical to whimsical. None have inspired and moved me as much as *My Stroke of Insight* by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D.

Dr. Taylor is a Harvard-trained neuroanatomist who awakened alone on the morning of December 10, 1996 with a pounding headache and a strange constellation of symptoms. The brain scientist in her was able to decipher that she was suffering from a stroke and subsequently, she was able to describe with amazing clarity the deterioration of her mind in the span of a few hours. While she quickly lost the ability to walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life up to that point, the damaged left side of her brain was miraculously able to swing in and out of function enough to enable her to seek help. In concert with the extensive loss of left side brain function, Dr. Taylor describes in detail the feelings of nirvana and euphoria of the intuitive right brain that took over her body during this perilous experience.

Dr. Taylor posits that she wrote this book to help educate the masses about the early warning signs of stroke; however, there are a few larger lessons in this book, which is why I am recommending it. For one, her descriptions of the hospital environment and the widely contrasting medical treatment (from nurses, doctors, and students) she received at a time when her brain was injured were both alarming and inspiring. All told, it took her over eight years to fully recover from the stroke and along the way she was treated with amazing care by some, but as if she was a worthless nuisance by others.

Most importantly, the author learned of and speaks about the amazing power of the right side of our brains. When she was finally able to shut down the constant "chatter" of the left side of her brain (albeit not intentionally), Dr. Taylor describes an overwhelming sense of peace and well being. Today, the author sees December 10, 1996 as a blessing, for despite the difficult recovery process, she was able to pick and choose the parts of her old life and her old way of thinking that she wanted to hold on to and the parts she would rather discard. She learned the power of stepping away from the busy, regimented, logical left brain and stepping into the loving, feeling, perceiving right brain. Nowadays, Dr. Taylor gives inspirational talks on the joy of "stepping to the right", something all of us in the medical profession can surely benefit from doing a little more often (type "Jill Bolte Taylor" into a YouTube search to see for yourself). *My Stroke of Insight* by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. (Viking, 2006) can be purchased at Amazon.com for \$14.13.