



COURTESY OF KIP MAY

Jill Bolte-Taylor holds a brain complete with brain stem. The brain scientist took eight years to recover from a stroke.

HER STROKE OF INSIGHT

**BRAIN SCIENTIST
WRITES ABOUT
YEARS OF HEALING**

By JANE PALMER
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On the Web
montereyherald.com

See the online version of this story to read how Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula is working to become an accredited primary stroke center.

Monterey and is speaking today at the sold-out Community Hospital Foundation's Women's Forum for Health luncheon. But while Bolte-Taylor took eight years to recover from her stroke, her ultimate message is one of hope.

"The brain is capable of recovery when we set it up for success," said Bolte-Taylor.

Because of her understanding of how the brain works, Bolte-Taylor has seen a complete recovery of her brain and body. She has since written a book "My Stroke of Insight: A Brain

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Scientist's Personal Journey," and speaks publicly about how to rebuild the brain after a stroke.

Helping family members

As with any disability, support from family members plays a key part in the recovery process, Bolte-Taylor says. But frequently, how best to support a stroke victim is something that family members themselves have to learn.

"Focus on the ability not the disability," said Bolte-Taylor, who says her mother's support was invaluable in her recovery.

It is important to break down everyday tasks into baby steps and focus on looking forward rather than backward, Bolte-Taylor said.

"When we consider how far they have come, compared to how they used to be, then it becomes very easy to see how they'll go that much further," Bolte-Taylor said.

Ultimately, it becomes another lesson about living in the present moment and accepting and supporting the family member as they are right now, Bolte-Taylor said.

"We have the choice of

looking and saying this person is not the person they used to be," Bolte-Taylor said. "Or we have the choice of saying this person is beautiful just the way they are and we help them find their way."

Freedom from inner critic

As the stroke affected the left-hand side of her brain, the analytical side involved in both judging and criticizing, Bolte-Taylor attained freedom, albeit temporary, from her inner critic.

"Imagine what it would feel like to lose 37 years of emotional baggage," Bolte-Taylor said at TED 2008.

Bolte-Taylor's consciousness then shifted to the right side of her brain; the side associated with the present moment "right here, right now." In this state of consciousness, Bolte-Taylor experienced nirvana, she said.

And with this sense of peace came a profound realization, said Bolte-Taylor. By "choosing to step to the right of their left hemispheres" everyone can find nirvana, she said.

"I realized what a tremendous gift this experience would be to how we live our lives," Bolte-Taylor said. "And it motivated me to recover."

Bolte-Taylor's mission is

now "helping people realize that we are wired for the experience of peace." The key to this experience is finding a way to quiet the left hemisphere brain chatter and live fully in the present moment, she said.

"It is in the present moment where that sense of peace is," Bolte-Taylor said. "It is available constantly for all of us."

Now, Bolte-Taylor can access that state without having to go relive a stroke. She simply goes outside.

"I go to nature," Bolte-Taylor said. "I look at the leaves. I look at the movement of the leaves. I feel the breeze on my face. I feel the sunshine on my face. I smell. I take the smells in."

When she is in nature, Bolte-Taylor said, she connects with the present moment. Walking by the ocean she finds especially therapeutic, she said.

"You have all the sounds of the birds and the sea. It is so rich," Bolte-Taylor said, of her favorite activity. The residents of Monterey County have real advantage when it comes to this particular form of meditation, she said.

"I live in Indiana and I have to make it up in my mind," Bolte-Taylor said. "All you got to do is walk there."

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