

## Laura's Story

October 2005

"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get."

In 1991, I had flown from Florida to visit my mother here in Seattle, where she was on a travel contract with Swedish Hospital. After a very pleasant two weeks, we decided that it would be a nice place to live. I was having a very unpleasant time with my job where I was. Nothing was working to my advantage, and to make it worse I had just been bitten alive by fire ants, a factor of interest lately that associates a release of a substance from the bites as a chemical reaction affecting the brain.

So, I returned to Florida with the intentions of getting my personal belongings together and returning to Seattle. However, sleepy as I was for this very early flight, I took a nap and on landing for a layover, I awoke in Kansas City, but was feeling very groggy. When I tried to leave the seat, I realized I was not walking well and not speaking well. Since, passengers left the plane and new ones were boarding, there were no familiar faces I could approach with my alarm. But I guess I was noticeably in trouble when two flight attendants stopped me as I returned from the rest room, and asked, "Are you all right?". I said "Yes. Why do you ask?"

Can any of you who have had a stroke relate to this perception that something intermittent must be wrong, but I don't know what it is? Well, I didn't know what it was, either. No expectation and no warnings. I merely brushed it off as serious jet lag. The next thing I knew, I was in the hospital right there near the airport, as Kansas City had learned by experience to handle medical emergencies because of their mid-country location.

Not until the next morning at 2:00, in the intensive care unit, when I tried to get up and just fell flat on the floor was the seriousness of my condition evident, even to me! I was told later that was indeed when I suffered a massive stroke. June 10<sup>th</sup>, the same day that Harry Reasoner, the news anchor, did the same. He died several days later, my family reminded me. I was to feel lucky to be alive. But, my life changed dramatically, thereafter.

Whose stroke is this anyway??? I've been adjusting to this claim ever since. Why is it somewhere within me I am the same person I always was, but the connections I strive to maintain and new circuits to develop, leave me exhausted and continuously struggling to bring a new identity forward.

Fourteen years later, and in spite of a recent setback, I am no more surrendering who I am than I was willing to in the beginning. It takes a lot longer to meet the moment than it did before. I have some dreams, and I know in order to meet them, a different mechanism needs to be found. I learned recently that the power of intention, paired with a unique mechanism for 'getting there', yields the best results. Therefore, there are infinite ways to reach one's goals, the leave one's personal stamp on the canvas of life. How I discover the path to merge the wholeness of my being, is still to be experienced, I feel.

I was very fortunate to meet a young woman my age, Mary Jo, shortly after arriving back in Seattle and a few months after surviving the stroke ordeal. She told me about this support meeting that she was attending each month, and she urged me to consider it the next month. It is a funny thing that I did attend because of her invitation, but I never saw her again. These years, I have been 'a regular' for what has become of that first group. The companionship and support I have realized from these monthly meetings is immeasurable. Many of the faces remain present each month. So, there is a common bond we can rely upon. At the same time there are new people to get acquainted with, as it is in every community we recognize. I love sharing the light-heartedness and each other's stories. The guests, we often host, bring new information that helps to forge new ways of coping with the downside of this injury. But, I especially enjoy the summer picnics, potlucks and the holiday parties. I like to call my self a party kind of gal! And thanks to these special friends I have treasured through

the years, they are there to bear witness to my journey and I to theirs. (And to those who have read through these two 'paragraphs' with me, thanks for bearing up!)