

## 57 Neurological and cognitive dysfunctions

This chapter will deal with my neurological and cognitive experiences and challenges. It will deal with many of the difficulties I have slowly become aware of.

Shortly after arriving at the Holywell ward I saw a computer in the day room and was eager to use it. After a few days I was granted my request and it seemed that none of the other patients had much interest so I wheeled myself behind the key board. Sometime before my stroke I had created my own website which was [www.hofland.co.uk](http://www.hofland.co.uk) so the first thing I did was to check it out. Now this I thought would be easy and I typed in the address but it would tell me 'not found,' surely I can remember my own surname? I tried several times each with the same result. I asked Warren for help and he asked me why I was typing in more than 3 'w's. From then on it was easy and I had to slowly count aloud each 'w'.

My occupational therapist suggested I keep a computer dairy so that was started. I was and still am particular in my spelling and will normally perform a spell check. I noticed that I was making too many spelling mistakes using words with the wrong letters and on discussing this with my occupational therapist she called it 'left neglect' whereby I would look at a key but depress the one on its left instead of moving my finger more to the left than I ought. The secret to improving this challenge would be lots of practice and I am gradually overcoming this problem and in typing this previous sentence have only done it twice.

At times I find myself suddenly becoming extremely tired but after a very short rest or 'power nap' I feel fine again. I have got used to these frequent power naps but I try to minimize them to ensure I get a decent night's sleep. The best thing I find is to do something active when I start to feel tired.

I feel that my cognitive reasoning and response has also changed tremendously. In some things I am as quick as ever but with other things I have become a lot slower. I have not yet quite worked out in which areas I am slower in but I am getting a gradual understanding.

Although I had a reasonable concentration span in that I could sit for hours sorting my stamps or building miniature models for my train set, I now find it extremely difficult to concentrate on one thing, constantly jumping from activity to activity.

While at Laelia house I could not bear any noise and would easily be distracted. Even the passing of a small bird would distract me and so I preferred to work in complete silence. After a while this changed and I now have to have some background music.

In writing this book I often find myself repeating myself by saying the same thing twice on the same page or in different chapters.

Our brains are wonderfully created and have an amazing ability to adapt to changing circumstances. At first at Holywell my brain would no longer acknowledge that there was a left side to my body. As an example, prior to my stroke I was able to accurately judge the distance between two poles walking through them without coming into contact with either. In my wheelchair I would misjudge objects on my left and often bump into them especially door frames. I soon learnt to give left hand corners wider berth.

Fortunately my memory was not affected so when I tried to tackle a complex balance sheet I remembered I had done them previously but could no longer do them. This did not worry me as I just left the problem for a few days of thought until the techniques would come back as clear as daylight.

I seem to remember that I was able to add double digit numbers but cannot yet do them now but I know that with a little practice this ability will also return soon

I started going to weekly swimming session in the Westminster Lodge pool as part of a disabled swimming club when I discovered that although I could now lift both my leg and arm individually to a limited degree, I was unable to do so simultaneously. In order for me to do arm exercises I had to buy a set of ankle weights to keep feet firmly on the ground. I have at one stage also found it difficult to walk and talk at the same time and would stumble if someone talked to me. At first when walking it took me quite some time to get used to having someone walk on my left. I also like to know exactly where I am going as I struggle to change direction suddenly and prefer to plan my path ahead of time

On an outing to Portsmouth I had an interesting experience standing on a glass floor of the Spinnaker tower over 100m above the ground. In the army I got used to stepping out with my left leg first when marching or walking. As I stood before this glass floor looking down to the street below I found it impossible to step out with my left foot. Instead I had to take hold of a railing on my right and by sheer will power forced my left foot forward. Once on the glass my left foot immediately clawed up while my right foot was still perfectly relaxed. I have never been afraid of heights but somehow my left foot seemed to be afraid.

I was rather ambidextrous before my stroke and could do most things with either hand. Looking back to photos I notice that I would hold my then fiancé with my left arm and also eat an ice cream with my left hand. It comes at no surprise that when I yawn my paralyzed left arm starts to rise in an attempt to cover my mouth as if by natural instinct. In therefore do not try to suppress any yawn knowing that each time my arm is strengthened a little.

As time passed I got accustomed to doing everything with my right hand. My brain is forgetting to do things like pick up objects on my left with my left arm as I now immediately reach out with my right hand. This is called over compensation and if I am to regain full use of my left arm I need to unlearn this by starting to visualize my left arm to perform the task.

During my healing process I have gone through several stages. After wearing a Saebostretch splint which helped to keep my fingers and wrist straight and supple I experienced what I call a 'long arm sensation' whereby it would feel that my left arm is longer than it physically is and I would have to look to make sure it is not longer than my right arm.

During 2013 driving back from Cambridge I noticed that after a lengthy period of time of keeping my hand flat made me extremely tired and after a while my toes started to twitch and lift involuntary.

The brain is indeed a complex organ and has been wonderfully created. What man-made object has so many varied abilities? Praise God for creating us so wonderfully. This reminds me of Psalm 139 verse 14 *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*