

When the Words Don't Make Sense

Apraxia. Aphasia. A few months ago those words meant nothing to me. If I'd heard of them I certainly didn't know what they meant. Now I do. In layman's terms, it's when words don't make sense. There's a lot more to it than that of course, but that pretty much sums it up.

In July, at age 85, my mother suffered her third stroke in a little over 2 years. She recovered quickly from the first two. Recovering from the third has been much more challenging in large part because Mom has both Apraxia and Aphasia.

Here is the description of each from the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#)

Apraxia: "*Apraxia of speech* is a motor speech disorder. The messages from the brain to the mouth are disrupted, and the person cannot move his or her lips or tongue to the right place to say sounds correctly, even though the muscles are not weak."

Aphasia: "*Aphasia* is a communication disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that contain language. Aphasia may cause difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, but does not affect intelligence."

Imagine with me for a moment. You suffer a stroke with severe physical effects but eventually your body begins to repair itself. You finally leave your bed for a wheelchair. Before long you graduate from a wheelchair to using a Walker to move a few feet. Then you begin using a Wheel Rollator and can go up and down the hall as long as you have someone close to steady you if needed. You are healing.

Except...you can't talk. You can vocalize, make sounds. But they are sounds no one else can understand. In your mind they may be as clear as the rich sound of a church bell but to those around you, they are undecipherable gibberish.

And if that's not bad enough, you sometimes have trouble understanding others as they speak to you. You hear the individual words clearly, you just can't always make sense of them when they are strung together. A friend or family member's name is mentioned but you can't quite grasp who they are talking about until you are shown a picture.

You were a passionate reader but today the words on the page don't mean much to you. You once sent cards to friends and family with hand written notes and now you can't even write your name with the letters in the right order.

That's Apraxia. That's Aphasia. That's what my Mom lives with.



Jim Cates and his mother
before her stroke

But here's the thing I find amazing. She *does* live with it. I fear that if it happened to me, I would spiral into a depression so deep there wouldn't be a light bright enough to help me find my way back out.

But Mom lives with it. She may not like it. It may frustrate her. But she accepts it and she lives with it.

If you will bear with me I would like to make a small confession. My dad inspired me. He started with little and against great odds, became a successful farmer. There have been many times I wished I was more like him. My mother? Well, she was Mom. She was loving and caring and nurturing and understanding. All the things we expect mothers to be. But inspiring? I'm embarrassed to say I didn't really see her that way.

Now I do. Now, it's my Mom who inspires me.

In the past year Mom lost her husband of 63 years, suffered two strokes, had to leave her home to move to a skilled care facility and battled through weeks of therapy to get her body working again. She survived all of this...but still, she can't communicate with others.

Or can she?

Oh, yes! She can and she does. With love. And in doing so, she inspires me and those around her.

She communicates with a smile that lights up her face when we enter the room. She communicates with the little shrug and brief smile that says she knows that we can't understand her but she appreciates us trying. She communicates with hugs and kisses that somehow mean so much more than they did before. She communicates with her great grandchildren by letting them sit on her lap or by holding their hands and laughing with them. She communicates a loving kindness toward those who care for her, letting them know how much she appreciates what they do for her. She listens. She may not always understand but when you are speaking you have her full attention.

If I ever suffer a stroke or other illness that incapacitates me, I want to be like Mom. I want my children to hear from my caregivers how much they love having me there. Should I someday have great grandchildren that come to visit, I want them to say, as my little granddaughter Cora did when visiting Mom, "I love coming to this place." I want to find joy in the midst of tough times. I want to be able to take whatever life throws at me and believe that God is good and He can still use me to glorify Him.

But of course I don't have to wait for similar tragedy to strike me to emulate Mom. Today, right now, when the world around me doesn't quite make sense, I can be calm, peaceful, happy, patient, compassionate, kind, loving. I can be a steward of God's grace in its various forms.

Thank you Mom for setting an example of how it's done. Your words may not quite make sense but your heart sure does.

As always...May we serve with grace. 1 Peter 4:10

Jim Cates

www.GracePointSolutions.com