

Aphasia Insights!

December 2020
Volume 2, Issue 18
December 8, 2020

“Those actions which appear the most insignificant, if only they are constantly repeated, will form for us in the course of weeks or months or years an enormous total which is inscribed in organic memory in the form of ineradicable habits (pg. 209).”

The Education of the Will; The Theory and Practice of Self-Culture, (1914).

Jules Payot (1859-1939) was a leading French figure in lay education, pedagogy and philosophy.

Stroke Educator, Inc. is committed to educating the wider public about stroke and the 50 state *“Aim High for Aphasia!”* Aphasia Awareness Campaign.

Stroke Educator, Inc.
6 Aspen Drive
Brunswick, ME 04011
207-798-1449
tbroussa@comcast.net
www.strokeeducator.com

Aphasia Recovery & The Princess and the Pea: A Little Thing Can Make a Big Difference.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

I had my first stroke in 2011. I was an associate dean at the Heller School at Brandeis University when I fell down on Main Street in Waltham, MA. I had aphasia and could not read, write or speak well.

We moved to Florida nine months later and I spent several years practicing my language (keeping a diary, recording my voice, taking pictures, and reading with increasingly complex text) without knowing that my lifelong habitual activities were the key to my recovery.

Much of my pre-stroke success was based on my habit to keep track (and keep lists) of the world around me. After my stroke, these activities continued without any idea that what I was doing were highly therapeutic as well. I kept track with my calendar, my diary, my recordings and taking many pictures.

I thought I had a good memory before my stroke, but after my stroke I knew I was having memory problems. Thankfully my habit of keeping track began when I was young.

My dad kept a pocket calendar and used it every day. He urged me to use one too. He always said, “Keep written lists and you don’t have to remember so much!” He helped me with small things, like a pocket calendar, that grew into successful habits much bigger than I knew.

My dad also read many stories to me when I was young including tales by Hans Christian Andersen.

The fairy tales that I remembered most were “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” “The

Ugly Duckling” and “The Princess and the Pea.”

The morals of those stories (and others) were embedded within the collective consciousness of our country (and others around the world) with lessons of virtue and resilience in the face of adversity.

I never really knew about adversity until my dad died, the day after my 16th birthday. He was a great dad, and somehow, I knew he was still a great dad with useful lessons even



The Princess and the Pea,
Hans Christian Andersen (1835)

after he died. Over the years, I would search for my memories (of talks, trips, sports, books, and advice) with my dad.

I saved some of the physical parts of my dad's life too (his pocket calendars, a cast iron model of a Yellow cab taxi, and old books including his old book of Hans Christian Andersen tales.)

I haven't opened the book in a long time, but it still sits on my shelf with "*Hans Christian Andersen*" in gold gilt letters on the cover. But even without reading it, every time I saw dad's Hans Christian Andersen book it reminded me of the morals of the stories in current national & political life.

After my stroke (and as I got better), I studied those old memories looking for the headwaters of my first experiences that helped create who I was before.

I discovered that many of my post stroke habits often started with just a story, a conversation, or even a fairy tale like *The Princess and the Pea*.

Many of those habits started long before my stroke and framed my future without knowing what my future might need.

Insignificant habits can still be *felt* not unlike the pea in the Hans Christian Andersen story.

But it had nothing to do with the princess being overly sensitive. She didn't know that there was just a little pea under twenty mattresses and the twenty featherbeds.

In much the same way, I didn't know that these particular "peas" had been "planted" years before, and helped shape my future self.

It wasn't until later (during the process of recovery), when I became aware that those helpful habits had started years before.

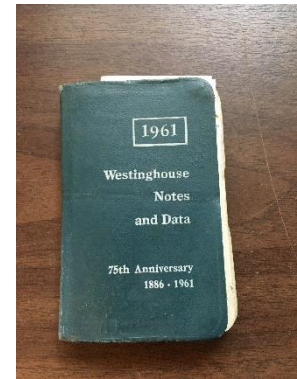
My pocket calendars (among others) were the Princess's pea. Each of those small and insignificant habits grew to produce the energy that was needed (experience dependent activities such as writing a diary, recording one's voice, reading out loud, taking pictures, games and so many others) to induce plasticity, learning and the resultant recovery through the lens of habit.

Post Script—I got better but how is it that I got better without any additional therapeutic interventions other than the few therapeutic hours provided by the speech industry and insurance? What else had been germinating in the therapeutic "black box" that created the power that was used to induce plasticity and recovery?

A new set of articles, starting in 2021, will focus on the yet-to-be uncovered therapeutic contents of the "black box" of aphasia recovery from the perspective of a person with aphasia (PWA).

Happy New Year!

Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness*



One of my Dad's pocket calendars (1961)



Some of my Navy pocket calendars (1976)