

# How I Climbed out of “The Black Hole”.

*by Phil Nossek 25.02.07*

## Part 1. Initial Shock ! Bewilderment, & Denial !

My name is Phil Nossek and I am 64 years of age. I suffered a stroke 4 years ago, it was a mild one I later discovered, but at the time I was in shock, I was bewildered, and I couldn't speak, and when it sunk in - **I then went into a state of Denial**, that is I didn't believe it, or I couldn't, and to an extent I refused to **accept** it I suppose. After all the examinations were over, the ultra sound tests, fMRI scans and the like - most of you have had them all, they told me I was aphasic, and “come back when we tell you” they said, and they gave me an appointment and an explanation, but that was all.

Those close to me, my wife and children saw the internal turmoil I was in, and offered good suggestions to help, but I believe that I refused to see reason, because in my disturbed mental state I thought it was **my** problem to solve, and **I was confused**, and I think that I wanted to do it my way. I later realised that the good, helpful thoughts had all come from my **wife and others**; I was just going along with the thoughts, thinking they were all my own thoughts. I suppose the reluctant acceptance had been distorted in my brain, by a feeling that was like “bowing” to my own “independence” . I guess that doesn't make too much sense to most people, and that was part of the problem. All these confused brain patterns were disturbing me severely, and there was no one to tell them to who had the faintest inkling of what I was talking about.

## Part 2. Determination to find out Why ! ... & do something about it.

Apart from the aphasia, I couldn't do mental arithmetic at all, and still have a bit of a problem with it. So, I was all set to work on my aphasia as best as I could. I made up my mind that I was not

going to be beaten by this stroke. I was going to embark on **A Journey of Discovery**. I investigated and I got some details of courses of the Adult Education Programme, from the University of Oxford, and I picked a course that seemed relevant to my needs called "**The Neuroscience of Human Senses**", and so I signed up for the course. **Now I was scared!** What did I know or **remember** about neuro -thing-amy-jig? Not much! It was a 10 week course, of 2 - 3 hours per lesson, in one evening per week, when I was tired from the day, and 3-hours was about the limit of my concentration - before my brain screamed "**enough, I'm tired & I want to sleep**".

### **Part 3. Neuro-Science of the Human Senses.**

Well, the tutor was very good, and after the second lesson or so, I began to understand much more of what she was saying and the lessons became enjoyable. ( after the 1<sup>st</sup>. lesson I understood nothing! ) I learned such a lot about the brain, its parts, how they're connected, stimulated, the Nervous System as a whole, **& what can go wrong with the Brain !**

I bought a textbook & began to study this too, picking out the bits that interested me on my quest: **Warnicke's aphasia, Broca's aphasia, the rightside & the left side of the brain, split-brain surgery and corpus callosum** etc. I asked lots of questions, and got lots of very, very complicated answers back! At the end of the course we had to write a short essay - or two, and abide by the University's rules, which I managed to do. All the time there was dialogue.....with other students,..... the tutor to me, .....me to the tutor ....and at the same time I was learning, and I was remembering more!! that was the main thing.

## Part 4. Re-learning my lost Computer Skills

I couldn't remember how to control the computer, or even how to start it. I knew what the mouse was, and the screen, but the rest? - it was as if someone had wiped it off from the "chalkboard" in my head. I had to learn it all again, from scratch. But, where do you start? My Local Authority helped; they had an arrangement with a nearby college where I could attend -when I wanted to, -at what time I wanted, -and how often I wanted, -in a Computer class - for **FREE !** Well I signed up for this, **as you can imagine !** I still remember to this day, walking round to the IT class, signing in virtually every day, sometimes for 1-hour, sometimes for 2-hours. There was a set book you could work your way through, and virtually all the questions you could think of were answered somewhere. You could always call over one of the supervisors if you were really stuck, and they would explain it in **another** way than the book; they were used to working with old folks, people with learning difficulties, & so on.

I relearned :

- **Word Processing**; letters, correspondence, documents.
- **Spreadsheets**; tables, calculations, manipulating figures and data.
- **WebWise**; all about the Web, the Internet, E-mailing, Clip Art etc...most of it re-learnt within less than a year.

That was, I think, one of the most useful things I learned in my **Journey to Discovery**. I wish they had taught me how to type.....I never did learn that, properly !!

## Part 5. Other Courses I Undertook

Along the way, I attended the following additional courses, as I had got used to and enjoyed my

journey into the “forgotten society” (its in inverted commas because I’m still trying to work who forgot who) The extra courses I took were:

1. **Architecture through the Ages**. I’d worked for a number of eminent architects and this was a refresher for me and a chance to re-aquaint myself with some old “friends” (buildings)
2. **English Folk Tunes**. I knew the tutor from business, but had lost contact with him. So when I spotted his name, I signed up for the course. It was a **real** laugh and I enjoyed it tremendously. He even gave us all a momento of the **Yettis** singing Ooh Ahh Ooh Ahh !!!!.....
3. **Astronomy + Astrophysics; “Exploring the Universe we Live In”**. I can only describe this as Amazing, .....amazing, .....and amazing again..! If you want a **big** hobby or a past-time, this is the one for you, **they don’t get any bigger!** The presentation material displayed on the course was wonderful with **beautiful** photographs from NASA, and The Hubble Telescope. The theories expounded were **mind boggling !**
4. **Beyond the Dreaming Spires**. Have you ever wondered what’s in that building with the Tower? I have ! This was a guided tour of the University of Oxford’s buildings with lots of insider knowledge of past events along the way. The Bodlean Library, The Radcliffe Camera, Queen’s College, Examination Schools, Magdalene College, New College and lots of other old friends featured. Again the lecturer was first class, as were the discussions, and we still all meet at monthly Lunch Club meetings. So you see I’ve met lots of people, enjoyed myself, became friendly with the new faces, and **improved my conversation skills**.

## **Part 6. My Message to you.**

Well, what have I learned from all that ? One thing I learned is you’ve got to **work** at it, and **worry** it, **it won’t come good on its own** unfortunately, but if you **try** you can probably, and possibly **will**

**talk again**, with some fluency. The human brain is such a complex and diverse thing; **no two strokes are the same - I'm convinced of that**, just as no two-of-us are the same. If you try, really try - then it can happen for you, as it seems to have happened for me, and others I know. There's a fair chance of it.....so **why not give it a try**.

Bless You All and , thank-you for listening.

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