

From Tragedy to Triumph: A Tribute to Occupational Therapists

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In April 2010, five days post-partum, I had an aortic dissection and underwent emergency open-heart surgery. I suffered two strokes that left me with a permanent, but minor, visual loss. During surgery, in order to work on the dissected vessels in a bloodless environment, I was placed on a heart-lung bypass machine. To preserve brain function, my body was cooled to 17 degrees. For a total of 87 minutes I had no brain or cardiac activity; a recipe for brain damage and essentially a near-death experience. When I awoke, I initially could not recognize my children's pictures hanging above my bed. I called my husband 'Daddy' in a little girl's voice. I could not dial the phone or read the clock. I didn't have the energy to dress or shower. Later on, I found that I had difficulty integrating the near-death experience from a psychological and spiritual perspective. There was a lot of work to be done.

An oddly exciting and life-altering journey followed. As an Occupational Therapist with a background in brain injury rehabilitation I was in an unusual position; I watched myself recover through the lens of both a patient and a healthcare professional. Things that never struck me as being particularly crucial in the performance of my job as an Occupational Therapist were suddenly thrust under a microscope for me to contemplate.

In my presentation I'd like to share my insights so that the audience might come to better understand the uniquely practical and very necessary contributions that Occupational Therapists make every day.