

# Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine

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Volume 7  
Issue 1 *General Issue*

Article 13

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2022

## Aphasia

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### Recommended Citation

Shoemaker, Corrie (2022) "Aphasia," *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 13.

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Aphasia  
By C. L. Shoemaker

"Aphasia? What is —"

"It's a common side effect," she says.

Is losing your ability to communicate,  
to speak what your brain screams but your mouth can't form,  
part of my everyday now?

Is dragging yourself through the mire of linguistics, a tailed trove of letters and phrases,  
common?

A tailed trove? That's not what I meant.

A trailed trove? A tracked trove? A tattered something? Tattered drove? Tainted ....

I can't even remember. Does it matter anymore?

Reaching for words that should be there but aren't.

Years of learning at école jumbled up with a lexicon of dialectic understanding.

Dialectic ... I know that word. What does it mean again?

Parabolic, paraphrase, prelapsarian, pronounce, parachute. They're there somewhere,  
someplace I have yet to find.

It's a strange spy game of guess the password with my own cortex.

Dialect, direct, derelict, lumbar?

"Are you in the medical field?"

"No. I just know these words from my past."

A past I'm desperately trying to recover, uncover, excavate like an Egyptian  
archeologist.

It's as if someone has played Bogo, no, Boggle with my cerebellum.

Years of learning put into the box and shook around. Isn't this fun!

It's your turn but everything is in the wrong place. Hurry up. The timer's going.

I reach for "communication" and pull out "communism". Not what I meant to say.

I apologize and try to patch my addle brain back together.

I've turned to synonyms to explain when my choice word has vaporized, like it was  
beamed up to another planet.

I want to say something, but the computer comes up blank.

A blinking cursor. A blinking curse.

In second place my brain proffers: reveal, disclose, surprise, uncover.

Hours later the search engine dings. "The word you were looking for was 'revelation'."

Thanks brain. Too little, too late.

At least I haven't inadvertently insulted someone yet.

I'm the queen on typos, er, of typos now and asking,

"Are you sure that's how it's spelt?"

Sometimes I make my friends laugh but I don't find it funny.

"Remember that character in Peanuts that made the Christmas speech."

"Which one?"

"The little guy, Dustbin," I proudly proclaim.

My friend is silent for a minute. "What?"

"You know Dustbin."

I can hear the wheels turning through the phone receiver. "Pig-Pen?" she asks in confusion.

"YES!" I declare. "That one."

She's killing herself with laughter.

Well, my brain wasn't completely wrong.

"Pig-Pen." "Dustbin." They're both connected to cleaning and dirt.

I feel strangely protective of my rattled brain.

"Hey. You knew what I meant," I huff, defending my grey matter.

"It's ok. You tried," I want to say, like I'm reassuring a puppy.

"Next time we'll do better."

Back at the hospital they put me through a gambit of test, like I'm a prized racehorse.

The tests are simple. List as many animals beginning with the letter R in one minute.

"Can you do that?" a saccharine voice drips in the testing room.

I grin back.

Any idiot can do that.

"And go."

The timer ticks away.

"Right, ok, um.

Rrr, rrr, rattlesnake wait, no, that's a reptile.

Rrr, red tailed hawk. Bird. Drat. Rhino, rrr, rrr.

I sound like an old car trying to start.

Razorback. I don't even know what that is. Is that an animal?

Rrr, rrr, rrrr.

"Time's up. Well, you did your best," she notes with a smile.

"Thanks," I reply. I don't mean it.

I've just been presented with the consolation prize at the soap box derby or a participation ribbon from the church picnic's three-legged race. No kid wants the consolation prize.

I feel like an idiot.

If my university degree was hanging on the wall right now, I'm sure it would be mocking me.

For once I'm glad it's in storage.

The flip book is somewhat easier.

"Identify the images you see."

"Pen, tree, lamb, house, settee, mirror, rake."

Now I'm going at my regular speed.

Ha, ha! See. I can do this game that seems to have been invented for infants.

Congrats to me but I celebrate too early.

There's a problem.

I'm staring at an image I don't know the word for, that is to say, I never knew the word for it.

"I don't know," I stumble awkwardly like a dunce. "I mean I never knew... never knew the thing in the picture. The Chinese counting math thingy with the beads."

Great. Now I'm describing it like an idiot.

"I went to school," I want to scream. I have a degree. I can throw down vocabulary with the best of you, I just can't find the right word amid the boggle game in my head.

Somehow, I'm sure she'll tell me the only game in my head is marbles and I've lost mine.

My next favourite game is "Guess the sentence." Everyone wants to play it, especially when I look confused or I stumble with my sentences.

I'm not up on the recent scientific studies

But I'm fairly certain we haven't discovered how to read minds.

So, stop trying to read mine!

And don't put words in my mouth.

No one likes being spoken for when they have their own voice.

It's why women wanted the vote

and feminists, refugees, and disabled persons hate being spoken for and guess what?

I do too.

I have my own voice. It just takes me a while to compose it.

And while I filter 95% of my concentration into that task, shut up so I can think.

I write letters and my words come out looking different.

Grag, Yrag, dray, drag.

Drag. That's what I wanted to write.

Upon receiving a gift of red rose ChapStick. I smile and declare. "Oh, I rove lowes".

My brain stuttered to a halt. The backup lights go on. Beep, beep, beep. Error.

Cut. Reset scene 5. Take 2.

"Uh, I love rose," I stutter out awkwardly. "Thank you. It's nice. Um, thanks."

Thanks. Welcome to my world of aphasia. My frustrating world of miscommunication.

Missing communication. Of forgetting so much. And remembering the wrong phrases.

Of searching for words among a scrabble bag of terms and definitions.

Still ... thanks.

Thanks that I can search. That even when I pick out "comatose" it's close enough to "tired" that my dad understands me.

I'm re-learning an old language.

He's learning a new one.

Together we'll figure out how to communicate and, in the meantime, stop finishing my sentences for me.

I can speak for myself.