



Endless Journey – A Head-trauma Victim’s Remarkable Rehabilitation

Dr. Janet A. Stumbo. OEPE, Santa Ana, CA. 196 pages. ISBN 0-943299-26-1

Reviewed by Janice M. McMahon, OD; Illinois College of Optometry; Chicago, Illinois

Dr. Janet Stumbo was a veterinarian in Australia when she was involved in a car accident that resulted in traumatic brain injury. This book is her account of life after a catastrophic event.

Beginning with the preface in this second edition, the reader is able to gain a sense of how long, grueling, and ultimately rewarding her recovery process has been. Dr. Stumbo speaks of the anger that was pervasive in the first edition and how, in the eight years since that time, she has learned to better accept her life and has discovered new possibilities and hope in her future. Turn one page and immediately encounter excerpts from the police accident report and the neurosurgeon’s report, a technique that is used throughout the book as a means of detailing the objective and clinical findings that correspond to the author’s memory and journey. Initially these various reports paint a bleak and formidable picture, but as the years (and story) progress, we gain a sense of how far the author has come in her recovery when contrasted with the content of these medical reports.

Dr. Stumbo’s severe head injuries resulted in immediate brain damage, amnesia of the traumatic event, permanent short term memory impairment, debilitating headaches, and loss of vision and visual field, among many other diagnoses. Her struggles with

memory loss and the frustration of dealing with not remembering people, places, and events are written with striking forcefulness and leave a particularly strong impression on the reader. Perhaps because of this memory loss, some portions of the book do read somewhat disjointedly. I also found notes at the end of each chapter distracting. Too smooth a writing style, however, would actually belie the difficulties and struggles which have been numerous in her recovery, and the written cadence is an ongoing reminder of the reality of her situation.

Many medical specialties play roles in addressing the needs of patients with traumatic brain injury. Dr. Stumbo includes notes from neurosurgeons, ophthalmologists, radiologists, dental surgeons, chiropractors, speech pathologists, psychiatrists, and other physicians who treated or assessed her condition. She also details how optometry, in particular behavioral optometry and optometric vision therapy, allowed her to regain not only better vision, but an increased ability to track the written word and regain binocularity. These visual skills formed a foundation upon which she was better able to learn and master new information. She also notes how decisively vital a role optometric vision therapy played in her overall recovery.

Endless Journey is a raw, emotional foray into the recovery process of a patient with traumatic brain injury. It brings to the forefront the incredible struggles with everyday tasks and the depression and grief faced by people whose lives have instantly and involuntarily been thrown into upheaval. Dr. Stumbo has gradually rebuilt a life after her accident; hopefully her journey will educate and aid those who read it.

