

# Healing Into Possibility

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The transformational lessons of a stroke--  
and how they can help you face your challenges.

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### Making Shapes

I used to "think" my life was an effort of my mind alone.

My friend and teacher, Stanley Keleman, taught me a lot about making shapes. Formative psychology he calls it - shaping a life.

I used to "think" my life was an effort of my mind alone. That's quite a funny illusion - a life without a body. Did I "think" I was a disembodied cortex?

A lump of brain cells running around - and just how would I accomplish this? The images are hilarious.

I am a life shaping itself, an animate sculpture through time, in constant motion, ceaselessly changing. This understanding gives me a whole lot more to work with than focusing only on my brain cells. I can use all of me to influence the way my life unfolds.

When I met Stanley I had spent years ignoring the dialogues going on within me. I had worked quite hard to become unaware of anything but the noise of my mind. It was a heroic effort because, in fact, the messages my body was sending me were getting louder and louder and I kept wondering why I could not seem to make any headway in creating a satisfying life. Nobody ever said I wasn't stubborn.

Stanley taught me that I can listen to those dialogues and voluntarily influence the shapes I make in my day-to-day existence - how the whole of me responds to what happens to me, moment to moment. Do I collapse? Do I overwhelm? Do I get rigid? All those responses and many more can become choices. If I physically collapse (pull my shoulders in, tuck my chin down, lower my eyes) the words in my mind will match - "helpless", "just give up", "I can't do anything anyway". There is a conversation going on between my mind and my stance - literally the shape I am making in and with my life. And I can learn to listen and participate and make choices about the stances I take - about the shapes I make with the whole of me.

Getting in touch with the dialogue required exaggerating whatever shape I was making. If I was collapsed, Stanley taught me to tense up that collapsed

position so I would really feel what it was like and then very gradually, in stages, relax the position and start to make a new shape. Because I had worked so amazingly hard to ignore the shouting of my body, it was necessary for me to do this a lot of times before the messages began to be heard. But eventually I started to listen.

I am an artist, a painter. You'd think I would have realized that all expression comes in a shape of some kind but I didn't. I was stuck in my mental image of what my life was like. This understanding about working with the shapes of our lives becomes all the more vital and obvious when we are faced with a major debilitating illness. When I could not easily make as many shapes as I once had made, Stanley's teaching came home to me loud and clear. I got a focused lesson in discovering that, just like in art, the satisfaction in living comes from the making, not the shape.

Artists don't generally paint because we want to have a pile of pictures. The pile of pictures often becomes a nuisance. We paint because we love painting and making shapes. The same is true of forming a life. The satisfaction comes in the voluntary effort of the making.

What does this give me? It gives me choices. I can choose how I am going to respond to a situation. I have created a bigger, more voluntary repertoire of responses. I always have choices about the shapes I am making with my life. The more I learn how to access those choices, the more satisfying my life can be no matter what life brings me.