



Julia Fox Garrison

Don't Leave Me This Way
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Q: *Don't Leave Me This Way* will be of great inspiration and help to everyone to reads it. Has writing it been a help to you too?

A: Many people ask me if I wrote my book for cathartic reasons. The answer is a resounding NO. I was okay because I had a rock of a husband, a son who inspired me to do more, a family who was consistently there for me, and a network of friends who provided regular belly laughs.

But I knew I had a lot to say that would be a help to many. In the aftermath of my stroke, dealing with the medical community and insurance companies, and trying to rehabilitate myself so that I could do even the simplest of tasks I used to take for granted, I sensed that I had a story to tell. It seemed that my experience was a blueprint for how not to let the system dictate the direction, pace, and objectives of your recovery.

My book is not just for stroke survivors and their families, but for people from all walks of life. People with health issues. People with stress in their lives. People who are depressed or overwhelmed or challenged. In other words, all of us. The message is clear: you hold the key to overcoming the obstacles put before you. Humor, positive attitude, and inner strength will help you prevail.

Q: Are you a different person now than you were before this crisis?

A: I don't think any person could go through such a devastating injury without changing. I used to think I was destined to pursue a career, climbing the corporate ladder, while being a dedicated mother and wife. But through my injury I have come to realize my true purpose is to be a Messenger of Hope to those facing adversity. To show by example how you can persevere with a positive attitude, a sense of humor, and an unbending belief in yourself.

I try to convey this in the book, which starts out in the third person because I want the reader to observe my daily routine. In the first chapter I'm thanking God for all the obvious blessings—home, family, job. Once the hemorrhagic stroke occurs, I end the chapter 'she's gone', and shift to second person so that the reader feels as though she's on the gurney with me. I then switch to the first person for the last few chapters to reflect on how much I've learned on my journey back. I now take nothing for granted and am thankful for what I have and for what I do, especially those things you might not even think about, like my face being symmetrical again, that I can feed and dress myself, and go to the bathroom without assistance.

Q: During your struggle to recovery, and to find an accurate diagnosis, your strength and determination seem boundless. This is rare. How did you manage not to give in to what your doctors were telling you?

A: The key ingredient for me was to be true to myself and to trust my inner voice (it is unsparingly honest). I had been told that I would die a horrific death if I did not follow the life-time treatment plan of chemotherapy for a disease that I knew I didn't have (courtesy of Dr. Jerk). I may not have a medical degree, but who knows my body better than I. Why should this font of knowledge be ignored?

I was told I was in denial, but there's a fine line between denial and determination. I was determined to get better despite what they were telling me, and so I pushed back with a vengeance.

Q: In what ways did this experience challenge, change, or strengthen your marriage?

A: Here's one anecdote I always share. In the aftermath of my injury, I was on industrial strength doses of steroids that caused severe mood swings. One minute, I'd be lovingly thankful and in a split second turn into a wild banshee. I often joke, 'If a marriage can survive Prednisone, it's solid!' A crisis can make or break a marriage. Thankfully, it made mine strong as steel. At a certain point in my recovery, I made a conscious decision that my injury was not going to drive our lives or marriage. I wanted Jim to be married to me because he was happy—not because he was stuck as a caregiver.

My husband has become my left half, the side that doesn't work. He is the smile on my face that lets me be me. He is my rock and I'm his hard place.

Q: Were you a writer before your crisis? Will you continue to write?

A: No. Nor did I harbor any desire to be one. In fact, what I wanted was for someone who had written a book to dedicate it to me. That, I thought, would really be special.

Currently, I have been writing speeches and other materials that I present at my speaking engagements. And yes, I do plan on writing another book, a memoir of growing up with eight brothers and no sisters. I find that I can only write about what is familiar to me, and it must be something that has comedic elements. And with the dynamics at play in my family, believe me, I have a treasure trove.