

 Aphasia Resource Center
BOOK CLUB

How to Conquer the World with One Hand...and an Attitude
by Paul Berger
Chapter Summaries for Week 1

Week 1 Assignment: Prologue & Chapters 1-3
Audio on iTunes: Tracks 4-7

Prologue

Throughout the book, the narrator is Paul Berger, a man who survived a stroke at the age of 36 years old. This book is about his stroke, his recovery and how he lives with aphasia.

Chapter 1: The Explosion in My Head

Setting: Paul's gym and two hospitals

Paul begins the story by describing the initial symptoms of his stroke (a horrible headache and dizziness). Paul is at the gym and the staff call an ambulance. He is immediately taken to a local hospital. A CT scan shows that he had a ruptured aneurysm. Though he is confused, Paul can talk to his wife, Stephanie, and his doctor (Dr. Lanman). Paul is sent to radiology for an angiogram but the neurosurgeon cannot determine the location of the aneurysm. Paul and his wife are uneasy about the local hospital, and request to be transferred to a better hospital.

At the university hospital, Paul gets a second angiogram. Surgery is scheduled for a few days later. The doctor will not allow Paul to watch television or get out of bed, but Paul begs the nurse to let him to go to the bathroom. This activity makes the bleeding (of the burst aneurysm) worse.

Chapter 2: Lost in Space

Setting: the ICU in the hospital

Paul's brain surgery is more complicated because of the new bleeding that resulted from his trip to the bathroom. Many of his friends and family visit him in the hospital. His doctor tells his family that Paul has

had a massive stroke and may not live. Paul also catches pneumonia because he cannot safely swallow food or liquids. The doctors give him a feeding tube through his nose.

When Paul wakes up from the surgery, he cannot speak at all and has a difficult time understanding other people. He wants to speak, but he is unable to so he just gives a thumbs-up sign or tries to gesture. This is extremely frustrating because he has so many thoughts he wants to share.

Paul's father-in-law, Joe, comes to visit every day at lunchtime. Joe's office is a few blocks from the hospital. Paul is very interested in the space program and watches the Challenger space shuttle launch with Joe during one of his visits. They are both devastated when they learn that the Challenger explodes in mid-air. Paul likens the Challenger explosion to what has just happened in his own life: "*My life exploded in an instant, too.*"

Chapter 3: Finding My Voice

Setting: the hospital

Paul begins to get better. He passes his swallowing test and he can begin to eat on his own. This becomes his favorite activity in the hospital, even though the food does not taste good.

He also starts rehabilitative therapy. The speech therapist asks Paul to point to various pictures—he has a hard time focusing and understanding her. He is very frustrated that he cannot tell people what he is thinking. He continues to give the thumbs up sign and gesture. One time, he is very frustrated because he cannot tell his wife Stephanie how to move the pillow under his leg. When she finally understands him, she moves the pillows but accidentally hurts his leg. He yells "ow!" This is the first time he speaks since his stroke. Stephanie and the nurse are very excited. They tickle him and Paul makes other sounds.

He also explains their frustration about working with their insurance company (an HMO) and how this threatens to prevent him from receiving therapy.