

As the paramedics were putting me into the ambulance, I looked out through the back door. The world was suddenly a jigsaw puzzle, with some of the pieces in the wrong places. For instance, the female paramedic's face was where her left knee should be. It was a disturbing sight, so I comforted myself by closing my eyes. The paramedics began asking me questions. I understood them perfectly but answering was suddenly difficult. They fired questions at me like bullets. "Can you hear me?" "What day is it?" "How are you feeling now?" "Who is the president of the United States?"

If the answer was more than two words long, I shook my head, "No." Suddenly, it was too much effort to say more than a few words. When they asked questions with short answers, I would decide to answer, but it was excruciating. First, I had to dredge my mind for the correct words. "Yes," became a 100-pound weight that I had to force my brain to lift, then push down to my mouth and coerce through my lips.

After a few moments of short answers that I thought I was managing, the paramedics told me they couldn't understand me. I listened as I tried to ask, "Why not?" and realized everything I said came out, "Mmmuuuu mmmmmuuuuu mmmuuuu."

They began talking amongst themselves, as if I weren't even there. I understood every word they spoke, asking one another's opinion of what was wrong with this woman in their care. One 92

even pulled out a book and started looking up things as they were mentioned—I could hear him flipping pages.

Meanwhile, inside my body that would not cooperate with anything I told it to do (or not do), I finally realized what was happening, and I was silently screaming, “I’M HAVING A FUCKING STROKE!!!!” I became incredibly agitated, wanting to let them know they needed to get me to the hospital, get me the magical medicine that fixes strokes—do *something* you do when people are having a stroke.

Then a thought came to me—the more panicked I got, the more I would hurt myself. I sat back with my eyes closed and began to meditate. “*I’m just surviving this moment,*” was the mantra that came to me instantly. I didn’t start the internal chant consciously, but I realized it had started echoing through my mind as I lay on the floor in the massage room. As I repeated it over and over, I knew I would be alright. I had used mantra in meditation sometimes, or when I ran (“One foot in front of the other,” got me through a lot of long runs). But it had never occurred to me that a mantra could save my life.