

# Fast Mind, Broken Processing

## struggling with a creative brain after stroke

A lived stroke experience story by Ruben from Rotterdam, The Netherlands

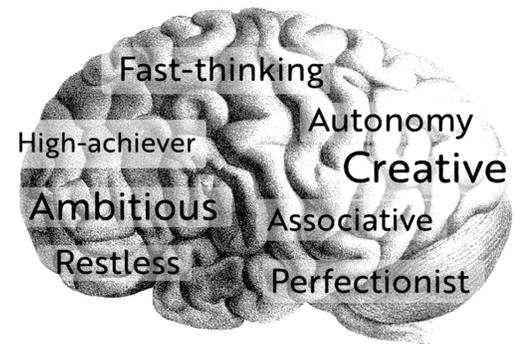
After a stroke at 32, the very characteristics that defined me - **creativity, fast thinking, and high-achiever** - became my biggest challenge. Finding a new purpose in life proved essential to navigating this mismatch and regaining fulfillment.

Before

### Before stroke I thrived on my busy and creative brain

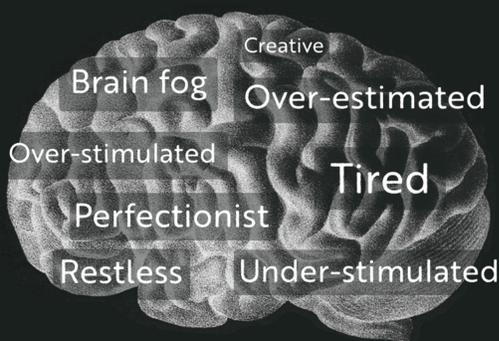
Until 2018 I worked as a creative director and university teacher. I had a rich social life, loved concerts, traveled frequently, and had a young family with two children. I've always been an associative thinker, full of ideas. My busy brain was wired for fast thinking, I could quickly connect ideas, switch contexts effortlessly, and tackle demanding projects with enthusiasm.

After a stroke my information processing and sustained attention was severely impaired. After recovery from aphasia I was forced to stop working. My family life, social connections and hobbies became very limited.



After

### After stroke my strengths became my obstacles



Occupational therapy taught me to take breaks and reduce effort, but didn't account for my brain continuing to seek opportunities and make plans. Even during "restful" activities like folding laundry, I'd get app ideas. My brain would ignite with enthusiasm and exhaust itself.

With damaged processing, this high-achieving mindset caused energy drain. The perfectionism that once served me well now worked against me. Coping with cognitive overload, I increasingly avoided activities, unsure how to spend days without overloading.

My restless, creative brain became a challenge instead of a strength. **I was in constant battle with both over- and under-stimulation.**

*"Getting overloaded while folding laundry, because I would get ideas to build an app"*

*"Processing both my surroundings and what's being said, once effortless, now exhausting"*

*"Still wanting to do minor tasks perfectly, wasting precious energy"*

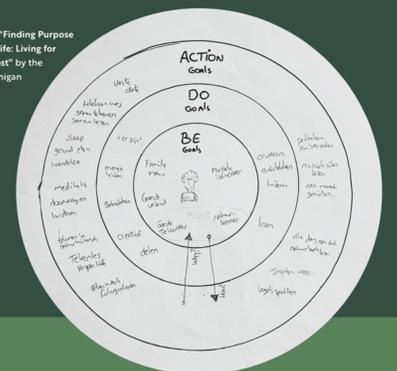
Change

### Understanding the mismatch was essential for my recovery

Four years post-stroke, with hospital support, I learned to build energy, stretch my limits and escape isolation. This helped me do more, but didn't bring fulfillment.

I realized my characteristics needed a place in my new life too, an outlet for my creativity, perfectionism and high standards. Understanding my brain's characteristics and the **mismatch** after stroke helped me find healthier balance. Simply filling my day "okay" wasn't enough. I needed a purpose in life.

From the course "Finding Purpose and Meaning In Life: Living for What Matters Most" by the University of Michigan

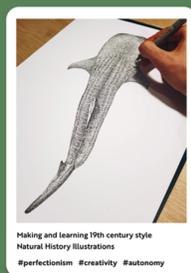
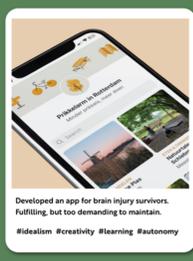


### Finding purpose helped me to find a better balance

I followed an online course on finding purpose in life. By focusing on what I wanted to be, I could define what I wanted to do, and what my actions would be. Defining a clear purpose proved essential: focusing my limited energy on what truly mattered achieved better balance, improved mood, and social reconnection.

*"Drawing, writing, reading, listening - curious as a 19th-century naturalist. To discover what deserves attention."*

Finding purpose



It remains a journey filled with frustrations and serious, often invisible, limitations. But: understanding my brain's characteristics and the mismatch after stroke helped me find healthier balance between over- and under-stimulation. I regained the feeling of being who I wanted to be, which is positive for my family. Spending time meaningfully gives me peace with resting.

Recommendations

### Recognizing characteristics can help high-achieving stroke survivors

#### For Researchers:

Characteristics of giftedness such as creativity, motivation, associative thinking, perfectionism and high sensitivity, can complicate stroke recovery. More research is needed to develop targeted interventions.

#### For Occupational Therapists:

These characteristics need tailored approaches to manage over- and under-stimulation. Standard rest protocols may not account for minds that continue seeking opportunities during "rest" activities. Consider the whole person, including pre-stroke cognitive patterns and motivation.

#### For Stroke Survivors:

Defining a new purpose in life, one that honors your fundamental characteristics while respecting your new limitations, can help achieve balance and fulfillment. It's not about filling time "adequately," but about living meaningfully within your new reality.

Questions? Feel free to contact me at: [liferafterstroke@pm.me](mailto:liferafterstroke@pm.me)