

The Man with the Seven Second Memory

Clive Wearing, one of the worst cases of amnesia in the world couldn't remember anything longer than 7 sec (this short-term memory of him may last up to 30 sec as well). This happened due to brain damage by a Herpes Simplex or Cold Sore Virus destroying his hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for transitioning short-term memory to long-term memory, however, his ability to play music remains intact. The way we can ride a vehicle without remembering how Clive can play music the same way because that capability wasn't destroyed by the virus. One hypothesis could be that the part of his brain involved in conscious and voluntary actions such as decision making, generic cognitive functions was destroyed but the unconscious or involuntary part was still intact, and his music capabilities were hardcoded in the unconscious part due to years-long of playing, similar to how we learn playing outdoor games, riding vehicles, reflex actions, etc. which are more or less governed by the involuntary or unconscious mind. Clive's wife visits him once a month, he knows her and how she looks like because some of those memories were formed before the damage, but he can't remember much of the moments with her, but feels like heaven whenever she visits as he describes, Clive doesn't feel her absence when she's not there as he didn't remember the moments when she isn't there, he says he was unconscious hence no feelings for her absence. To Clive being unconscious is the same as death, no thoughts at all. Clive even developed auditory hallucinations after the illness. Clive was a very passionate conductor before his illness, after which the virus crossed the blood-brain barrier of his nervous system entering the neuron's fluid system thereby damaging them. He was given the drug acyclovir which saved his life but couldn't retain his brain damage. Clive remembers some things like remembers working with BBC but not the play, he knows who he's married to but doesn't remember the wedding, he can even remember phone numbers and vehicle numbers that were embedded in his memory before his illness. Deborah had taken care of him since the illness started. At times, his son from his first wife and his sister would visit him, and an hour later after they left, if you'd ask him who he met, he wouldn't remember anything. A documentary was made on him in 1986 called "Prisoners of Consciousness" and in 2005 with the title "The Man with the 7 Second Memory".