

Seizures – brain sparks of creative genius?

Einstein... Socrates... Tennyson... Sandy Ross? I recall a childhood song, 'one of these things is not like the others'. Yet, however far apart these minds may be, there is a common thread – seizure disorders.

Thankfully, I've had but a few seizures over 30 years, so the impact's minimal, highly manageable (no drugs, my choice), and nothing compared to many who suffer daily – or fatally, as was the rare case in Jett Travolta's tragic death. In fact, the infrequency of mine is why I'd not made much mention. It's seldom on my radar. Then, I heard of Epilepsy Awareness Month (please [wear purple](#); [March 26](#)). I figured, I can help. After all, I am a communicator, and it does touch my life.

Like, no driving. No swimming alone. No baths (bathe, yes – showers). I won't bathe a baby in a tub, climb to put flower pots in high-rise balcony spots, or ride a bike on roadways. OK, that one's laziness, but might I play off your sympathy? No need, I'll play off something else – the upside – a connection between **epilepsy and genius**.

First, know that any suggestion of a silver lining does not make light of the condition. It's just that humour is a merciful messenger. So, humour me and consider a positive. Walk a smile in my shoes.

Seems science is intrigued by the great thinkers and artistes who've had seizures. It even theorizes a link. And without so much as my toe dipped in the literati's gene pool, I delude that, in sharing the condition, I'm practically descendant from wordsmiths Dickens, Byron, Poe, Lewis Carroll. Sure, the last guy indulged in a lot of extracurricular 'chemical support', so who really knows which came first in his love affair with the alphabet – MRI, or LSD?

Speaking of MRIs, we do have better **therapy** now. Poor Tennyson was 'treated' by having to drink large amounts, be submersed in cold baths, and walk long distances in bad weather. Sounds like every holiday I've had in England. Now, if we can just ease up on the stigma, we'll have made real progress. Did you know lavender (associated with isolation), is the colour for epilepsy? Bracelets say, 'Out of the Shadows'. Wow, glad awareness gets a whole month.

So, reality. What can **seizures look like**? Disturbing to see, I'm told (which likely doesn't help any stigma). My few were mainly nocturnal. Then my Mum witnessed one that wasn't. My face "screwed up like a monster" (only a mother could love). The body may go rigid, shake, but is typically fine if in a safe position. I went V-shaped, limbs stiff in the air with just my bottom on the floor. Bonus, minute-long stomach crunches! Check off another perk for this mouse potato (the computer version of a couch potato). Hey, if shakes and rattles firm my rolls, they count as exercise. Also, of benefit to others, I've chewed my tongue all to hell, keeping me uncharacteristically silent for days. Of embarrassment I'd rather avoid, I read that wetting oneself is a possibility. Look, I'm 50, so that's likely just from a good laugh... Next!

"Temporary bursts of **electrical activity** in the brain". Geez, when you put it like that, it's exciting, Star Trekky. Which brings us back to the brilliance factor. Yes, it may be coincidence or, given the brain's such an interconnected fascination, maybe not. Psychiatrist, Dr. David Bear feels temporal lobe epilepsy "can play a role in creative thinking by uniting sensitivity, insight, and sustained critical attention". I say go with that. As Trek's Mr. Spock deadpans, most logical. So, I try to embrace any episode, ups and downs, and appreciate my gifts and inspirations. Sure, it's no slogan tag line, but I like that my clients can benefit from a creative sensibility that's not just strategic – it's electric! ❖

"One of the best messages about seizures I've ever read! [14 years as EEG tech. (then) Exec. Dir. of Epilepsy Midwest]. Brilliant... sure it'll be widely distributed." ❖ "Thanks for insights and humour on this. I laughed a lot and am now wearing purple." ❖ "I laughed and cried a bit as I read. Thanks for sharing. Truly appreciated." ❖ "A great read. Quite insightful and humorous. Thank you for being so open... people lead capable and successful lives with epilepsy." /CB, Epilepsy Support Centre

Tips **Epilepsy Awareness Month — March**

- ❖ a seizure usually lasts just 1-2 minutes and typically does not require medical aid – but seek it if it lasts five minutes or more, or if it recurs soon thereafter
- ❖ don't put anything in the mouth of a seizing person
- ❖ ease him/her into a safe position, but don't restrain
- ❖ don't panic if a little blood is at the mouth; the tongue (it can't be swallowed) was likely chewed
- ❖ after s/he relaxes, tilt head to side (saliva, choking)
- ❖ speak reassuringly – s/he may be 'foggy' for a half hour or so, then may wish to go rest (which is fine)

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