

By SUSAN J. SMITH
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At 60-years-old, Megan Timothy is rediscovering life.

Braving the high winds and extreme climate changes, she is making her way through New Mexico as she travels around the United States on a bicycle.

On Monday, she stopped in Artesia.

However, her journey didn't begin this spring as she left her home in Southern California. It began two years ago when she suffered a brain bleed from and arteriovenous malformation which caused her to lose all ability to speak, write or read.

After months of recovery, many of them spent in a place for mental patients, Timothy regained some of her ability to speak and relearned everything about reading and writing. Although she still struggles with words, she has written a book titled "Let Me Die Laughing."

She said that along with the publication of her book, she decided to make the trip around the U.S. as a way of rediscovery and promoting literacy.

"I knew it was a problem for people who are illiterate, but I didn't understand it until I was struck with it," she said.

Before her brain bleed, or "brain explosion" as she calls it, Timothy led a life of adventure. Cycling through Europe, rafting through the Mississippi, acting and singing professionally, she lived her life to the fullest.

On Sept. 2, 2003 everything changed, leaving Timothy without a way to support herself or even communicate with the world around her.

"I'm a writer. I've been in theater. I used my voice to make a living," she said.

Not being able to communicate was like living in solitary confinement within her own mind she said. "It was like a one-way window. I could see out but no one could see inside," she said.

Yet, even with her limitations, she said it was laughter that kept her going. "The one thing you must not lose in times of crisis is laughter," she said, recounting how her friends would laugh with her as she struggled to find a simple word such as "door."

With her zest for living, Timothy decided to accept her condition as another journey in life.

"This journey with the broken mind has been extraordinary for me. It has been one of the greatest I've been on. It isn't one I would have chosen, but when you are given something you can't just sit back and complain.

"With this journey of coming back into the word, I'm a better person I think — a lot more compassionate and understanding," she said.

One of the biggest revelations for Timothy was that she must accept help, which wasn't easy for her.

"You have to learn to have the grace to accept help," she said.

Gradually, as the words were repeated, she learned to talk. "Repetition is just incredible, but that is what gets it back," she said.

The next obstacle for Timothy was reading and writing.

When she finally understood that her brain would not work properly, her determination increased to regain herself. "I thought, if it's broken, we must fix it. I told my friend,

give me some books — but I couldn't read," she said.

Instead of books, Timothy started with the 26 letters of the alphabet. Once that was mastered, she had to learn the sounds each made and how blends were put together.

Today, she can read, but it is very slow and there are still times she struggles to find the simplest words. But her life could not be better she said. She is currently working on a second book chronicling her journey through the United States.

She said that although the trip began as a way to prove to herself she was a whole and complete person, what she has discovered is that she is only beginning to find herself.

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