

Open Forum 1

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 4

A = Student 1

B = Student 2

A: Hi! are you busy?

B: No, I just finished watching this really interesting documentary on TV about a guy named Clive Wearing. He's a man from England with terrible amnesia.

A: You mean he forgets things?

B: Right. He lost his memory. He had encephalitis—this virus that destroyed the part of his brain that controls memory. It happened over 20 years ago. Since then, he can't remember anything further back than about 7 seconds.

A: Really?! He can only remember things for seven seconds? Does he know his name?

B: Yeah, He knows his name and he knows who his wife, Deborah, is. I think he knows that he has kids from his first marriage, but he doesn't recognize them or know their names. He lives at a center for people with brain injuries. It was really amazing, though. He has signs around his room reminding him where he is. And he can't really leave the center because he might get lost or hurt. He has to have someone to care for him all the time.

A: That's so strange, and it's so sad too. Does he know what happened to him?

B: Kind of. He knows that he was sick, but to him—since his memory pretty much erases every seven seconds—every moment feels like his first moment following the illness. So, like, he wakes up in the morning and is excited to be alive. He writes in his journal: "7:30, I'm awake for the first time." Then a few minutes later, he has forgotten his previous waking and now has a new feeling of being awake. So he crosses out the earlier sentence and writes something like, "7:38, hooray! I'm really awake now." And then he'll cross that out and write, "7:45, now is when I'm truly awake." And over and over.

In this program, he saw the cameraman and the producer and said, "You're the first people I've seen in 20 years." And then his wife came in and he was excited because he thought he hadn't seen her in 20 years either. They hugged and kissed as if it was a 20 year reunion. But really, she'd been there just a few minutes before.

A: Wow. That's crazy! I can't even imagine what that must be like for her.

B: Well, she was only in her 20s when he got sick. They'd just been married for around a year! I would've thought that she'd leave him, but actually they're still very close.

A: That's amazing that they are still together. I don't know if I would be able to do that.

B: I think she spent a lot of time with him for the first 10 years or so. She organized charities and tried to get good treatment for him. Once she got him into the new center, she decided she had to move on. She moved to the U.S. and got divorced from him. I think she dated other people but she was never able to get Clive out of her head. I guess she finally accepted how much she loves him and how she can't be with him and can't be away from him either. She moved back to England. A few years ago they got married again. Now she visits him all the time. He always asks when she's coming and asks her to "Please get here at dawn. Get here at the speed of light." They're still so in love.

A: That's so sweet. What about his kids? How do they deal with their father?

B: Well his kids are adults now. They said that it's hard to visit him. He enjoys their company when they visit, but he can't actually remember who they are. And, of course, he doesn't remember that they ever came. So in a way, it doesn't matter much whether or not they do visit.

A: Wow. What does he do all day?

B: Well, he doesn't read books because he has trouble remembering the sentence before. It's the same with television programs or movies. He can't follow a story line. But he does like to watch sports since he can enjoy it without remembering the previous events.

One other really interesting thing. He was a brilliant musician before he got sick. Amazingly, after the encephalitis destroyed his memory, he still had his musical skills. For some reason, he can still play the piano. He spends a lot of his day at the piano. It's actually music that gives him a lot of comfort and satisfaction in his life.

A: That's an amazing story! I hope I can see the program sometime.