

A stroke at 34 opened up my brain to a whole new world

By [Andrea Morabito](#)

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Filmmaker Lotje Sodderland undergoes neurological testing after suffering her stroke.

Photo: Netflix

As a teenager, London-based filmmaker Lotje Sodderland was a fan of “Twin Peaks.”

But she never expected to find herself living in a dimension as surreal as the David Lynch TV series — or becoming friends with Lynch through a series of life-changing events.

In November 2011, at age 34, Sodderland suffered a severe stroke, the result of malformed blood vessels in her brain. The emergency surgery on the parietal and temporal lobes of her brain left her without the ability to speak, write or read, but she gained an extrasensory perception — experiencing colors and sounds in a way she never had before the brain injury.

“It’s probably what it’s like to be a baby, but none of us really know. You lose all of the sensory layers that protect us from the world,” Sodderland tells *The Post*. “Images are very, very colorful and bright and sounds are really, really loud. Everything was really extreme ... which made it sort of filmic and nightmarish and beautiful and frightening and otherworldly.

“The whole thing is like something David Lynch might make.”

You lose all of the

Her story is the subject of the Netflix documentary “My Beautiful Broken Brain,” premiering Friday. It combines the iPhone videos Sodderland obsessively shot during the early months of her recovery, co-director Sophie Robinson’s footage and special effects to re-create the sometimes psychedelic

sensory layers that protect us from the world.

- Lotje Sodderland describing her post-stroke condition

experience of being inside her transformed mind.

“I had problems with my short-term memory and I was really frightened but fascinated by the world I woke up in. I certainly wasn’t thinking ‘I’m making a film about this’ initially,” she says. “But I had worked as a producer previously [and] there was some internal instinct about telling stories that I’d lost because I’d lost the ability to communicate in a linear way.”

The film follows Sodderland for the first year of her recovery, during which she underwent a first-time neurological experiment in an attempt to regain her cognitive skills. Basic speech came back first, with clear communication regained about six months in; after three months she was suddenly able to write again.

Toward the end of that year, Robinson persuaded her to send a video message to Lynch, who later joined the project as an executive producer. “He was really lovely and seemed genuinely excited by my story and by my brain and how I’d decided to deal with the situation. And then we became friends I guess,” Sodderland says. “Whenever I made what I thought was an exciting discovery about brain and mind [I’d send him a video message] and he’d always write back.”

More than four years after the stroke, Sodderland’s brain has learned to tune out unnecessary noise and sensory information with the help of meditation. But the permanent damage to her right visual cortex means she still can’t read (she uses Siri to translate words into sounds).

“We think of it as much more than a recovery film,” she says. “When you lose all of the external attributes that you think of as ‘you,’ you’re forced to re-evaluate everything.”

[My Beautiful Broken Brain - Official Trailer - Netflix \[HD\]](#)



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