

Evan Upchurch: Freedom to concentrate on writing, not multiple sclerosis.

“Life can dole out some tough breaks, but sometimes, in even stranger twists of fate, those tough breaks can lead to completely unexpected and wonderful things” observes Evan Upchurch. In 2006, he was a Microsoft employee working in the usability group, where he wrote reports to help the product teams understand how people use software, when he began to experience blurred vision and numbness.

“I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and I was absolutely terrified by what it might do to me,” Upchurch recalls. His hands began to develop a severe tremor, and his group administrator recommended that he try Dragon NaturallySpeaking, which another team member had been using.

Upchurch went to that person’s office to speak with her and, in one of those twists of fate, learned that she had MS, too. Their similar plights led them to develop a close friendship and eventually marry. “Dragon and multiple sclerosis served as our extremely unlikely matchmakers, and the luckiest break I’ve ever had,” he says.

“Blown away” by the accuracy

Upchurch started using Dragon at work and says he was “blown away by how accurate it was out of the box. It only needed a little training to get better. It even got the name Jean-Dominique Bauby, author of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, correct on the first try!”

He was previously capable of typing 70 words a minute, but his affliction slowed that down considerably until he started using Dragon. “It takes you out of the writing process when you have to explicitly concentrate on increasingly uncooperative fingers, making the automatic typing process a concentrated one,” Upchurch explains.

“Dragon freed me to concentrate on my writing, not my hands.”

Upchurch's renewed writing speed applied to emails, too. "At Microsoft, email is lifeblood," he says. "If you can't do email, you don't exist. I had to deal with numerous emails every day."

His hand tremors also affected his ability to use a mouse, so he relied on Dragon's MouseGrid commands to move his cursor around the screen. He also created verbal macros that allowed him to quickly and easily launch applications when he needed them. "Dragon let me easily make the transition from using my hands to using my voice. It was a painless process", he says.

Eventually, Upchurch's disease progressed to the point that he had to take early retirement from Microsoft; his wife later did the same. However, he continues to use Dragon for all of his computer tasks. He says: "Between email and Facebook, Dragon is my lifeline for casual day-to-day conversation with my family on the East coast."

Dragon has also allowed Upchurch to dig into his family's North Carolina roots and tell the fictionalized story of a family friend who made his own moonshine and escaped an impending prison sentence by faking his own death. He says the book began as "a way to feel productive, but I'm going to try to get it published."

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