



## My Beautiful Broken Brain

### Discussion Guide

Directors: Sophie Robinson & Lotje Sodderland

Year: 2014

Time: 86 min

#### **You might know this director from:**

This is the debut feature film from this directoral team.

Sophie Robinson has been making long-form documentaries for 15 years for the BBC, Discovery, and Sky Arts.

This is the debut feature film for Lotje Sodderland.

## FILM SUMMARY

Imagine waking from sleep only to enter into the real-life nightmare of your senses going completely haywire at the hands of a massive life-threatening brain hemorrhage. At the age of 34, this is what happened to Lotje Sodderland, a whip-smart Londoner whose life was forever changed by this traumatic event. After uncharacteristically falling off the radar of her friends and family, Sodderland was found unconscious in a hotel bathroom and underwent emergency brain surgery immediately. She remained unconscious for two days before waking to find that her speech was incomprehensible, her sound and vision were distorted, and half of her peripheral vision was filled with frightening hallucinations. As a means of remedial aegis, she began to document her rapidly changing life with her iPhone, and shortly thereafter she asked filmmaker Sophie Robinson to help document her recovery.

Taking inspiration from the surreal work of David Lynch, whom Sodderland lovingly composes video messages to throughout her recovery and who later came on board with the project as an executive producer, the 150 hours of footage shot over the following 12 months has been woven together into a hallucinatory, inspiring, and heartwrenching depiction of human resilience and the therapeutic power of artistic expression. With the ability to take control of her own narrative, no matter how wayward it might be from its original path, Sodderland has triumphantly begun to reclaim her life and her identity with MY BEAUTIFUL BROKEN BRAIN.

## FILM THEMES

Lotje Sodderland's brain haemorrhage was completely random, as is often the case, and turned her whole life upside-down in an instant. But thanks to a solid support system and a passion for making films, that didn't stop her from forging ahead in pursuit of her goals.

### **SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE IMPORTANT**

After Sodderland was found and hospitalized, her brother, mother, and friends arrived to offer their support in her moment of need. Recovery, however, takes more than a few days. Over the subsequent months, each of them offered her their time and attention, ensuring that she could focus on her well-being rather than merely staying alive. In moments of fear and doubt, they were right there to reassure her that things would get better. Without them, Lotje's road to recovery could have looked very different.

### **ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AS A MEANS OF HEALING**

Within days of waking from her emergency surgery, Lotje began to document her daily experience using her iPhone. Although her sense of general comprehension and perception was still out of sorts, she knew that down the line it would be integral to her own understanding of her current and future experience. The act of making art in and of itself was a therapeutic endeavor, but furthermore, it became pivotal in resettling her life, rediscovering herself, and ultimately relating to the world around her. Looking to other films, specifically the surrealistic work of David Lynch, gave her comfort in her time of need, while the many hours of footage she shot during her recovery helped her see just how much progress she had made since the incident.

### **ONE'S SENSE OF SELF IS NOT LIMITED BY DISABILITIES**

When a person endures a traumatic medical event that alters not only their perception of the world, but their memory and the way their mind processes information, it can change nearly every aspect of their existence, including the way one sees themselves. Yet, as Sodderland shows with poise and perseverance, a sudden medical emergency resulting in a disability does not have to be the sole defining aspect of what makes a person who they are moving forward. Following her initial recovery period, Lotje regained her sense of self and has continued to pursue a happy and fulfilling life.

### **BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN**

Though Lotje surely wouldn't define her brain haemorrhage as a blessing in disguise, she has embraced her new reality for all that it is: full of shifting radiant colors, heightened aural perception, and wild peripheral hallucinations to match her reshuffled capacity for comprehension. Upon initially discovering these alterations to her perception, she felt as though she embodied the feeling of fear itself, but as time went on, things improved. What she at first perceived as a scrambled overload of terrifying sensorial input became a beautiful new normal in which she has relearned to thrive within.

**“You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**“The portal of healing and creativity always takes us into the realm of the spirit.”**

Angeles Arrien



## FILM FACTS:

- MY BEAUTIFUL BROKEN BRAIN had its world premiere at the 2014 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), where it won the DOC U award, and then it's North American Premiere in March 2016 at SXSW.
- In 2013, directors Sophie Robinson and Lotje Sodderland managed to raise \$46,610 for the editing, effects, sound design, and post-production of MY BEAUTIFUL BROKEN BRAIN via Kickstarter thanks to 607 contributors.
- Most people think of Hollywood films when they think of special effects, but documentaries often utilize special effects to help tell their stories. Sodderland and Robinson incorporated more than 110 visual effects shots, all created by Outpost VFX and supervised by Elena Estevez Santos, to represent Sodderland's perception after the stroke.
- The National Aphasia Association defines aphasia as an impairment of language, affecting the production or comprehension of speech and the ability to read or write. Aphasia is always due to injury to the brain—most commonly from a stroke. The ability to communicate using language is affected, including speaking, understanding the speech of others, reading, writing, gesturing, and using numbers. Intelligence is not affected by aphasia.
- In April of 2013, US President Barack Obama announced a new research initiative focusing on the human brain: "As humans, we can identify galaxies light years away, but we still haven't unlocked the mysteries of the three pounds of matter that sits within our ears...so there's this enormous mystery waiting to be unlocked."
- According to the Brain Aneurysm Foundation, it is estimated that about 30,000 people in the United States suffer a brain aneurysm rupture annually. There is a brain aneurysm rupturing every 18 minutes. Ruptured brain aneurysms are fatal in about 40 percent of cases. Of those who survive, about 66 percent suffer some permanent neurological deficit.
- In the early hours of a Monday morning in November 2011, Lotje Sodderland was woken from her sleep with a pain in her head so excruciating that she lay on the floor waiting to die. She was experiencing a massive life threatening brain haemorrhage.
- When Lotje Sodderland had her brain haemorrhage, she was just 34 years old. According to research by the American Heart Association, the chances of this occurring in people younger than 35 is estimated to be three in one million.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Lotje's remarkable tale of recovery is sure to inspire all who have the opportunity to see it.
2. **Donate** to organizations like [National Aphasia Association](#), who offer support to those suffering in the wake of injuries to the brain.
3. **Become** a brain aneurysm activist. Community action suggestions, detailed information, and additional resources can be found on the [Brain Aneurysm Foundation's website](#).
4. **Contribute** to a documentary project that catches your eye on [Kickstarter](#), a donation platform that helps make films like MY BEAUTIFUL BROKEN BRAIN possible.