

Speaking from Experience Stroke in Midlife USA

Transcript for Chapter 4 of 9: Psychological impact

Cynthia –

I was 52 years old when this happened to me. At the time, I didn't know anybody else in my age group that had experienced anything even slightly like that. Now, I've educated myself more and more people I know who are younger have strokes. It's not...it doesn't respect age. Strokes do not respect age, they do not respect...strokes can happen to anybody. I know that now. But at the time I was thinking that I had been catapulted into this completely different category that I didn't belong in. So I had to kind of come to terms with this sort of new person that I was. And some of it I was okay with because I was still alive. But some of it I was definitely not okay with and I worked really hard to get as much of my life back as I could as fast as I could. Plus I had a 5-year old little guy to take care of and I was a single mom, I had to get back.

Dave –

It was kind of a very interesting awakening for me. I realized that my life was defined by these things I did, this activity I was involved in, the career I had, the traveling I did and then the activities outside work, the skiing and the hockey and that's how I defined myself. That's how I saw myself and if I meet someone new and they ask me to describe myself, that's how I would describe myself. Then suddenly I'm laying in a bed late at night in the rehab unit and I'm thinking, "I'm not that person anymore, I'm not gonna be that person anymore. So, who am I?"

Carmel –

One of the other repercussions from stroke is the depression that comes along with it and I've always been a vocal person about depression since I've been clinically depressed my whole life and so I was lucky in that I was checking in with my therapist on a weekly basis when I was in the hospital.

Trish –

I was sad and decided to work on it. My therapist says I have a good attitude.

Colin & Caroline –

The one thing that can happen with strokes that Colin has been really good at stopping is a lot of people get a lot of depression and Colin has been extremely good about making sure...especially when I first came home when I was in rehab that I had no time to sit and think about what was going on. He always had people when... if I wasn't physically working with the therapists, he always made sure there was somebody visiting me if I wasn't resting and he did exactly the same when I came home. It was like we had a constant cocktail party going on in our house and every now and again I'd get sent to bed for an hour to rest and then get pulled out again and back on show.

Cynthia –

I would in a way sort of feel bad that my son didn't have a regular functioning parent who rode bikes with him and kept up with him physically and did things like that but he's says "You're fine." He says, "Oh, you're my mom, you're fine." And I said, "Yea, but I wouldn't have been so crazy." "Yea, well that's ok."

Dave –

Fortunately, I didn't have any obvious affectation above the neck which is probably because of the area of the brain that was affected. But I didn't really have any speech affectation nor did I have any obvious cognitive issues. Although, I think the jury is still out 5 years later because I do seem to have some memory issues. I'm not sure that's stroke-related, it could just be age-related. I can't remember why I went to the refrigerator, but that might just be my age.

Cynthia –

I have taken a class at a junior college level just to see if I could...if I had enough brain cells to do a class and that was okay. Now, with cd-roms and a lot of tutorials on powerpoint and you can look at something over and over and over again where maybe before you only needed to look at something 3 times and now you need to look at it 10. But I'll take it, 10's fine, I'm learning and I kind of think I'm trying to keep my mind in a learning place so I can keep learning

things.

Sachi –

Everything takes time. Really long time and frustration and time pressure makes it harder to keep up.

Cynthia –

The brain injury part of having a stroke...it can be harder to keep an even keel, it can be harder to stay calm. I was talking to my sister on the way here because I thought I was so cool and smooth but 3 stressful things in a row, 4 stressful things in a row and I lose it. I don't remember being like that before. Maybe I was but I do think those around you will have to be extra patient.

Carmel –

It is important to ask for help and I think it's very hard for women to do that because they're so used to running the whole show at home where they do everything and are everything and things like that and they don't stop to ask for help often enough and so that's a really hard thing to do but it's an important thing to do.

Dave –

For me, the biggest challenges were things like going to the bathroom and taking showers where it's hard...it was hard to ask for help to do those kinds of things just because of hang-ups I had I think. I didn't want people to have to help you with that. I didn't mind asking people to help me fix food or get me to my therapy sessions, but when I needed someone to get me on and off the toilet I just didn't want to ask for that help and so those things are the things that stand out in my mind the most and especially when I conquered those things, those are probably the big successes that I remember early on, I think because they meant more to me than other things.