



Speaking from Experience *Stroke in Midlife*

Transcript for chapter 7 of 9: Employment and social issues

Robyn, 48 years, stroke 11 years ago, & mother Cath: High school teacher, History and English. The last school, Fitzroy High.

Jack, 53 years, stroke 11 years ago: I was self-employed when I had my stroke, doing concreting. Of course, when I had my stroke that went by the wayside.

Noelene, 63 years, stroke 7 years ago: I was a teacher. I taught junior secondary teaching.

Helen, 54 years, stroke 11 years ago: Well, prior to having the stroke, I was an extremely busy person. I was a senior person with the Australian Education Department, I'd also started to do some lecturing at Melbourne University. I'd just finished doing a Masters Degree. I was convenor of a national conference, which I had to give up because of the stroke. So, I suppose I was go, go, go. And now I'm probably slow, slow, slow [laughs].

Leonie, 37 years, stroke 4 years ago & husband George: Being a nurse, it was something that I really wanted to get back into.

Leonie & husband George: Leonie believed that if she got back to work that it would show that it was a step back to being normal.

Jack: A social worker got involved with me and she said, "You need something to do". So, she took me and introduced me to the activities officer in a nursing home or a hostel and I've been there for five years doing odds and ends. At the moment, I do bowling on Monday mornings, carpet bowling. And then in the afternoon, I do bingo. On Thursdays, I do a cooking segment of a morning and bingo in the afternoon. I think I get more fun out of it than what they do.

Helen: I knew that the skills I needed for work were no longer available to me. But, as I say, I felt enormous guilt over that. Wasn't I trying hard enough? What was wrong with me – some other people have gone back to work? But of course I now know that stroke affects everyone differently and no two of us are the same. Some people will go back to work, others can't.

Leonie & husband George: Getting back to work was fantastic! And my confidence did go up. But my self-confidence did continue to waiver.

Helen: Two friends were going overseas and they said, "Helen, how about coming with us?" Oh, I thought, terrific. And then of course, I didn't think of the problems associated with that. But anyhow, I spoke with my physician at the hospital and she thought it was a wonderful idea and that I should by all means go. My family thought that it was a great opportunity and that I should take the opportunity to go and we just had such a wonderful time.

Noelene: I went to Kakadu in June last year. I was going when I had the stroke. So now I've got the added bonus of going there and I went to the Stockman's Hall of Fame. We did over 600 kilometres in the outback each day in a lovely air-conditioned coach.

Robyn & mother Cath: We've got to look after ourselves to and we have been on holidays. It takes a lot of organisation. We have to make sure that the other children are there. But, no, we always take a holiday.

Helen: It's amazing, I've always been surprised particularly at young people who will stop and say, "Look, can I help you in any way?" People do say the most extraordinary things to you when you're out in a wheelchair, or they'll totally ignore you. But by and large, people want to help. And also people want to know what has happened to you. And I think that overall people don't mind telling. But I think you need to be sensitive to people and how you ask and how you phrase things. You know, "Can I help you here?" or "Do you need any help?" And people will tell you. I mean, you'll get the odd person who might be a bit grouchy and snap back, but overall... And if you do encounter that, I don't think it should put you off asking.

Noelene: Most people are kinder to me than not so kind. Thank goodness they are.

Helen: I was also asked to write a small book for children, who are greatly affected by stroke when a parent or grandparent or someone close to them has a stroke. And it's just a little picture story book and it just tells of a small boy and his grandfather and the grandfather has a stroke and how all the family can be involved in his rehabilitation. Well, that's been reprinted in Great Britain. It's just recently been translated into Japanese. But I think earlier in the year, a tremendously significant thing was told to me, and that was that the book was given to a small boy to read who had had a very close relationship with his grandfather and the grandfather had a stroke and the little fellow wouldn't have anything to do with his grandfather. He was absolutely terrified of what had happened to him. So his mother gave him the book to read, at the suggestion of someone at the hospital and it quite turned that child around. And he's become best pals with his grandfather again and it's become his favourite book and he's helping his grandfather. Now, if for no other reason that I had that stroke to write that book for that little boy, I think it was just so special.

Leonie & husband George: I'm fortunate enough to be able to drive now which has just given me a whole new aspect that I wasn't able to do. It took me a while to feel confident enough to go for it. But I've had my tests and the doctor has certainly given me the okay.

Leonie & husband George: It was three years before she was actually back on the road.

Leonie & husband George: Yes.

Leonie & husband George: Just to give you an idea, since she had the stroke.

Jack: One of the worst things I had was they took my car licence off me. I got that back eventually. I was discharged in June and I drove to Perth that December the same year.

Robyn & mother Cath: Tuesday, walk down the street.

Robyn & mother Cath: This is her big burden for the week, as you can see by her face.

Robyn & mother Cath: [laughs]

Robyn & mother Cath: But she insists on doing it.



Robyn & mother Cath: Hate, but...

Robyn & mother Cath: She pushes a trolley with one arm, right down the street, across the big road. All the way around the supermarket and back again, up the steps and empties it. And she won't have any help.

Robyn & mother Cath: Yes.