

Speaking from Experience

Stroke in Midlife USA

Transcript for Chapter 1 of 9: Early days

Dave –

It was the Friday before Christmas and I was scheduled to fly out to go back to Minnesota which is where I'm from to spend Christmas with my family and my flight was cancelled because of a blizzard and so I was at home. And I had noticed early in the day just some strange tingling in my right...or my left foot and leg but it was so minor that... you know, it felt like maybe I had slept on it wrong or whatever it was. I didn't really give it much thought. I went through the whole day, kind of replanning my week because it didn't look like I was going to get a flight for a couple of days. And that evening, after fixing myself some dinner I sat down to watch a hockey game on TV and I'd been sitting there for about an hour, I had no symptoms and then went to get up to let my dog out and couldn't move and that's the first indication that there was anything wrong. I literally was in disbelief. I'm sitting there looking and I could move everything on my right side but nothing on my left side was responding. Fortunately, I had a phone next to me so I was able to call for help, but I had no typical symptoms – no headaches, no blurred vision, blurred speech, all of those things, I didn't have any of that. And so I kind of went into denial. I mean, I didn't believe anything serious was wrong, but it was.

Cynthia –

The morning of the stroke, I was...April 5, 1999, it was a rainy day kind of like today. Just getting my kid ready to go to a friend's house, packed up the car with toys to take to his friend's. Ya know, I had the headache, I was ignoring it, I was gonna go to work after I dropped him off, it was ok. Got in the car and it was kind of drizzling. He was in the backseat in this child seat because he was not quite old enough to get out of it and I got on the freeway to a screaming migraine and I just wanted to get to my friend's house. I drove the car, in the rain a distance of maybe 10 or 11 miles. Got out of the car, and I noticed while I was driving the car that my hand wouldn't stay on the radio button, it would just fall off, and it wouldn't stay on the steering wheel, it would fall off and I started to feel a kind of heaviness on my left side, but...nothing really, no pain really and then I got out of the car and my left side was like lead, so just lifting it to get out of the car, lifting my leg, and then I tried to open the trunk to get the toys out, nothing seemed to work. And I get to the door and my friend says, "What's wrong with you? Are you having a stroke?" She actually used that phrase which was just really crazy. And I looked in the mirror and the left side of my face was like really collapsing and I said, "Yea, I think I'm having a stroke. Can you take me to the emergency room?"

Carmel –

The event was a severe cough due to the flu and during that coughing episode I had a severe headache and that headache was caused the spontaneous rupture of that blood vessel in the brain and from there I started noticing that I was drooling on the left side of my mouth. After that, I lost my balance...I tried to...I was going back and forth off walls and then I finally fell down on the floor and couldn't get back up.

Trish –

I have a clot in my left artery and...go to ambulance...and doctor says hey, stroke. And I'm surprised.

Sachi –

After work, I went to...for a change, exercise, and I was swimming in the gym and then I realized, "I can't swim straight, what's going wrong?" And then I thought, "Maybe I should get out before I'm in trouble." And I went to the edge but I couldn't get out and the lifeguard came and helped me get out.

Colin & Caroline –

The day that I had the stroke we were taking some friends out sailing on San Francisco Bay and I woke up with a really, really acute headache and as we were driving down to the boat I was mentioning to Colin that these headaches were getting worse and he said...it was a holiday weekend...he said, "Well, if they're still going on after the weekend I think it's time to go and see the doctor about this." And we just left the river, and putting the sail up, and I looked up to see when the sail was atop the masthead and that action completely closed the artery in my neck and it started off with what felt like pins and needles going up to my...up my left arm. I thought I was having a heart attack and then I just

collapsed on the floor and actually Colin was the one who said straight off...looked at it and said, "This has to be a stroke." Well, we had...the strange thing, you've got 6 engineers on the boat, none of whom are medics but all of whom are engineers and you think, "It's just hydraulics, we can work this out." And, after much beating around the bush, we came to the conclusion it was a stroke at which point we had to decide what to do. We called the Coast Guard. They came out pretty swiftly actually. In some regards, it was probably a faster trip to the hospital than many. But the horrible moment was deciding was this stroke caused by a blockage or was it caused by a leakage since the...what you need to do for either is the opposite. And our guess was that it was actually a blockage since it was one side and she was still very coherent, so you need blood thinner in a hurry and we, between us, rounded up 6 aspirin, crushed them up, got her to take them and later the doctors said that's probably what saved her life.