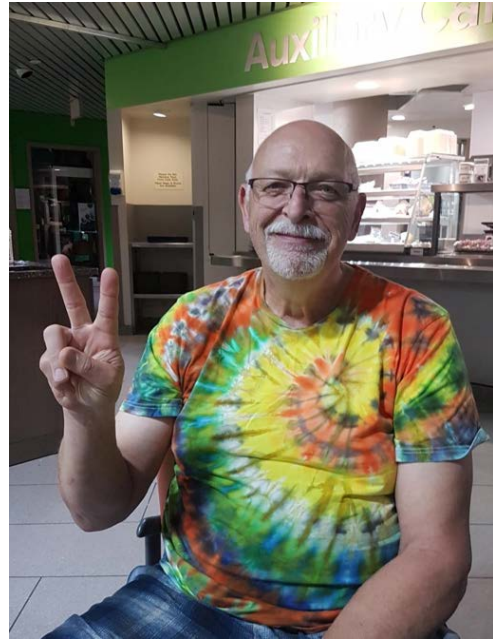


My Stroke Journey

Sufferer to Survivor



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Reasons for Writing this Article

I wrote this article to give the reader, e.g., fellow stroke survivors, family members, caregivers, friends, and the public, a first-person account of some of the experiences and challenges a stroke survivor faces every day. I had three strokes. While some of my challenges are unique to my strokes, most of the issues I will discuss are universal issues that many of my fellow stroke survivors had and must deal with daily.

- For the stroke survivor:
 1. I hope this article inspires you to move past the trauma and the disabilities associated with your stroke and focus on your future. For the most part I have and as a result I am starting to enjoy my new life, and
 2. To let you know, you are not alone.
- For family members, caregivers, friends, and the public:
 1. I hope this article provides you with some insight, education, and personal tools to better understand and support all stroke survivors you meet in your lives.
 2. Become advocates by informing and explaining the realities and challenges a stroke survivor faces every day, and
 3. To let you know that everyone's stroke is different.

Chances are, you know someone who is living with a stroke or will know someone in the future. The more we all understand how to prevent or manage strokes, the better it will be for everyone.

It is also my goal to provide all readers with a forum in which to start a discussion about strokes. Mainly, stroke awareness, prevention, education, and the resources available to stroke survivors and their families. In addition, and this is the tough one, an opportunity to have open and honest discussions between the stroke survivors and the people in their lives. More specifically, the effects of the stroke, your feelings, your physical and mental challenges, and your future.

My Story (Optional Read)

My hope is that my story gives you, the reader, a better understanding of the new (post-stroke) Dan and my journey. As mentioned, this part is an optional read so if you still feel the need to continue, you have been warned.

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Hi, my name is Dan J Cormier. I am a three-time stroke survivor. My stroke journey started in 2017. Let me back up a bit, I was born with a deformed tricuspid valve in my heart. To make a long story short, a typical tricuspid valve should look like a Mercedes Benz symbol, while mine looked more like a Hyundai symbol. So, in early 2018 my valve was successfully repaired by Dr. Hamilton and his team at the Kingston General Hospital (KGH). Unfortunately, after the surgery, I developed an irregular heartbeat, called Arrhythmia. One of the major causes of strokes. Did I know it was a risk factor? Yes. Did I take it seriously and change my lifestyle? Regrettably no!

Stroke Number 1. In March of 2021, it was a typical spring day, I was in my garage repairing an old vehicle and at the blink of an eye my entire world changed. The next thing I remember was being strapped to a gurney and being loaded into an ambulance. I had no idea what happened, but I did know that I was going to the hospital and the trip was not on my to-do list. In hindsight, this first stroke was a result of living a less than perfect lifestyle, combined with a pre-existing heart condition and an attitude that IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO ME.

For the next seven months, through extremely hard work and determination, an army of therapists, and the support of my family, I learned to walk and talk again. Not perfectly, but good enough to look forward to the start of my new life. I had what you would call a “visible stroke.” In general, a visible stroke is when a stranger sees your actions; walking, talking, etc. and concludes that your actions are not atypical or normal. Thus, noticeable.

For the next two years I changed my lifestyle, exercised, ate healthier, lost weight, and reduced my alcohol intake. I was doing everything I could, but I still had arrhythmia.

Stroke Number 2. In January 2024, I had my second stroke. This time my stroke happened at work. Fortunately for me, I was surrounded by several co-workers that knew the signs of a stroke, **FAST**, which stands for:

F - Face. Is it drooping?

A - Arms. Can you raise both?

S - Speech. Is it slurred or jumbled?

T - Time to call 911.

(Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2024)

Note: Stroke symptoms could also include loss of balance, trouble walking and trouble seeing out of one or both eyes.

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They placed me in a safe position and immediately called 911. Within an hour, I was in the hospital on an operating table, having a blood clot removed. Amazing!

It is important for everyone to know that in Ontario a surgeon cannot remove the clot from your brain without your permission. Fortunately, I was able to talk (enough) to give the medical team permission to proceed. Imagine if I could not communicate. I am sure the outcome would have been completely different. So please make sure you have in place a preset means in which to express your wishes. Strokes happen more often than most people think. Shockingly, it is estimated that in Canada, a stroke happens every 5 minutes (Holodinsky et al., 2022).

My procedure was successful. They were able to remove the clot, however, the clot did damage a part of my brain, and I developed an anxiety disorder. This time, unlike my previous stroke, I had what you would call an “invisible stroke.” In general, an invisible stroke is when a stranger sees your actions: walking, talking, etc., and concludes that your actions are typical or normal. Thus, hidden.

While the effects of this stroke were hidden to the public, the personal changes and challenges related to my anxiety disorder were very clear and real to me. Again, through extremely hard work, determination, and the help of several mental health specialists, I learned about the symptoms related to my anxiety disorder and several techniques to manage my anxiety. While my symptoms are now relatively minor, I am still technically a work in progress. This time the lessons I learned were to recognize and accept the fact that mentally, I was in trouble and more importantly, I was not afraid to reach out to mental health professionals for help. Looking back, reaching out was one of the best decisions I ever made. It also reaffirmed the fact that mental wellness is every bit as important, if not more important, than physical wellness.

Stroke Number 3. In April 2024, I had my third and hopefully final stroke. This stroke I had in my sleep, which made my nightly trip to the washroom one to remember. I will spare you the transportation logistics, but what is important to know is that I did make it to the hospital. For two days, I laid in the hospital bed, unable to move the left side of my body. I laid there thinking to myself, why me? I figured, at that point, I must be here for experimental testing purposes. But in all seriousness, having all that free time, lying there in a hospital bed, not being able to move one side of my body and thinking of my future, I was scared. I did my best to stay positive. I kept remembering all the stroke survivors I met since my first stroke three years ago. Their positive attitude and determination and how

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some accepted their disabilities by setting new life goals and moving forward, were my inspiration. I told myself, “If they can do it, so can I!” I knew at that point, no matter what life had in store for me, I was going to be different, but more importantly, I was going to live.

On the third morning, as usual, the nurse asked me to move my left leg. It moved! I had never been so surprised in my life! I even teared up a bit typing out that line. A few days later I was walking the hospital halls. It was not pretty but it did not matter. After another week, most of my limitations were gone. However, this stroke left me with a new case of drop foot and I was unable to physically control the left side of my throat. I later learned that I was paralyzed from the Adam’s apple up. The medical term for this is called Dysphasia. Again, I had to learn new swallowing and speech techniques, and through hard work and determination, I was able to swallow and talk again. Swallowing is still a challenge and will be for some time. Talking, though not perfectly, is gradually improving. Strangely enough, the friends that knew me before my stroke seem to like the quieter Dan.

With this stroke, my limitations were classified as both a “visible stroke” and an “invisible stroke.”

After my third stroke, I learned another important life lesson; **THE LIFE YOU HAVE IN FRONT OF YOU IS SO MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LIFE YOU LIVED.** Please do not waste your time looking back.

Did you know?

Did you know, according to the World Health Organization, 2022, “1 in 4 people will have a stroke in their lifetime?” While in Canada, the number is roughly 1 in 6 people (Victorian Order of Nurses, 2022).

The stroke risk factors are many: diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, excessive alcohol intake, heart disease, obesity, family history, age, lack of exercise and so on (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2024). What is important to remember is, while some of the above-mentioned factors are out of your control, a lot of these factors you can control. Please do not overlook them, like I did.

For those stroke survivors reading this article, remember you are now at a higher risk of having another stroke. So, please do what you can to minimize your risk. Your quality of life depends on it!

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Statistically speaking:

In North America 17% of the population (over 50 years old) will have a stroke.

Of that 17%, 23% will have a second stroke or 4% of the total population.

Of that 23%, 25% will have a third stroke or 1% of the total population.

(Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2024)

I used to love statistics!

Stroke 101

Stroke 101: A stroke happens when there is an issue with blood flow to a part of the brain. According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (2024), strokes can occur in three ways:

1- Ischemic Stroke

When blood vessels become blocked by a clot, this is known as an Ischemic Stroke. Approximately 80% of all strokes are Ischemic Stroke (Lu, 2011).

2- Hemorrhagic Stroke

When a blood vessel bursts and causes bleeding in the brain, this is known as a Hemorrhagic Stroke. Both Ischemic and Hemorrhagic strokes restrict or stop blood flow to that area of the brain. Thus, without a steady supply of blood and oxygen, that area of the brain starts to die. The results can lead to permanent brain damage, long-term disability, or death. The longer the length of time the brain is without a steady supply of blood and oxygen, the greater the severity of the damage. This is why understanding the signs of a stroke and quick medical treatment is so important.

3- Transient Ischemic Attack, or TIA

When blood vessels become briefly or temporarily blocked, this is known as a Transient Ischemic Attack, or TIA. The Transient Ischemic Attack has stroke-like symptoms, but unlike the Ischemic and Hemorrhagic strokes the TIA does not damage brain cells or cause permanent disabilities.

Now that you have read and understand the different types of strokes, it is even more important to know which part of the brain has been affected by the stroke. To the medical professionals, knowing the size and location of the damage to the brain provides the doctor with valuable information as to what body function will possibly be affected and to what extent. This information will provide the medical professionals with a better understanding of what they are dealing with and be able to provide the best care possible in order to stabilize the patient and stop and/or minimize the damage to the brain. As a

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patient, knowing the size and location of the damage to the brain was not high on my priority list. All three times, I tried to put on a brave face while I was trying to answer the doctor's questions at the same time. Truth be known, I was confused, scared, and consciously taking inventory of my body, trying to figure out what was and was not working. Trust me, it was not a lot of fun.

While this section provides a high-level overview of the different types of strokes, it is important to remember that **everyone's stroke is different**.

6 Steps of Stroke Rehabilitation

From my experience, I genuinely believe that there are **6 steps** to successfully manage a stroke: **Trust, Listening, Learning, Practicing, Courage, and Acceptance**.

- **Trust-** As a stroke survivor you are lying on a hospital bed, dazed, confused, scared and vulnerable. This is when you must put all your trust in the medical professionals. The doctors and nurses are working around you, ordering various tests and scans, all to better understand the type, extent and location of the stroke that occurred in your brain and the probable effects: physically, mentally, or both. Remember you are the only person in the room that should not be there.
- **Listening-** You have been diagnosed, stabilized, and told how the stroke has affected you. Next, you are introduced to the various stroke associates: doctors, therapists and other healthcare professionals that specialize in stroke health. These various professionals talk to you about your stroke and the range of rehabilitation services available and tailored to your needs to optimize your chances for the best possible recovery. Your rehabilitation in hospital services could range from occupational, community and speech therapists to physiologists, physicists, and social professionals, and as you improve, a transition to home care. As the survivor progresses, the therapists will be constantly evaluating the patient's progress and providing rehabilitation strategies, plans, exercises, tests, and words of encouragement to aid in your recovering. So, this is a good time to listen, it worked for me.
- **Learning-** Now it is time to learn and understand the benefits of the various rehabilitation strategies, plans, exercises, and tests so you can achieve your best results.

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- **Practicing-** This is where things get hard. Only with the instructions and guidance of the various therapists and your hard work can you become the best version of the new you. Treat this stage of your recovery as the most important thing you can do to improve your quality of life, because it is. It is important to note, results do not happen overnight, your brain is healing and rewiring, fatigue is common, do not get discouraged. RECOVERY IS NOT MEASURED IN HOURS OR DAYS BUT WEEKS, MONTHS AND YEARS. Recovering from a stroke is a long process, there are no quick fixes. **Remember, if you get tired, learn to rest, not quit!**
- **Courage-** This is where you find the courage to look beyond your limitations. As a survivor you have done everything you could possibly do to recover from the stroke. Unfortunately, due to your stroke you may not be able to resume your previous lifestyle.
- **Acceptance-** This is where a survivor is courageous enough to let go of the old person they were (the pre-stroke version of themselves) and accept and embrace the new person they are (the post-stroke version of themselves). This stage does not come without grief. I will be talking about grief later in this article. When I was younger, I was told by one of my grade school coaches, “Noone ever won a race looking backwards.” The same can be said for surviving and managing a stroke. The life still ahead of you is much more important than the life behind you.

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“Mistakes” Stroke Survivors Make

- Telling people, you are okay, when you are not.
- Not managing your energy.
- Ignoring PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) after your stroke.
- Not working through communication problems, such as Aphasia.
- Not thinking about prevention.
- Not thinking about lifestyle changes.
- Over training.
- Not exercising.
- Not eating right or knowing the importance of good nutrition.
- Not learning how to manage and control environmental and personal stress.
- Not getting enough sleep.
- Overcompensating with your unaffected arm or leg, thereby, minimizing or ignoring rehabilitation on the effected limb.
- Losing your drive to recover through the tough times.
- Not practicing rehabilitation techniques on a regular basis.
- Rehabilitation training based on emotions, not strategy.
- Quitting or losing motivation.
- Not setting recovery goals.
- Not setting realistic goals.
- Waking up without a plan.

Things not to Say to a Stroke Survivor and Why

- **You are too young to have a stroke.** Some people think strokes only happen to an older person. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (2022), approximately 25% of strokes occur in people under 65 years of age. Another sobering statistic is that approximately “four out of every 100 strokes happen in people ages 18 to 45” (Campbell et al., 2015).
- **You do not look like you had a stroke.** Some people think that strokes only cause visible effects to the person. A stroke can occur in any part of the brain. In other words, since the brain controls many facets of the body’s functions, both physically and mentally, the effects of a stroke can be visible or invisible or both.
- **You work hard enough you will get better.** Some people think a stroke is like a broken bone or stitches. That understanding could not be further from the truth.
- **Better Now?** Again, a stroke (a brain injury) is not like a broken bone or stitches. While a minority of stroke survivors recover to their pre-stroke selves, most stroke survivors must adapt and manage their post-stroke selves for the rest of their lives.
- **I know what you are going through, I get headaches and get tired too.** I am sure that person has the best intentions and is trying to relate to the stroke survivor, but trust me when I say, “Stop while you are behind!”
- **I know someone who had a stroke, and they are fine now.** Those are great feel-good stories, and I am happy for the survivor. However, total recovery from a stroke is rare. As a result, those stories, to most survivors, are not that helpful.
- **Your stroke could have been worse.** Comments like that fall within the range, from inappropriate to insulting. Regardless of the extent of the individual’s disabilities from a stroke, the stroke is usually traumatic and a life changing experience. The effect on an individual is not just semantics.
- **It is too bad you had a stroke. I really could have used you for ...** Putting your needs and feelings before the survivor’s is never a good starting point in any conversation.
- **Don’t tell me I am a victim, tell me that I am a survivor.** While both deal with a traumatic event, the survivor is mentally focused on overcoming the event. When talking to a survivor, knowing the difference will go a long way to help in their recovery.

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Things You can do to Support a Stroke Survivor

- Get the details of their stroke so that you have a better understanding of their stroke and its affects.
- Offer emotional support.
- Encourage self-sufficiency whenever possible.
- Help with the rehabilitation whenever possible.
- Stay connected.
- Be upbeat and positive.
- Do not be afraid to offer help.
- Learn the best ways to communicate with the survivor.
- Be aware of their medications and the possible side effects.
- Listen.

Please remember: **Survivor's Trust Require Our Kindest Efforts – STROKE**

My hope in developing this mnemonic is to help people remember to be patient and kind to stroke survivors no matter where they are in their journey.

Ways the VON (Victorian Order of Nurses) Supported Me and other Stroke Survivors *

This topic was hard to write about. I did not know where to start. To say that the VON (Victorian Order of Nurses) has done so much for me through the various stages of my recovery does not do it justice. With that said, here I go.

The VON and their excellent people, such as Emilia (Stroke Coordinator in Kingston, Ontario), provide in-person and online educational and support programs for stroke survivors and their caregivers, which covers a full range of stroke related subjects. Their lectures are prepared and presented by the VON and other stroke professionals, such as doctors, nurses, and a wide range of therapists, and cover all facets of stroke rehabilitation and wellness.

During my rehabilitation sessions at Providence Care Hospital (PCH) and at home, several care workers told me about the various programs the VON offered. A year after my first stroke, I attended my first in-person meeting at the VON office. Surprisingly, I was the guy that just sat quietly in the corner, not really knowing what to say or what to ask. After two years of attending meetings, I learned more about strokes and more importantly how to live

* **Note:** The Victorian Order of Nurses do not currently have a Stroke Navigator in the Champlain Region. Please join March of Dimes Canada's After Stroke Program at www.afterstroke.ca or call 1-800-263-3463

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with a stroke. I am sure many of the members and Emilia really miss that quiet guy in the corner.

But again, in all seriousness, from that first meeting, I realized I needed to be there. The stroke related educational and support discussions and presentations helped me understand the physical and mental changes I was experiencing. In addition, it provided me with the support and confidence I needed to better manage the effects of my strokes. Another very important aspect of attending the meeting was meeting my fellow stroke survivors. At that point I realized, **I was not alone.**

Today, I really enjoy the discussions I have with my fellow survivors. One of the benefits that the group offers is the open and honest conversations. Usually someone in the group has faced a common challenge in their life and their advice and ingenuity as to how they dealt with that particular issue is invaluable to us all. Another take away from our discussions, besides bad jokes, is the support and encouragement we give each other. Priceless.

Over the last three years, I have met several stroke survivors from other VON branches, from Brockville to Belleville, and their VON leaders, which I respectfully call them handlers. Everyone, no matter what their story is or where they come from, has so much to offer.

Lastly the VON support services provide the stroke survivor, like me, a non-judgmental place and forum in which to discuss my issues, heal, rebuild, and help find my new self. Thank You!

To pay it forward, I became a VON volunteer. I can only speak for myself, but I am really enjoying helping stroke survivors in any way I can and making new friends along the way.

Reality Check

At this point of your stroke recovery journey, you have been educated about the different types of strokes. You now know how your stroke has affected you. You have participated or are still participating in every physical and mental rehabilitation program available. You have done everything you could possibly do to recover and now you are left with two outcomes:

1. If you are one of the very rare and fortunate stroke survivors that has fully recovered from the effects of your stroke, I am glad for you and wish you all the best.

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2. If, however, you are like most stroke survivors, your recovery (through no fault of your own) has slowed down or stopped. You did not reach the personal plateau you were working towards or hoping for. Now reality strikes.

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If you, like me, fall into the second category, this is by far the hardest moment in a stroke survivors' life. My thoughts turned to what used to be, what I am now and what I will be. I was scared, confused, hurt, and sad, just to name a few. Then I realized, **I will never be the same again.**

At this point, a survivor has two options:

1. Hold on to your past, or
2. Imagine your future.

I learned years ago that you can't look forward to your future, if your eyes are looking at the past. Another inspiring quote that I recently read is:

“If you focus on your past, you will continue to suffer. If you focus on your future, you will continue to grow.” (Unknown).

For the record, I decided to let the past go and picked the second option, to imagine my future.

I came up with this second mnemonic as a nudge or reminder to new stroke survivors to: **Start The Recovery Or Keep Enduring – STROKE.** I hope it motivates you to begin your journey towards recovery and not accept the status quo.

Moving Forward: Accepting the New You

In order to look forward to your future, you must accept the NEW you. That means letting go of the OLD you. This is where the grieving begins.

I had to let go of the old me, that person that was able to do all those things before my strokes, so that I could accept the new me. I quickly realized I could not accept or enjoy my post-stroke life, if everything the new Dan did (or was going to do) was going to be compared to what the old Dan would have or could have done. Letting go of the old Dan was like a death in the family. I grieved.

For two weeks, I mourned, I cried, I got mad, I missed the old Dan. After two weeks of crying, I had no more tears left. When I opened my eyes, I realized I had grieved and all that was left was an empty box of Kleenex and the new Dan. It was very hard, but I knew I could not start my new life by comparing myself to the legend of the old Dan, in my mind.

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To move forward with your new life, it is essential that a stroke survivor makes every effort to make peace with the old you and move forward as the new you. I can safely say, there is life after surviving a stroke. But like everyone's stroke is different, the same can be said for your future life. **Same world, new you.**

Wound versus Scar

You can learn a lot about where someone is in their stroke recovery journey by simply listening to them and the way they talk about their stroke(s). My following assessment was derived from listening and talking to survivors about their life experiences, the way I expressed myself through the stages of my strokes and lastly the reactions and feedback I received from my fellow stroke survivors. As a result, I deduced that stroke survivors fall under two categories: the Healing Stage and the Healed Stage.

Healing Stage: usually when you listen to a person talk about their stroke in the present tense, you notice they are talking about their stroke as an open **wound**. These survivors are usually also looking for advice on how to do something that may help them to improve their recovery. At this stage, the survivor is rebuilding or functioning from their stroke. They are looking to get back to the person they used to be. In other words, they are still healing.

Healed Stage: when you listen to a person talk about their stroke in the past tense, you notice they are talking about their stroke as a **scar**. These survivors, when asked for advice, provide sound information on ways and techniques to improve your recovery. At this stage, the survivor has healed and accepted their stroke and has moved on. They are looking to the future as a new person. In other words, they are in the healed stage. It is worth noting as well that these people have so much to offer new survivors that are still in the healing stage.

Note: The information included within this topic was based on my personal experiences and observations, not on any scientific data. Having said that, I felt so strongly about describing the difference between these two stages because it helped me so much in understanding my surroundings and myself along my journey. I hope it helps in your journey as well.

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Things a Survivor would like You to Know

- **Talk to me.** I might be disabled, but I am not stupid.
- **Make eye contact with me.** I am still here.
- **Listen to how I was affected.** The stroke affected some of my abilities, not my IQ.
- **Understand me.** Get to know what I am going through.
- **Do not minimize or trivialize my stroke.** It is life changing.
- **Make sure I understand you.** Ask if I understood a simple yes or no. My ability to listen and understand you may have been affected.
- **Make sure you understood me.** Be aware of the possibility that my tone, speed, and the method in which I now communicate, may have changed.
- **Be patient with me.** I am healing.
- **Encourage me.** It does not have to be very much, just positive.
- **Support me.** I still have present and future goals.
- **Accept the new me.** If you cannot accept the survivor, leave. You are not helping anyone.
- **Feel free to offer help when you can.** It helps more than you think. Could be anything.
- **Be patient with me at gatherings.** They can be overwhelming. Boundaries may need to be set, do not take it personally.
- **Be honest with me.** Lies still hurt.
- **Respect me.** I would hate to have to say goodbye.
- **LASTLY,** the more you know about strokes (my stroke) and their effects, the more it will help us both recover.

Circle of Friends

The fact is, after a stroke people leave your circle of friends. Why? There is no shortage of reasons for two people to drift apart. No matter what the reason is, it still hurts. The important thing to remember is that you never lose true friends. They will still see you and you now (really) see them. These friendships are priceless. For those lost friendships, my advice is that unless they owe you money, let them go. You have more important people and things to deal with in your life.

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I can recall a personal experience and lesson that happened to me. I was having a good post stroke day. A very good friend and I were talking about our old school days. I did not remember a lot of the details of the story, so I just nodded and smiled and pretended that I remembered. At that point, my best friend looked at me and said, “you’re back!” I realized at that moment that I screwed up. Trust me, unless you are actually back, do everyone a favour and explain your mistake and apologize immediately.

In hindsight, I realize that I was just trying to cover up the memories that I had lost from the stroke. Instantly, the way I felt when I heard that comment, “you’re back,” I knew that I deceived a great friend. I put my pride before my friendship. Something I told myself never to do again. So far, I have held myself up to that promise.

Lesson learned: not everyone understands what you are going through and the challenges you still must face. Be honest with the people around you, a true friend will understand and help.

Things I have Learned Along the Way

- **Just because you think you can do it, does not make it so.** Know your limits.
- **Do not be afraid to ask for help.** It is okay.
- **Do not be afraid to tell people how you feel.** Without using the F word.
- **Do not mask your disabilities.** Be proud that you survived.
- **Ignore what negative things people say.** Their opinion and \$1.50 will get you a cup of coffee.
- **Educate people about strokes.** You both benefit.
- **You win when your mind is stronger than your emotions.** It is a work in progress.
- **Do not ignore any negative feelings you may have.** Feel free to get help.
- **Be positive.** If necessary, adjust your state of mind.
- **Okay, I am ready for my next mistake.** New adventures await.

Final Thoughts

I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would suffer a stroke and let alone write about it. My initial reason for writing this article was to give the reader (fellow stroke survivors,

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and their family and friends) a sense of what it is like to have a stroke, the possible mental and physical transformations that survivors go through, and the challenges they face along the way. Unexpectedly, putting my experiences and thoughts on paper became a major source of therapy for me personally. As a result, I hope that every survivor has the opportunity to write their own story, not only for your family and friends to better understand your journey but for yourselves, to better understand the person you were and have become.

I always remembered the old saying by Elbert Hubbard (1915), “When the world gives you lemons, make lemonade.” This quote is meant to encourage optimism and a never quit attitude in the face of adversity. Words to live by. In my case the lemon was my stroke story and while I was afraid to start over again, I am starting to like the new me.

In closing, I hope this article motivated the reader to make any necessary lifestyle changes that will aid in lowering their risks of a stroke. Remember, 80% of strokes are preventable (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). I made the mistake of thinking that I would never have a stroke. Please do not make the same mistake that I did.

Lastly, I hope my story provided everyone that has been affected by a stroke (stroke survivors, family members, friends, and caregivers), a forum or platform in which to continue a conversation on some or all of the topics I dealt with or more importantly, start a conversation about the specific issues or challenges you have dealt with.

Now for some parting words to new survivors, which has helped me through my journey from Sufferer to Survivor. Look for and focus on those things that inspire you. They will become a great source of strength.

I wish you all the best on your journey.

Sincerely,

The New Dan

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Acknowledgements

To the army of doctors, nurses, therapists, caregivers and administrators at the Kingston General Hospital, KGH (Emergency, Surgery and Kidd 7 floor), Providence Care Hospital, PCH (Stroke Rehabilitation Unit), and the Home Care Services, thank you for your professionalism, dedication and compassion that enabled this stroke sufferer to become a stroke survivor.

To my friends, thank you for putting up with and accepting my transition from the old to the new Dan. While my friends did not always know what I was going through (truth be known, at the time, neither did I), you were always just a call away and gave me the space and time to heal. I cannot thank you enough.

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MY STROKE JOURNEY

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