

Stroke from page 1C

Needed speech therapy

After I was released from the hospital, my physical and occupational therapy lasted for two more months and speech therapy a little longer. "Why speech therapy?" people asked me. Certainly I could talk clearly, right from the start. The problem was not in forming and speaking words. The problem was my short-term memory.

Another stroke survivor, Helen Harlan Wolf, author of "Aphasia, My World Alone," said it best. "If I don't say something in a hurry I will forget it," or "I think of such things and forget them immediately." Many times while I was in the hospital, I would start to say something and forget what I was thinking before I could get the words out. This still happens occasionally but nothing like it used to. Most people have no idea how often a speaker is interrupted. For an aphasic, that is devastating. A thought once gone may never return.

My earliest therapy after starting rehab involved printing with my left hand. It was pretty bad, and one day I decided it couldn't be any worse with my right hand. I was right, and from then on I printed and soon wrote right-handed again. Today I write a little slower than I did before the stroke and I can no longer take notes as fast I used to.

In my 25-year career in journalism prior to the stroke, typing obviously was a major part of my life. For that reason, my therapy while in the hospital and later at the Beaumont Rehabilitation and Health Center in the former Barnum School in Birmingham included using a word processor. As with writing,



STEPHEN CASTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Stroke survivor: Barbara Underwood considers herself lucky and has made what she terms "95 percent" recovery.

my typing has slowed considerably and I do not expect to regain any speed, but my philosophy at this point is, "Who needs speed?"

For some months now, when people I haven't seen in weeks or months ask me how I am, my answer is, "Ninety-five percent." I always qualify that by explaining, "That assumes I was 100 percent before the stroke." When I made that comment to my doctor recently he said, after two years 95 percent is probably as good as it's going to get. I can live with that, especially when I know how much worse things could be.

Numbness in foot

The seemingly permanent reminder I have of the stroke is a

numbness in my right foot which I have been told is not unusual. Initially, I experienced some pain as areas affected by the stroke related being used, but physical therapy and continuing exercises have taken care of that. Also, weather permitting, I walk from one to two miles a day and even walked the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day — all five miles of it.

Many stroke victims experience vision problems up to and including total blindness. Again, I consider myself lucky. My peripheral vision was severely affected, especially on the right side, and for some weeks I could read the headlines and little else. It gradually cleared, but it was 10 months after the stroke before I felt confident to drive again. Another on-going problem related to vision is that I often reach for something and find it isn't quite where I thought it was.

I don't always say what I mean or mean what I say, and often I say things in reverse — up for down or right for left, for example. Numbers pose another problem for many stroke survivors and I still have some difficulty with numbers. I don't always say the number I see or the number I mean, but I usually know instantly when I have made an error. And I can balance my checkbook without help.

The only other long-term effect of the stroke I can recount is my newfound ability to sleep — any time, any place. In her book, Wolf refers to her "often and devastating exhaustion." Fatigue affects almost all persons who are aphasic because of the inordinate amount of cerebral activity aphasia necessitates, she noted.

A stroke or CVA is an accident, just as the name states. Anyone can have a stroke at any time, but perhaps my chances of having another one are greater than average because of a condition I never knew I had until 1977, following some rather severe headaches. I have always said I think I was born with a headache but those were different. Tests at that time determined that I have a congenital malformation of the arteries and veins in my head. The puzzle is why this didn't happen sooner. Luck again, perhaps.

Surgery to correct the malformation was not considered an option in 1977, but two years ago it was because of advances in medicine. However, after obtaining a second opinion, the recommendation of the doctors involved was for no surgery because of the size and depth of the malformation. The risk of another stroke, they said, is only two to four percent without surgery.

A lucky survivor

So, I am a lucky stroke survivor. Does that mean it couldn't happen again? No way. Do I awake every day wondering if it will be my last? The possibility certainly crosses my mind but it is not the foremost thought in my mind all day every day. I am living a somewhat normal life, doing my own work, reading and writing, baking bread, traveling far and wide and enjoying family, friends and cat.

Often when people I meet for the first time learn I have had a stroke they express surprise and say they never would have known if I hadn't told them. But I know and I mean it when I say I am lucky.



DENISE SUSAN LUCAS

Cinderella honors: Artist Patricia Hill Burnett (left), Tom Schoenith and Ruth Fruehauf are honored at the 46th Cinderella Ball on Feb. 13.

Ballroom fantasy is a winter palace



DENISE LUCAS

SOCIAL EYES
Denise Lucas' column Social Eyes alternates with Gretchen Hitch's column The Scene. You can mail information to Lucas at The Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009, or leave a message for her, on a touch-tone phone, by calling 953-2047, Ext. 1869. You also may write her at P.O. Box 250242, Franklin 48025, or call 442-2339.

cloths and topped with white tulle, topiary trees dripping with crystal and pearl beading.

Guests did not stop talking about the decor, about the best dinner the Westin has ever served and about the fabulous display of young entertainment at the oldest ongoing ball in the country.

Enchanting Olympic ice skaters from all over the country greeted guests in the main ballroom after the cocktail hour with outstanding (and timed just right) performances by vocalist Margaret-Rees and the Michigan Classic Ballet Company directed by Mary Celeste Geiger.

Twelve-year-old Dana Turkin, daughter of Georgetown and Jerry Turkin of Bloomfield Hills, danced with grace and ease with male lead Chris Leadbitter and a troupe of about 20 dancers. Honored as Michigan's Woman of the Year, Patricia Hill Burnett received accolades from longtime friend Sonya Friedman.

See SOCIAL EYES, 3C



Fairy tale ball: Carole Larsen Wendzel, co-chairwoman of Saturday night's Cinderella Ball, is introduced by gala emcee Rich Fisher.

Caregiver from page 1C

Phyllis taught in the Detroit and Southfield Public Schools for 40 years before retiring. She had the stroke the day after undergoing surgery for malignant breast tumors. Thus she became not only a stroke survivor but a cancer survivor. The years since his wife's stroke have been "frustrating, educational, sad, happy, eventful and ever-changing," Shoemaker said.

The stroke left her able to say only yes and no (which she often reverses) or to repeat single words. She cannot form sentences

but her comprehension is excellent. She enjoys Scrabble and other word games but cannot do crossword puzzles — yet, her husband emphasizes. He says she has "lost none of the good things except speech and has gained a better sense of direction."

She is unable to use her right arm at all and has learned to write and draw with her left. She finds even limited walking with a cane painful so uses a wheelchair all the time.

Shoemaker recommends professional help for stroke caregivers

as well as survivors "because there is life after a stroke." He said it took a few days before he realized if he were to do his job as a caregiver he had to know "everything that happened, was happening and could happen" with his wife.

The life of a caregiver after a stroke becomes pretty much a routine and often is a battle against boredom because of a partner's limitations. In an effort to combat that boredom and learn at the same time, Shoemaker, and when possible his wife, too, at-

tend meetings of caregiver and spouse groups.

"To be everything to my wife that I must be and should be, I must think of myself first," he said. "A good state of mind is essential and avoiding boredom is an important part of it."

"What we miss is the life we knew before our loved one or spouse became a stroke survivor," Shoemaker said. "The same person is there but life as we knew it is gone forever, no matter how hard we try to bring it back."



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