

Stroke – Facing The Future

David

I'm David Lidgate. I had a stroke on 5 March last year, some 14 months ago. And we're in my home in Edinburgh.

Janet

It all happens very, very quickly. Here we are. We got up one morning as a very normal family and the next thing David's flat on the bathroom floor and as the day progresses, we learn he's had a stroke, and by that afternoon, I'm sort of informed he's had a very bad stroke, he's clearly going to be disabled and he's going to need assistance even twelve months down the line.

David

My biggest problem that stops me enjoying time at home is I have to wear a splint. It's a catch 22 situation. I can't walk without the splint. You can see the way my ankle is, bending outwards like that, so I have to wear the splint to give enough support. Once it's on I can walk, but unfortunately the splint tends to give me blisters, so mobility is still a problem. But I think it's such a nice day, this is the day to go outside so I'll put this thing back on and wander outside.

Janet

I think he's probably bitter and that, you know, if you like, his life has been snatched from him and he's very determined to get certain aspects back.

David

Oh yeah, there's no point in being angry. You've just got to put up with it. And having two young children does help with that because I have a two year old, and she was learning to walk at the same time as I was. Quite funny really. I watch how she does things, how she stands up and things like this and think oh, that's how I should be doing it, is it?

John

Hi, I'm John Brown and I'm 57 today. And I'm here to talk to you about my stroke and what I can do now two years after it. This is a photograph of my daughter Jennifer. She was married about six months, seven months after my stroke, and she was one of the reasons why I had to make sure that I got up on my feet as quickly as possible. My first objective was to get down to the post box, which is about 50 yards away. This was my first goal and it took me about two months after

I came out of hospital in the March to get to this, but I had to do it because wanted to be able, as I said before, walk at my daughter's wedding.

Rosemary

Hello, I'm Rosemary Gow. I live in sheltered housing in Penicuik. Come in please. Well, I had the stroke in May two years ago, and I was in hospital for six or seven weeks and Isabel and her husband came visiting me, and one day when Isabel came in, she said I think it would be a help if -- now you correct me, Isabel, because I'm not awful clear at remembering exactly it'd be a help if you came out to stay in Penicuik.

Isabel

I felt that if she was out here she would be nearer if she needed help, whereas in town. I was a good half to three quarters of an hour away. Here I was only five minutes away if she needed any help. I have my sister to turn to. Quite a lot of people in sheltered housing do not have a relative to turn to.

Neil

I'm Neil Sharp. I had a stroke. I had a stroke -- what's the time?

Linda

Four years ago.

Neil

Four years ago.

Linda

He'd no speech right away. I mean, he couldn't communicate at all. He was disorientated and he was paralysed down the one side and he couldn't -- he couldn't swallow. But mainly he was unable to communicate. That was the worst part about it. Those first two weeks he'd no speech at all so it was difficult for him to say how he was feeling or what was happening.

Linda

This is the book that the hospital made up for Neil. It just basically told who he was, and that he'd had a stroke and telling anyone that needed to know that he was dysphasic and that he'd speech problems and where his brain was actually damaged, and a bit about his background, his family and who the family members were. And then they had, you had bits for communicating a thumbs up for yes and down for no, and different faces so that he could say whether he was happy or not.

And maybe some of the things he wanted, you know, obviously things like the toilet and whether he needed his glasses or whether he wanted his writing pad to try and communicate. And days of the week and numbers. Neil actually remembered his numbers quite well, although he couldn't read properly and he couldn't write sentences or anything. He could draw.

Rosemary

I never was very quick as Isabel will agree. I never was very quick at walking or moving around, but I'm slower now. Both in mind and in movement.

Isabel

I help her with shopping although she's now much better than she was, and she's getting the hang of the bathing now, although she still likes to have someone beside her just in case anything should happen.

David

I am supposed to go up and down these stairs once a day to keep my leg working and keep the blood flowing and what have you, but I actually want to get upstairs. It's motivation as much as anything. It is hard work. There's 17 steps, I know that, I've counted them so many times.

John

When I had my stroke, we had to have this handrail replaced, and also a second one put in.

David

Of course I can only go up staircases that have got a handrail on the right hand side. There isn't one on the left, so I've got to come down backwards as well.

John

Initially I would take the steps one at a time like this.

David

Only five to go.

John

Now I can move with just one hand, and sometimes I can take both hands off and do it.

David

And this is the room I want to get into. It's so much determination and motivation to get up those stairs. This is my pride and joy. This is my model railway room.

Rosemary

You watching your time, Isabel?

Isabel

Yes, dear.

Rosemary

If you're too dependent, you keep on depending on people and eventually you give in, because you find that you're not able to do it yourself, and you depend on other folk to do it whereas if you make the attempt, you get the satisfaction of knowing you have tried.

John

Initially I wasn't able to put cups away or get them down from cupboards like I can now. The problem was that initially when I put it up after washing it, I couldn't release it. So I had to pull it, but now as you can see, I can put it down, I can lift it up and put it away and close the cupboard door. I'd gone to the Western General. One of the exercises I had to do was to sit behind a desk and gradually thread balls onto a piece of string, which I thought was a waste of time, having to keep my elbow on the table. But obviously I realise now they were all designed to help very small movements. One of the things my counsellor said was the best thing to do is to try and use your right hand as often as possible, and one of the targets you want to aim at is being able to write your name or write a cheque because when I first had my stroke, my wife had to have power of attorney for me. It's slow, but if I take my time, it's legible.

Female

Neil had his stroke on the left side of his brain which affected the right side of his body and he's naturally right handed, so he had to learn to use his left hand again. But quite quickly he started drawing with it to try, because he couldn't speak, to try and tell us what he wanted to say, and that's basically how the art group thing came about. Now he's started painting. I think this was the first attempt, wasn't it?

Neil

Uh huh.

Linda

You had at painting.

Neil

Yes

Linda

He likes countryside. He likes being out and about don't you, and this was the second one, was it?

Neil

Uh huh.

Linda

This was his latest one. And as you can see, he's getting brighter and his colours are getting better aren't they? Your mixing of colours is getting better.

David

And of course, social services locally have supplied me with a lot of equipment everything from a trolley to aids for the kitchen, to the lifting seat for the bath, to the raised seat for the toilet all sorts of things really. The biggest adaptations that have had to be made to the house, as you might imagine, are in the bathroom area. If you come into the bathroom here. I've been supplied with a raised toilet seat for the toilet. That gives me a six inch raise, and then a handrail to help me stand up again. The biggest problem is I can't get in and out of the bath unaided so what we've got is it's called a manga booster seat. You fill the bath with water in the normal way, pump the seat up and sit on it and then when you're ready to go into the water, you release the pressure and down you go. And then to come up again, you turn on the compressor and it pumps the bellows up until you're sitting on the edge of the bath, and from there I can stand up. And that enables me to have a bath every day, although we do have a care assistant that visits the house every morning for now to help me with that. We do try to sit at a proper table to have meals. We think it's good for the girls, not to mention me. What? You don't want that bit? Just put it on the side of your plate then. Here's something else that social services have provided. In addition to steps the other thing I have trouble with is normal height chairs, so the plan is in every room we have a chair on raised legs. So this one here that I'm sitting on, it has metal extensions. In the lounge, I have an ordinary armchair which is on big plastic blocks, but in each case it raises the chair by about six inches which is what I need.

John

With physiotherapy and just working on exercises, I can manage to prepare myself a meal, I can make tea, I can butter bread or cut you food or open a tin, all of which I can do now. I also use a couple of cans of soup or large cans of beans to help exercise this shoulder, which is still fairly weak. And I practise this almost every day, perhaps for five or ten minutes. When I go to the gym I use small dumb bells. Doing things naturally, ie dancing, is as good as aerobic exercise, so sometimes when people aren't around and I can stick a tape on and shake around the house.

Rosemary

Well it took a wee while to settle, because I've never been a good mixer. I mean, I'm all right with a small crowd, one or two people, but if there's a bigger crowd I just don't feel so much at ease. But I mean, that isn't a new thing, I've been like that all my life. But I've settled now and got to know people and I'm on first name terms with most of the ladies and gentlemen here. Thanks Alan.

Isabel

Jeremy Beadle at the back as well, is he?

Rosemary

Well don't block the way for the star. I'm the star.

Isabel

Sorry.

Rosemary

The meetings are every week on a Wednesday. Sometimes we go outings, maybe go to a hotel, outside of Penicuik, and have tea and a sandwich and cakes, or sometimes we go a run somewhere. Ethel and among others and I play dominoes this afternoon. We always sit together at the same table and have a wee chat in between the game of dominoes and the next game.

Linda

I think it's one of the things he can do for quite a long period of time without him getting tired or his brain sort of closing down on him, isn't it?

Neil

Uh huh, uh huh.

Linda

Yeah. Whereas speaking makes you tired and difficult. Your art seems to be something you can do for quite long periods of time, isn't it?

Neil

Yes. Well, painting of a

Linda

Of the countryside, or just anything?

Neil

Paper.

Linda

Oh Paper.

Neil

It speaks, has the same as

Linda

It's the same as speaking.

Neil

Yes.

Linda

But you're putting it on paper. Yeah.

Rosemary

Isabel supported me in a lot of ways but now I'm managing to gain a bit more independence. She used to help me with my bathing, my shopping, and advise me about different things, but now I'm able to do wee bits more myself.

Neil

My wife and I went shopping in Edinburgh about three weeks ago and I said to her this time last year I really needed to be pushed around in my wheelchair if we went to do shopping, but now we don't need it today. You're here for the chair?

Male

I've come for the chair.

Neil

I'll get it, it's in the garage.

Male

Thanks very much.

Neil

The Astley Ainslie hospital are coming to take away my wheelchair which they gave me about 18 months ago, and send it back and give it to someone else.

Male

I'll get you to sign for that, if you can.

Janet

Everybody said to me oh the fact that you've got two very young children will really motivate him to get on and so on, and he has. I mean, he's made enormous steps forward, literally.

David

I'm back at work, largely because of an initiative by the Employment Agency. They pay for taxis to take me to and from my place of work. I'll see you tonight. Yeah. Off to work to keep the girls in the style to which they're rapidly becoming accustomed. It's not the only reason for doing it, but a pretty important one, and they make a contribution towards special equipment which I need which isn't very much. Things like a hands free telephone has been the only one so far.

Rosemary

And I hope through time to become more independent. I'll be glad of help too from Isabel, and glad of her advice, but at the same time, I'll have to try to start living my own life more completely.

David

I've been back at work part time eight weeks now. I started off three mornings a week and it's increasing by half a day a week. I'll be full time by the second week in June. So it gives me something different to think about. Right, I'll just tackle these steps.

John

Nice to see that going. A sort of big step I think, you know, two years after having it delivered to us, it's nice to see it going away.

Linda

Every day he gets a bit better, don't you?

Neil

Yes, yes.

Linda

Every day you get another wee skill back. And a wee bit of his speech comes back, or he finds it easier to communicate some days than others.

Neil

Uh huh, uh huh.