

A FAMILY RECOVERS

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On December 14, 1992 at 6:33 PM, tragedy struck my family. The family suffered a light to moderate stroke. Although I suffered the physical damage, the family unit was affected in other ways as well. Shock, fear, uncertainty, anger, sympathy and remorse are some of the emotions my family and I experienced along the road to recovery.

I accepted my condition, I think, rather well. I had high blood pressure medication to take daily, but I chose to take it on my schedule, and as a result, a small blood vessel ruptured at the base of my brain. My present condition is of my own making. I have left-side weakness. I am unable to use my left hand, have limited use of the arm and I wear a leg brace to aid in my walking.

During my nine weeks in rehab, the family started the long journey to recovery. As I learned to care for and dress myself with one hand, it became apparent to me that I would not be a burden on my family, which was and still is my greatest fear. Frequent visits from family and friends, cards and prayers and interaction with other stroke survivors in rehab played a major role in my family's recovery. The family began to smile and laugh more. I left rehab with a leg brace, my left arm in a sling, and walking with a quad cane. I drove home from rehab.

At home, I continued to get better. I was determined to be as independent as I could safely be. The family saw 'Dad' as not the problem they thought I might be. They adjusted to a sodium reduced diet and some bland tasting meals with a few frowns. My wife would become frustrated with me at times because I seemed not to want her to help or she would see me struggle to do some tasks without asking for help. Then one day she said, "Louis, I guess I have to learn how to help you." I also had to learn how to accept help and to allow someone to help me.

I returned to work after nine months. I worked as a manager in the data processing field with a small amount of hands-on duties. I set my own time frame and date to return to work. I was ready physically after three months, but I chose nine to give myself time to heal emotionally. I worked six more years and retired at 57 yrs. of age with full benefits. I take pleasure in being a research subject. I feel good about myself trying to be a vehicle to discover new methods of recovery.

The family has also healed. I'd like to share some of the family's comments about our healing. At the time of my stroke, my four sons were 23, 18, 15, and 13 yrs. of age. What stood out to them was my upbeat spirit, determination to be independent, and my refusal to be helped with things I could do. My wife thinks I'm still stubborn and I agree up to a point. She is very grateful and thankful that I am still here. She needed me to finish what we started (to raise 'four hard headed boys').

My youngest son, Chris, said he had been accustomed to seeing me show his older brothers various father-son type things. I had shown him a lot also, but not how to drive a car or read a map. In fact, we had never even arm wrestled. But in time, all of these things did come to pass. Chris told me that he learned from my stroke recovery that life is about preparation. He also learned that stubbornness, as in my case of not taking my medication as directed, can have life-long disadvantages. He said my refusal to give up, my tenacity, my attitude and will to be independent has made him proud to be my son. In his own words... "I am blessed to say these days, my dad's mobility is only limited by the fact he doesn't have wings on his back. Otherwise, anything he wishes to do, he does."

Patrick, my second youngest son, also said, "Dad, if I had to take care of you, it would not be a burden. How could it be? You took care of me all my short life, didn't you?"

These comments from my family, and my own stroke recovery, have made me a proud man, husband, and father.