

A CHANGE IN MY LIFE

By Norm Shapiro

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In 1994, I had a stroke. My stroke left me with my right leg and arm paralyzed and they would not move. A couple of weeks after my stroke, I received an evaluation and started physical therapy. I began wearing a brace on my leg and continued physical therapy on an outpatient basis. I learned to use my right leg and was able to walk somewhat. Now, everything I do is dependent on my left side. I use my left hand to perform most common tasks. It has been difficult for me to get used to functioning after the stroke. Dressing and putting on my shoes with one hand continues to be difficult. But I've gotten used to it.

In my mind, I always think that someday I will get better and be able to use my entire body. A week after the stroke while walking with a cane, I thought to myself that this was temporary, that I would be able to throw away the cane and walk without it soon. But for a long time I needed the cane to walk. Eventually, with therapy and a lot of effort I was able to walk without the cane.

With rehabilitation I have been able to recover. It helped when I contacted a local hospital and began doing volunteer work in a rehabilitation section. I volunteered in a section where there were stroke patients, people with aneurysms, and brain injuries. Watching these people work toward their recovery gave me inspiration for my own recovery. It felt good to me when they would gain motivation from me for their recovery. It felt rewarding emotionally to do this volunteer work. I realized I liked helping the other patients with disabilities.

I find I am very grateful to my family, my wife, children, and grandchildren, for the love, support, and help they have given me during my recovery. Sometimes I will sit quietly in my chair in the family room and reflect on how much the people in my life have helped me.

With the stroke my personality changed. It changed so much that I do not recognize the old me. For example, I never used to be considerate or care about anyone else but me. Now, because of the stroke, I have learned a great deal about myself, and am able to better understand the problems of others. I think I was a tyrant and impatient with other people before my stroke. Now, due to the stroke, I am much more patient and understanding of my family and other people, especially my friends. I liked to talk all the time and it was usually about me. Now I've learned to listen more and understand the daily problems that others face. I have become more mellow and make friends more easily. This makes me feel better.

Before the stroke I was a practicing podiatrist, a foot doctor. A year after my stroke, I sold my practice. I still go to the office and visit with my old friends and patients. I have learned from them that I was well regarded by my patients during my thirty nine years of practice.

During the first few months after my stroke, I just sat around the house feeling depressed. The lack of function in my right hand and arm continued to make me depressed. During this time, my son bought me a ceramic statute of a harlequin clown along with paint and paint brushes. I proceeded to paint the clown with the limited use I had of my left hand. While painting the clown, my depression subsided and I felt good. I was doing something that really interested me. The painting seemed to be good therapy for my depression.

After I finished painting the clown I went to the store and bought other ceramic statutes of clowns and cowboys and proceeded to paint them. During this time, I met a woman who owned a store that sold ceramic figures. She had her own kilns and ovens. Once I was able to cure my own ceramic statutes in her kilns, I went crazy. I bought, painted and cured many statutes. I have 60 or 70 finished statutes of Santa Clauses, angels, cowboys and others. I kept some and some I gave to therapists and friends. Painting these statutes was wonderful therapy for my left hand. Unfortunately, I've gotten away from the painting and don't do it any more.

When I had my stroke I thought my life was over. Through therapy and a hobby that captured my interest, I recovered most of my physical function and relieved my depression. My volunteer work has allowed me to help others and become a more outgoing and understanding person. Now, it's like I have added a whole new dimension and perspective to my life.