

# DRIVING — MY GNAWING ANGUISH

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My gnawing anguish was to be able to drive a car 11 years after my stroke. For a long time, I felt helpless not being able to drive our car. I felt like my last bit of independence was taken from me. Day after day, I constantly thought about driving. Before my stroke, I had driven for approximately 40 years. I wanted to go on my own and be independent as I used to be prior to my stroke. I knew I was in for much preparation in order to be able to drive again, such as renewing my expired driver's license. This required an eye test, a written test and a driving test - all of which I managed to pass.

My spouse, Angelo, was very good about taking me where I needed to go, such as doctor and hair appointments, grocery shopping, department stores and any other places I needed to go - and I wanted to go! But my goal was always to drive my self. In fact, Ang was too good. He did not want me to drive because he was afraid that my reflexes were not good enough. So he traveled in fear all the time that I would want to drive on my own.

My determination had a profound effect on my husband. He was tired of hearing me whine and started to give in to my demands after a while. This started to happen when he needed a ride somewhere because his vision was starting to fail. I was all that was available at the time. This was the beginning of my not so new adventure. So, I started to drive short trips.

About three months ago, he started to try and help me with my driving. He called it relearning a skill. I called it practice. He did not know that I was terrified and would constantly pray while driving, taking nothing for granted. I also had another critic, my daughter, Sheri. She would tell me I have to turn my head more to the left because of a blind spot which I have a tendency to ignore. And my third critic was my son, Mark, who never sees me do anything wrong, although he rarely drives with me. At first, I had a hostile attitude towards my critics instead of trying to appreciate their perspective on my driving habits. But now I have come to realize that they cared enough to comment at all.

Some of the mistakes are worth mentioning, so here goes. With my impairment, I have a tendency to ignore my left side. One day, around Super Bowl Sunday, I was on my way to get groceries for our guests. I pulled out onto the highway. So far, all was good. Then I started to change lanes and it happened! Without turning to check my blind spot, I sideswiped another car. I immediately turned back into my lane. The damage was slight. No one got hurt. I wasn't sure if it was me ignoring my left side or the blazing sun in my eyes.

Another incident occurred when I pulled into a station to get gas. After completing our fill-up, I proceeded to exit the station. Again, ignoring my left side, I slightly scraped the car door on a post leaving red paint on the side. Again, luck was with me. When I returned home, I managed to rub the paint off and could not see any damage.

I am finally realizing that it sure is better to be safe than sorry, especially since sometimes I am called upon to pick up my grandchildren from school and to me they are the most precious cargo to be placed in my care. So I have decided to drop the attitude and enjoy the ride. I am reconsidering my desire to drive. I am a strong willed person, so I will put my new attitude to the test before quitting altogether. I know my desire to drive is not as fulfilling as I thought it would be. As the old saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for." In my case, as my wish has come true, I've had to reevaluate my priorities.