

MY JOURNEY TO SURVIVE

By Cynthia Frazier

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For some reason, the night that I had my first stroke stays in my mind all of the time. I guess it's because it was the start of my long journey to survive. I remember getting off from work, coming home and being so tired that I lay down to take a nap. When I woke up about four or five hours later, I couldn't move my arm from under me. I tried and tried, but couldn't do it. It was a frightening experience I will never forget. Somehow I got myself up to sit on the side of the bed and I sat there for a while. Then I got all of my feeling back, got up and went to the bathroom and went back to sleep. When I woke up the second time, it was the same thing all over again. My arm was under me and I couldn't move it. This time, I couldn't even sit up. I had to roll myself out of the bed to the floor and make my way to the front door. My girlfriend lived next door, so I called and called her. I was hysterical with fear and I still didn't know what was happening to me. When she came to the door, she called the paramedics to take me to the hospital. After being in the hospital for a few days, I was sent to rehabilitation. I was there for a couple of months. It took hard, daily work, but it helped a lot.

When I finally came home, I was confined to a wheelchair. I hate to remember that time. It was a difficult period of adjustment and I didn't like how others treated me as if I was going to break. I was limited in so many things. But several members of my family and friends were living in my building, so I had help. I also had a helper who came and helped me clean up. One surprise was that the church I was attending took up a big collection for me. That was the first time something like that had happened to me and I really appreciated it. It was so unexpected. I cried tears of gratitude.

Later I moved to a new home and then in 1999, I was smoking a lot of crack. I had had a drug problem before my first stroke. After the stroke, I was bored and wanted to escape my new life. I cut myself off from everyone but other users. Crack became my best friend. One day a friend of mine and I got high all day and all night. When I woke up the next day, I knew I was sick. I wound up back in the hospital with another stroke and then back to rehabilitation again. This was rather embarrassing because they knew the reason why it happened again. I think they were fed up with me. I wasn't there long before I was sent back home, but within months, I got sick again and I was back in the hospital. This time I was sent to a nursing home to try to regroup. I had hit bottom. It was a terrible time for me. My sons came to my side and I realized how much love they had for me. Maybe I doubted it before, but now I decided I would never hurt them as I had before. With that decision, my life began to turn around. From there, I hooked up with an independent living center. I was able to get into subsidized housing where I live now. I have not messed around with drugs in years. I am doing much better, and

I have no intentions of going back. I know what the drugs did to my health, and now I have a will to live. I still don't know the moral of my story because I am still living it. I guess it is to always remember the consequences of your actions. The lesson is to survive and learn from them.