



“ I HAD A STROKE AND WOKE UP WITH A FRENCH ACCENT

Judi Green used to speak what she called “country Australian” until a stroke in her 30s left her unable to talk. When she finally did, the results were unusual. As told to **Lorraine Sathicq**

“**P**eople often ask me if I’m French and are surprised when I tell them I’m from Tamworth. I’ve had this accent for years now and I’ll probably have it forever. I hope so anyway – I’m going to Europe in a few weeks so I’ll fit right in. My speech patterns, along with many other things, changed the day I had a stroke that affected the part of my brain responsible for language. The result was a condition called aphasia. It meant I had to learn to speak, read and write from scratch.

“I was fit, active, had two young children and a promising career but my life changed in the blink of an eye. That day, my sister Robynne and I had just had our nails done and I was driving us back to our parents’ house. We were almost there when I heard a loud bang and I knew it came from inside my head.

“Suddenly I had no idea how to drive my own car. I saw street signs I couldn’t understand and traffic lights with three colours

that meant nothing to me. My sister was asking questions but I couldn’t answer so I just reached out and touched her cheek. I knew I should stop the car but I didn’t know which pedal was the brake so when we reached home, I just pressed both pedals at the same time and the car stopped.

“Robynne’s husband was there and because his father had suffered a stroke he recognised the signs right away. When we got to the hospital though, the triage nurse thought I was on drugs because I couldn’t talk. It was terrifying – I spent three days on my back unable to communicate or move any part of my body except my eyes. I was three months in a rehabilitation unit where most of the other people were in their 80s and it felt a bit like God’s waiting room.

“The stroke affected my memory too. I saw my 10 year-old son and my four-year-old daughter stroked my arm. She told me I was going to be OK and I thought, ‘what a lovely little girl’, but I had no idea she was mine.

“It’s been a long, difficult road to




get where I am now. It took years of overcoming emotional and physical challenges to recover. I had speech therapy and I had to learn to walk using parallel bars which was frustrating because each step seemed to take forever. I just didn't want to be there and I was probably a trying patient.

"It was hard work but with the right attitude and enough support it's possible to get your life back after a stroke.

"I quite like my accent although I didn't even know I had one until my brother got me a mobile phone and I heard my own voice on the

message-bank recording. Now there are few signs I've had a stroke apart from a slight laziness on my right side when I get tired.

"I've worked to raise funds and public awareness through the annual Stroke of Art Exhibition, my children are grown up and doing well - I'm really proud of them. Through my work with Stroke of Art I met and married Dr Christopher Green. My life is wonderful now and sometimes I wonder if someone planned all this I'm grateful for everything - I have enjoyment and peace every day." 





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Did you know?

More than 80,000 Aussies have trouble communicating due to aphasia. Experts liken the experience to suddenly finding yourself in a foreign country where nobody speaks your language. There is no treatment or cure available so sufferers have to relearn their own language.

Be prepared and act promptly

+ Know the signs.

After heart disease, stroke is the biggest single killer of Australians and it can strike at any age. Surviving a stroke may depend on how quickly it's recognised and acted upon.

+ The National Stroke Foundation urges us to think FAST:

F. Check their **F**ace. Has their mouth drooped?

A. Can they lift both **A**rms?

S. Is their **S**peech slurred?

T. **T**ime is critical. If you see any of these signs call 000 promptly.

+ Are you at risk?

Age, family history and gender (men are more at risk than women) are major risk factors but you can reduce your risk by:

+ Not smoking.

+ Lowering your cholesterol.

+ Maintaining a healthy weight.

+ Controlling high blood pressure and diabetes.

+ Limiting alcohol consumption.

For more information visit

www.strokefoundation.com.au





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