

My One Stroke Handicap

Geoff Howard

It was Wednesday 15th of May 2019 when my life turned upside down.

After a 40 year career as an architect i was enjoying a long and happy retirement, including going to the cinema and theatre, singing in choirs, learning the cello, visiting friends, sailing my small boat off the East Coast, joining a watercolour painting group, going on holidays abroad, and seeing my family.

Then, on that day as I got out of bed I fell on the floor and could not get up. My wife Beverley rang for an ambulance and two paramedics carried me downstairs and took me to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich. There, I was examined, asked several times to state my name, address and date of birth, and to count backwards from a hundred in sevens. Having decided that I still had most of my marbles, the medics eventually concluded that a stroke had paralysed my right side by knocking out that part of the left hand side of my brain which controlled it.

I was taken to the Stroke Unit at the Princess Royal Hospital in Bromley, and put in a four- bed observation ward.

At this time I felt that my life was coming to its end, and spent some sleepless nights planning my funeral arrangements. A visit by a couple of young and attractive physiotherapists persuaded me that my life had still some time to run, and I quickly adopted a more positive attitude to my situation.

After a few days I was transferred to the Stroke Rehabilitation Ward at Lewisham Hospital where I had daily visits by the physio team. My wall by this time was covered by "get well soon" cards from relatives and friends, and I realised that I had an obligation to do just that! Beverley would come each day at 2pm, and sometimes take me in a wheelchair to the cafe downstairs for a coffee and muffin, and on fine days we would go into Ladywell Fields park and watch the tennis players.

On my 87th birthday on 3rd July, she wheeled me to the cafe in the park where she had secretly arranged a tea party and had invited lots of friends to come along! It was the best birthday treat I had ever had.

For weeks I had been hoping to be able to attend the wedding of our son Dominic and his bride Jessica in Cambridgeshire on 8th July, but it became increasingly obvious that it would not be possible. On the day, friends Tessa and Ray came to be with me, and brought some cake and bubbly to celebrate the occasion. Later photographs and videos showed what a beautiful day it had been.

After eight weeks I was discharged from hospital and sent home, where the ground floor sitting room had been converted into an emergency ward, with hospital bed, wheelchair, standing hoist, table trolley, and various other items. How wonderful to be at home with Beverley again, and to gaze out of the conservatory to the flower-filled garden. And to taste home cooking again! My daily routine is ruled by the teams of carers who, four times a day, attend to my personal needs, washing, dressing, and getting me in and out of bed. A much undervalued service.

As I make snail's progress towards recovery, I am encouraged by the prayers and support of friends at St Andrew's and elsewhere, and ever grateful for the self-giving love of my dear wife, whose life has also been turned upside down.

Should I blame God for inflicting this undeserved punishment on me? Or should I praise Him for creating a society which cares for those who are afflicted by such random acts of Nature?

With sincere greetings and love to all.

Geoff Howard