

## **My Stroke Story – Lorraine Rowsell**

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011. I hadn't long been returned to work following a horrendous illness in 2010 where I'd been admitted to intensive care with multiple organ failure, given 24 hours to live and all my wonderful family called in to say their last goodbyes. They weren't getting away from me that easily though! I survived and after 4 weeks in intensive care and 3 weeks in a general ward I returned home and started the long road to recovery.

Off on a much needed holiday to Devon in July 2011, I was suffering from horrendous headaches. I managed a few days but spent much of the time in bed struggling to cope. My husband Andy decided to bring me home but on the way home popped into a Caravan Sales shop. I decided to stay in the car and by the time he returned I was unable to speak coherently or make any sense, he got me home ASAP and called NHS Direct who advised an immediate trip to A&E Bristol.

I can't remember the full story but it took a few days before a severe stroke was diagnosed. I do remember I was on my own when they told me and when Andy arrived for visiting hours I sobbed for so long it took him ages to discover what it was they'd told me. I was unable to speak properly, had no idea of who I was, where I was, or indeed anything. Andy brought me in a Sudoku book to pass the hours and I didn't understand it or numbers. Not easy for an accountant to take on board. I cried some more.

In need of the beds, they let me go home after ten days. After I'd passed the test of making a cup of tea. Tears streamed down my face because I couldn't remember where you put the tea bags or water. But I "passed" the test nonetheless and was sent home.

And then the nightmare began. I was considered non urgent (I'd made the tea after all) and waited and waited for someone to come and see me. I was scared, lonely, depressed, and emotional and didn't know what to do. Nor did my family, my husband and two beautiful children. Then the Stroke Association arrived and started to signpost me in the right direction.

Through sheer determination I learnt to speak again, walk a decent distance (not far just decent), learnt to use a computer, learnt to speak to others again. I managed, with the help of Andy, to manage my panics and anxiety, learnt when not to go into supermarkets (or how to walk out of them when I was scared). I learnt to live again. It's not easy, the panic and anxiety is always there. The hidden sides of stroke.

That's when I realised that others in my home town might not have the same support. So with the help of another stroke survivor, we set up the Portishead Stroke Drop In Centre in 2012. We aim to provide information, support, a friendly ear and sometimes just a big hug. To both survivor and carer. It's been a fantastic success.

Not long after that I volunteered to help at the Stroke Association Nailsea Club which saw me take the Chairmanship at the end of 2013 (how the hell did that happen?). We used to meet weekly but post the pandemic now meet twice monthly. We do a variety of events, trips, talks and basically anything that inspires and helps stroke survivors realise they can achieve so much and lead a wonderful life regardless of the stroke. Or is it because of the stroke?