

Alicia Humphrey

25 years old

Alicia Humphrey was twenty-five years old when she had her stroke. She was at home with two of her three children, ages three and two. Her project that day was cleaning out all the children's drawers and closets. A friend from nursing school called in the middle of this clean-up project with an enticing offer.



Alicia: Lisa, my friend from nursing school, called asking if I wanted to go to lunch. I had already eaten lunch with my kids by then, so I declined. But I thought better of it and called her back and asked her if she wanted to go for a walk instead. She agreed and said that she would get ready and call me back. The crazy thing about this was that until that day I had not heard from Lisa for three months. I started getting everybody ready to go down to the park.

I finally got to go into the bathroom after everyone else. I noticed when I was sitting down that I was drooling. The only thing that crossed my mind was, "Hmm. That's weird." Then I noticed some numbness in my left hand. I was trying to grab something and couldn't do it. It felt like my left hand was half dead. I did not have a headache at that point.

Lisa did not live very far away so I had to hurry because she would be arriving soon. I remember sitting there for a while. I don't even remember what I was trying to grab, but whatever

it was I ended up dropping it. And I remember thinking to myself, "Why am I having such a hard time?"

I didn't know why I was weak. Sitting there trying to stabilize myself, it seemed that my left side was a little weaker. The symptoms started in my face, went to my arm, and then to my leg. It was a small bathroom, so you've got to watch out when you sit down so your head doesn't hit the sink. Also, you never know what's on the floor after the kids have been in there. I started feeling increasingly weak on the left side and I think I started to sway a little because I felt like I was losing my balance, going towards the left side. I knew I was going to fall off the toilet, so instead of fighting it I just went with it. I rolled off the toilet. The door was open. It's always open because the kids don't let me go to the bathroom with the door closed. I have the living room all baby-gated so they can't get to the front door and get out. So, basically, when I rolled off the toilet, I landed in the living room.

Alicia, a twenty-five-year-old nursing student at home with two of her three children rolled off the bathroom stool into her living room. She was now flat on her back, helpless and unable to get up.

Alicia: I just lay there for a minute trying to think of how to get up. Normally, getting up is something you just do. You don't think about it. I was lying on my back rocking from side to side trying to get enough momentum to get up. The phone began to ring and I couldn't get to it. My three-year-old got the phone for me. It was Lisa telling me she was on her way. I said kind of jokingly, "I've fallen and I cannot get up!"

My words were pretty slurred and I don't think she could understand me very well. She was trying to figure out what was going on. She asked if I was hurt, and I said, "No, I fell off the toilet." I kept telling her I was okay. She got here in about fifteen minutes. The front windows were open, but our kitchen table was pushed up against the windows. The door was locked. Lisa found it impossible to get in through the window and unlock the door. She could hear me but was unable to see me because I was still lying on the floor. I could hear her yelling in the window to send the kids over and unlock the door.

I was trying to tell her they couldn't because the baby gate was up. But she said she could not understand anything I was saying. I was slurring my words too badly.

When Lisa arrived, she knew that Alicia was in trouble. She called her mother and Alicia's husband. When Lisa's mother arrived, she ripped out the window screen, opened the door and called 911. The 911 responders were let in through the front door and found Alicia lying on her stomach with a pillow under her head. She was still confused and her speech was slurred.

Alicia: They kept asking me if I had hit my head and I told them that I had fallen off the stool. By then they could see that I couldn't use my left side. Lisa's mom told me that my arm was all folded up under me. I was lying on it and didn't know it. I couldn't feel anything on my left side.

The 911 responders determined that Alicia had had a stroke.

Alicia: Once we were in the ambulance, they asked me where I wanted to go. I told them that I worked for a nearby hospital so that would be a natural choice. They said that was not the best place because they really weren't able to take care of the symptoms I had. So they decided to take me to Saint Luke's Stroke Center for an attempt at stroke reversal. When we got to the ER I was blind in my left eye and had left-sided neglect [couldn't recognize her own limbs]. They started an IV in my left hand, and I was like: "What the heck? Where did that come from?" I now had a headache and it was on the right side of my head."

She barely remembered her brief, but busy stay in the ER.

Alicia: They kept asking me to do stuff I could not do and my head hurt so bad I couldn't think. The stroke team explained the options of the clot retrieval process to my husband and my mother.

The procedure utilized the clot buster, tPA, and the Merci® Retrieval system.

Alicia: I don't remember any of the procedure but I do remember them telling me about it. After it was all over, the stroke neurologist asked me to move my foot. I did not know if I was doing it. I remember it was so weird for someone to ask me to do something that seemed so natural. Then I remember moving my foot. I could only do it for a few seconds because it felt so heavy. Then he asked me to move my hand; he put his hand in my left hand and I squeezed it. I think it surprised him because he didn't think I would get my left hand back at all. I remember my mom commenting on the look of surprise on his face when I moved that left hand!

Alicia knew her stroke reversal had been started by a friend she had not seen for three months, and it still puzzles her how it happened that Lisa had called that day.

Alicia: I had good luck. Most of it was just chance. To think that Lisa called that day of all days. If she had not come and found me, I would have been on my back until 10 p.m. that night when my husband comes home from work.

Alicia returned to work and school two weeks after her stroke reversal and graduated with her BSN (Bachelor's of Science in Nursing).



COMMENTS

Alicia was lucky that her friend Lisa come by that day. Without Lisa's arrival, the calls to her mother and subsequent 911 call, Alicia might have ended up with serious complications of a stroke. Or, as Alicia noted, she might have been on her back until ten o'clock that night with no chance of an attempt at stroke reversal. The first responder team diagnosed her condition as an acute stroke. They knew of Saint Luke's Stroke Center and took her there immediately.



