

# Kerri Dabney

## 39 years old

Stroke warnings may occur minutes, hours, days or months prior to a stroke. They are often confusing to both the doctor and the patient. These warnings are called “transient ischemic attacks,” often abbreviated as TIAs. Kerri Dabney had her first stroke at age thirty-seven, but she probably had had multiple TIAs prior to her first stroke.



Rodney begins the story of his wife’s two strokes and multiple presumed TIAs.

*Rodney: Kerri and I were sitting together with a group of our friends in a bar. We were laughing and having a good old time when suddenly she fell over against me. She seemed to pass out. I shook her but she didn’t come around. I thought her sugar level was low so we tried to give her some Mountain Dew™ to pick her sugar back up, but she spit it out. She didn’t really talk; she mumbled. The left side of her face had fallen, and as soon as I heard her speak and she looked at me, I thought, “Oh God! She has had a stroke.” Several of our friends there were nurses, and when they saw her they agreed, so we called an ambulance and off to the hospital she went.*

*Kerri: I couldn’t feel anything on my left side. While I was touching my friend’s arm, I couldn’t feel the difference between her arm and mine. My face was completely down and I couldn’t*

*make any sounds. I tried but they were real guttural. At the hospital they treated me with heparin. They kept me in the hospital for a few days. I never went back to that hospital.*

Heparin is a blood thinner. Unfortunately, it has no effect on stroke and is not a stroke reversal treatment. At the time of Kerri's first stroke, tPA had been available for six years; yet it was not offered or recommended for her.

*Kerri: I was placed on a "cocktail" of drugs and told not to drive for one year. Finally, I went back to school. I had stopped smoking and I stayed on my medication for high blood pressure.*

Prior to the first stroke Kerri had been alert to some probable stroke warning signs.

*Kerri: They [possible warning signs] lasted just a few minutes. I felt off kilter. For example, when I got my test paper in my anatomy class I couldn't tell you a single thing on the test. It was complete gibberish. I didn't have a clue what I was supposed to write. I couldn't talk right. I felt kind of numb, and my vision was blurry. I felt like I wasn't in control, like I wasn't in my body.*

*For a couple of years I had had almost a dozen of these episodes, yet nobody knew that I was having mini-strokes. I'd even gone to the doctor and explained what was happening. I told him about the blurred vision and how bad I felt. The doctor told me it was the stress of nursing school and/or my blood sugar. You don't look for somebody my age to be having strokes, especially up here in a rural area. They're not going to check that.*

Prior to her first stroke Kerri may have been having multiple TIAs. Kerri and Rodney were not satisfied that the medical investigation after her first stroke was thorough enough. Something was wrong, and they were not getting any answers.

The events leading to her second stroke were tragic for her father but lifesaving for her. It was a strange twist of fate.

*Kerri: My dad had cancer and was hospitalized with pneumonia at a medical center in Kansas City. One day I got a call telling me to get there right away. We got there in three hours after driving through a terrible snowstorm. He died a few minutes after we arrived.*

Kerri had little memory of the events following her father's death. The funeral took place the next day, a Saturday.

*Kerri: I remember getting out of the shower on the day of the funeral and falling in this tiny bathroom, but I don't remember hitting anything.*

*Rodney: On the day of the funeral she kept saying that the top of her head hurt. I never thought anything about it. I just figured it was stress.*

*Kerri complained off and on about a headache all day but she was very coherent. The headache started on Friday, the day before what turned out to be her second stroke. On the day of the funeral she went in to take a shower, and suddenly I heard a thump coming from the bathroom. She had fallen over, hit the stool and torn herself up in the fall. I bent down to pick her up and as soon as she talked, I knew ... As soon as she*

*spoke, I knew she had had another stroke. Her speech was slurred. I told her mom, who called 911.*

*I got her dressed and tried to get her up on the bed but she was paralyzed. She could not help. The EMTs got there immediately. When they came in, I said, "She had a stroke before and there's a pretty good chance this is another one." After looking her over a little bit, they agreed. Then they asked where I wanted to take her. I said, "I don't know! Where's the best place to take her for a stroke?"*

The paramedics answered that if they were having a stroke, they would go to the Stroke Center at Saint Luke's Hospital.

*Rodney: "Saint Luke's. Yeah. That's it. That's where you take her then." They put Kerri in the ambulance and we followed them down to Saint Luke's Stroke Center."*

*The stroke team at Saint Luke's explained our options. They told us that the drug (IV tPA) that she had been given had not been enough to reverse the stroke. She was in trouble. They told us about the "corkscrew" and asked for our permission to use it since it was considered an experimental procedure. This attempt at stroke reversal was totally different from her first experience with stroke.*

Rodney gave the stroke team permission to use the Merci® Retriever, the "corkscrew."

*Rodney: There really wasn't any other choice. So I said, "Hey, you guys do what you got to do to fix her. I'll take her home and we'll be done."*

*They went in and did the surgery. The stroke team updated me two or three times while Kerri was in surgery. I was sitting there fidgeting and didn't have anything to do so I went over and got a newspaper, The Kansas City Star. Right there it was, right on the front page there was an article about the exact same surgery Kerri was having. It had the little corkscrew thing and explained the whole process; what a strange coincidence.*

*The Kansas City Star happened to feature a front-page story of John Kelly's stroke reversal (see page 85) with the Merci® Retriever on the very day that Rodney picked up the paper.*

*Rodney: Next, the surgeon came out and showed me the clots. He had them in a bottle of saline; they were huge. I mean it was like two BBs floating in the water. He said that everything had gone well.*

Kerri's progress after the second stroke has been good.

*Kerri: My thinking is good. I still have problems with words, which really frustrates me. For example, I can be talking and want to tell you to go look at the lake but say "glass" instead. I switch words. I also sleep quite a bit because I'm so tired. I still use a cane because I have a problem with balance. When I get really tired, you can notice my smile is off a little. And the vision in my left eye is blurred. So these are my problems. I mean, I should be paralyzed, so I'm thankful for what I've got.*

Rodney and Kerri were both very pleased with the care at Saint Luke's Hospital Stroke Center.

*Kerri: The gals at Saint Luke's Hospital – those are the ones I want to thank. I am talking about everybody, from the cleaning lady to the CNAs to the nurses. Everybody was good to me. I had my picture taken with a lot of the nurses; I have my arms around them because they just meant that much to me.*

*Rodney: Saint Luke's Stroke Center was a godsend. It was a miracle we were there. If we'd been anywhere else – if we'd been at the first hospital – she'd have been dead; just pretty much point blank. They'd just have given her the drug [heparin] and hoped it would work.*

*Kerri: I'm here and I'm alive.*



## COMMENTS

Rodney was alert and proactive. He made the diagnosis of acute stroke when Kerri had her second stroke in Kansas City. The first responders confirmed his diagnosis and identified Saint Luke's Stroke Center as the best destination for an attempt at stroke reversal. Kerri would not have been in Kansas City unless she had been summoned to her father's deathbed.

