

Laurel Hansen

48 years old

Laurel Hansen, forty-eight years old, lives and works in King City, Missouri. On June 8, Laurel started her day cooking breakfast for the residents of the King City Manor. Her husband, Virgil, watched her start to fry breakfast and knew that things were not right.



Virgil: I saw her in the kitchen. She looked pale. I said something to her but she could not talk. Then I knew something was seriously wrong. I am a retired police officer and I have seen many, many different medical cases.

Laurel: I began to fry sausage and suddenly I felt like I wasn't there. I knew something was wrong. I went out on the porch to get some air but I lost my balance. I fell down. I didn't lose consciousness but I couldn't get up. I tried pushing up with my right hand but I had no control over the right side of my body.

Quickly 911 was called. Laurel was confused when the first responders arrived. She was unable to explain what was happening to her.

Laurel: I couldn't think. I couldn't talk and I couldn't get up off the ground.

The first responders were from the Volunteer Union Star Fire Department. Virgil's son, Jim, was a member of that

group and he was among the first to arrive. He helped with the initial evaluation, as did his youngest daughter, Cindy.

Soon Laurel was loaded into an ambulance headed for the nearest hospital. In the ambulance the medics continued to monitor her.

Laurel: They kept asking me if I could talk. I shook my head because I couldn't. They asked me about my right side because it was paralyzed. I could not answer their questions.

When they arrived at the hospital, several tests were run that confirmed the diagnosis of stroke. The ER doctor had contacted Saint Luke's Stroke Center for possible stroke reversal. They were first told that she would be flown via the Life Flight helicopter, but it was on another mission and would not be there for one hour – too long a delay. Direct transport in the ambulance proved faster than waiting for the helicopter.

The stroke team at Saint Luke's Stroke Center had been in contact with Laurel's ER physicians. They learned that she smoked about two packs of cigarettes per day and had done so for about thirty years. They also learned that she had had cataract surgery about three days before her stroke. In preparation for that surgery she had stopped taking her customary aspirin for one week. She recalled that aspirin was her only medicine. After she arrived at Saint Luke's Stroke Center, the clot was located and she was sent down for an attempt at clot removal.

Laurel: I felt nothing during the clot removal.

After the clot was removed Laurel knew she was improving.

Laurel: I could move my right side and I knew I was better. I still couldn't speak though.

Virgil had a different perspective after the clot was removed.

Virgil: I gathered that the stroke team was pleased. It went so well that they thought it was a miracle.

Laurel's memory of the ICU was that they were very interested in testing her for the return of her speech. They had already seen that her muscle strength was recovering.

Laurel: They had me hold out my left hand in front of me and tried to make me talk. They asked me if I wasn't speaking because I could not talk or if I could not understand them. They held up pictures and asked me to say what was wrong with a given picture. I had to point at what was wrong so they could see if I understood them. I understood them.

After the reversal was completed, the search for the clot's source revealed a *patent foramen ovale* – a PFO. (PFO is a hole in the wall between the two upper chambers of the heart, which 80% of the time closes after birth. See page 11.) The closure of this defect was scheduled at a later date. Laurel's speech was returning but not the way she had hoped.

Laurel: The next day my speech started coming back but everything was garbled. Sometimes when I talked, it didn't come out like I thought it should. A speech therapist came in the day after the stroke reversal and told me that everything

would be all right. It would take a little time but everything would be all right, she reassured me.

Laurel was able to return home after a total of only three days in the hospital. She and Virgil reflected on her stroke reversal as follows.

Laurel: When they took me from my home, I was paralyzed on my whole right side – I had no control – I had no voice. The stroke team saved my life; they were wonderful.

Virgil: When you think you are dealing with a stroke, be fast and be knowledgeable. Don't wait; otherwise you will miss the window. I think it is important for people not to try and second-guess this. Get them in right away. Don't delay. They told us that if we had been a half hour later, it would have been too late.

Laurel: Be knowledgeable. There is not a lot of time. You cannot ignore it. I had no warning. I went down, and if it hadn't been for everyone around me, who knows what would have happened? I did not have a severe headache – I didn't even have a headache. I thought I would at least have had a warning but I didn't. As for prevention, there will never be another cigarette in my house. No cigarette will ever touch my lips. I have a sign on my house that reads: "Nobody comes in with cigarettes." I am also wearing the patch. [The small patch, applied to the skin once daily, is a nicotine replacement therapy designed to aid in the cessation of smoking.]



COMMENTS

Laurel said it best: “I went down and if it hadn’t been for everyone around me, who knows what would have happened?”

When all the time-sensitive steps in stroke reversal are carried out properly, it is like a falling line of dominoes; it is over quickly.

Laurel was at home and work when the stroke occurred. It happened during the day. Virgil was trained in recovery techniques in medical disasters. Virgil’s son was a first responder. The ER physician confirmed the diagnosis of stroke and contacted the Saint Luke’s Stroke Center’s neurologist.

The decision to bypass the Life-Flight helicopter helped give the stroke team precious time for the reversal attempt. The regional referral network worked. The distance from their home to Saint Luke’s Stroke Center was approximately eighty miles, and her intervention occurred within the eight-hour window for the Merci® Retriever.

Five years after stopping smoking, the risk of stroke reverts to a non-smoker’s risk. It is important to stop.



