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Survivor to share her life after stroke



Gayl Hutchinson will speak at White Rock Stroke Recovery Club/Stroke Recovery's seminar June 8.

Alex Browne photo

By [Alex Browne - Peace Arch News](#)
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White Rock's Gayl Hutchinson can still remember the day her life changed forever.

She was just 50 years old, a successful businesswoman running her own cross-border trucking company, Airtruck, in South Surrey.

It wasn't her first business venture – she'd started up and sold her first trucking business to UPS, and worked for them for several years before the opportunity to start the new business came along.

"It was about 9:15 in the morning and I was at work," she said. "We had about 10 trucks at that time, and the drivers were getting their trucks ready and warmed up.

"I got myself coffee and then I went into the bathroom."

Without warning, she said, she began to experience extreme dizziness.

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“Somehow I ended up on the floor,” she said.

“I was lucky my son, Craig, was there. He found me on the floor. I’d made an awful lot of noise because I couldn’t move.

“I think I was going in and out of consciousness at that point, because the next thing I knew I was in hospital and my husband, George, and our other son, Lance, were there.”

What had happened, she discovered, is that she had had a stroke as a result of a blood clot – a ‘cerebro-vascular accident of the left hemisphere,’ to use the medical terminology.

For Hutchinson, the frightening reality was that she was paralyzed on the right side and lost the ability to speak, as well as part of her vision.

To meet her today, some 18 years later, one would hardly credit that she has fought back from such a disability.

She’s a vital individual, speaks clearly and, aside for some slowness in moving that scarcely qualifies as a limp, gives very little indication of her past struggles.

“If you hang around, you’ll see a few more signs,” she quips, while conducting a brief tour of the [White Rock Stroke Recovery Club/Stroke Recovery Association of B.C.](#) offices at White Rock’s Centre for Active Living in Centennial Park.

Little wonder that she’ll be one of the key speakers at the association’s Education Day event, June 8, 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the centre’s Fitness Studio 2.

The free seminar, around the theme of Life After Stroke, is open to individuals, families, caregivers and medical practitioners who have found their lives affected by a stroke.

Among topics covered will be easy-to-apply tips and strategies for making life at home easier; ways to prevent another stroke; finding support and programs in the community and coping with life through the weeks, months and years after a stroke survivor’s initial hospital stay ends,

Hutchinson – who rediscovered her own self-confidence by helping other survivors as an exercise leader with the Stroke Recovery Club – is uniquely qualified to talk about the hope for recovery and the importance of resources such as speech and exercise therapists, and family, friends and local support networks, in the recovery process.

She said she looks back on “a very scary event” as though it was yesterday. What made it all the more scary is that there was no apparent preamble, she added.

“There seemed to be no reason. I had low blood pressure. I worked all the time, it’s true, so maybe stress was involved. It’s hard to know, because it was my own business and I enjoyed it.”

However, she said, there are symptoms that are being better identified, thanks to the work of the association in collaboration with organizations like Fraser Health.

“They are very clear, if you do pay attention.”

Hutchinson also notes that while rehabilitation is possible “you really have to work at it.”

“It took me six months to get out of hospitals and rehab,” she said, adding that she had to work with a speech therapist weekly after that.

“It took me almost three years to say my name,” she said.

And that’s where the work of organizations like the Stroke Club and the association are crucial, she said – costs of speech and exercise therapy often placed them beyond the reach of many stroke survivors.

“I was very lucky – I had my son Craig there to run the business, and my husband took early retirement to help him whenever he was needed.”

After working with the Stroke Club as an exercise leader she became co-ordinator some 12 years ago.

“It’s worked very well for me,” she said. “You can completely lose your confidence after you have a stroke.”

While the club had a long and happy association with St John’s Presbyterian Church in White Rock, moving to the Centre for Active Living has allowed it to grow.

The club offers drop-ins for stroke survivors Mondays and Tuesdays, drawing some 100 participants each time, and thanks to a \$15,000 grant from Peace Arch Hospital and Community Health Foundation, has now added a Wednesday session.

For more information on the Education Day and ongoing services for stroke survivors, call the club at 604-541-1290 or email wrstroke@shaw.ca



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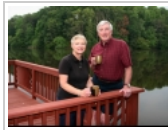
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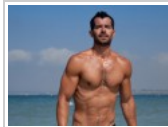
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