

## take action to prevent strokes

A monthly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.



### grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

**One Sunday in September 2013 Wayne Winiata woke up and reached for his book. Finding the words made no sense, he got up to get breakfast, only to find himself walking round and round the kitchen trying to work out what to do.**

His worried partner, who recognised the symptoms of stroke, phoned a friend who works in the health field, and they quickly took Wayne to the Whakatane Hospital. There tests showed that the clots had happened during sleeping and already cleared.

A stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery or a blood vessel breaks and prevents blood flow to part of the brain. This causes brain cells to die. A stroke can be fatal or cause long-term disability. The quicker someone gets to hospital to be put on clot busting medication, the better the outcome.

In contrast to the many strokes that leave people physically disabled, Wayne's stroke led solely to aphasia, an impaired ability to speak or understand speech. He lost the ability to sing, and to recognise many words. Initially he didn't remember his partner and his family's names, and he could no longer read or write.

Speech therapist Fiona Dominick at the hospital was immensely helpful, starting him reading and writing from children's books again.

Wayne learned to take note of key words when listening in order to trigger his memory when trying to recall conversations. But the key to his recovery was his sheer determina-

tion to overcome his impairment and go back to work as an osteopath after only three weeks.

I was one of his patients soon after his return to work. He explained then that his stroke meant he forgot many words but needed to trust his hands to do what they did. He not

week being Stroke Awareness Week, I figured it was time to catch up with Wayne once more, this time to learn about his stroke and his work.



only had his osteopath training to call on but also his early teachings from his mother who was also a healer.

He asked me to stay silent while he worked so he could focus. As usual he fixed me up so I was good to go for another few years. This

Wayne, who comes from a family of healers, began his working life in Auckland, as a marine engineer in the Navy, and a builder, scaffolding and rigger.

An accident brought him to therapy, a chance meeting with an osteopath, and a change in direction. He sees engineering and osteopathy as having much in common as osteopaths work on the structure of the body, on our skeleton and joints, and the way they function.

Wayne still finds reading difficult and occasionally has to search long and hard for a lost word, but he considers himself lucky. He not only managed to get back to work and to most of the things that give him joy, such as his family and friends, health and fitness, motorbikes and waka ama.

His recovery was aided by his determination, at first fueled by anger and frustration. After a while he came to realise he had to let go of emotions that get in the way of recovery, knowing that strong emotions, such as anger and frustration stop the brain working.



He uses a technique from the martial art sport of Kendo to strongly release his breath, so anger quickly passes.

His other recommendation for recovery is to be willing to get things wrong. A fear of looking ridiculous can lead some stroke patients to hold back and avoid pushing their boundaries.

Wayne's stroke was not caused by high blood pressure, but that is the leading cause of strokes, including that experienced by my friend, Poihaere Morris, a well known Whakatane identity, a strong advocate for permaculture, disability, te reo Maori and other passions.

She was only 52, 13 years ago when a stroke caused severe physical disability and ended her career as a teacher. Like Wayne, she is fearless and pushes boundaries, though she spent some years learning that rest too was essential to recovery. Now able to walk short distances with the aid of a stick, Poihaere has added being a key adviser to national disability organisations to her many contributions to our communities.

She notes that strokes are not just a disease for older people. Everyone needs to monitor their blood pressure. If reading this motivates you to take action yourself, or to plead with family and friends to do the same, then your luck is in. The Stroke Foundation is holding its annual Big Blood Pressure Check this Saturday at Whakatane Pak'n Save, 10am-2pm.

You and your friends and family can all get a quick, painless test for free. This could save your life or the life of those you love.

*Matata and Rangitaiki plains residents of all ages can find out more about Eastern Bay Villages: Te Kokoru Manaakitanga on Wednesday, October 10 at 10am at the Community Resource Centre at 31 Wilson Street, Matata.*

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