

Stroke Survivors Offer Encouragement To Others

BY SUSAN USHER

John Warring talks eagerly about winning—one day at a time, and only with the help of others. He's neither an athlete nor a politician. He is a stroke survivor.

Over the past year John and his wife Marcia have learned to measure success in barely perceptible increments and to celebrate small joys.

On April 6, 1993, just two days past his 65th birthday, John tried to rise from bed and collapsed in apoplexy. His legs and arms wouldn't follow marching orders. The pain in his head was intense. Luckily, a visiting nephew was there to help Marcia get her husband back into bed and emergency medical help on its way.

John suffered a serious hemorrhagic stroke. A blood vessel in the right side of his brain ruptured. In that instant John lost not only full use of his left leg and arm, but his independence and livelihood as well. He was suddenly unable to mow the yard, drive a car, change a tire, replace a lock.

His 35-year career as a locksmith in first Long Island, N.Y., and then here ground to a halt, and his wife's job with it. Marcia came home to be John's round-the-clock caretaker, No. 1 coach and therapist. She operates a bookkeeping service from their home.

After a week in a local hospital, John was transferred to HealthSouth, a rehabilitation center in Florence, S.C. For five weeks he underwent a grueling program of physical and occupational therapy to regain partial use of his left arm and leg. Marcia put 3,000 miles on the family vehicle commuting.

After that came six months of trips to Wilmington three times a week for therapy. In January he switched to three sessions each week at The Brunswick Hospital, now down to two sessions of occupational therapy for his arm and hand only. John wears a lower leg brace on his left foot and leg, and he continues physical therapy at home.

At first John couldn't stand, much less walk or pick up something with his left hand.

"One day you're fine and then you're severely handicapped. A stroke is very, very devastating," he recalls a year later. "Your caregiver gets a stroke too."

Along with anger and frustration, depression is one of the biggest obstacles to recovery for stroke survivors. Circumstances force them to redefine who they are and how they relate to others.

"You're not the same person. I had always done everything around the house. You have to realize you can't do it, and that's very hard to accept."

Close to tears, John candidly admits he could never have made it through the year without the grace experienced as family members, friends, healthcare professionals and their stroke support group surrounded Marcia and him in love, understanding and encouragement.

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for them," he says. That support took many forms.

When John couldn't be left alone, couples like Dick and Carol Good and Rhonder and Marilyn Barbee called and arranged to stay with him, giving Marcia respite time to attend meetings, run errands and have some time alone.

Fellow boater and Shallotte River Power Squadron member Rev. John Richardson convinced John to enroll in a seamanship and boating class. He was among four of six students who failed the weather course final exam. He passed an engine maintenance course with flying colors, drawing on his handyman experience and a stint as a U.S. Army battalion motor sergeant during the Korean conflict. He received word this week that he passed the seamanship course.

The Warrings recently toured the county's Emergency Medical Services building with the squadron and will check out John's maneuvering on and off a boat on an upcoming waterway trip to Barefoot Landing aboard squadron Commander Dewey Adams' *The Bounty Hunter*.

John anxiously looks forward to the day he can return the family boat *Our Tern* to the water, fondly recalling trips on the waterway between Figure 8 Island and Charleston Harbor. "We won't be able to take her out this year, but maybe next year," he says.

Cheers came from the congregation of Seaside United Methodist Church the first Sunday John left his wheel-



STROKE SURVIVOR John Warring of Sunset Beach, shown with his wife, Marcia, walks mostly with the aid of a cane after a year of intensive therapy and expects to continue making gains over the coming years. He's encouraging adults to learn about stroke prevention and wants to offer his support to fellow stroke victims during recovery.

chair and used a cane to walk up the aisle to take communion.

The Warrings are forming fast friendships with other couples in their support group of stroke survivors (mostly men) and caregivers (mostly women) that meets 10 a.m. each Wednesday in the Food Court at Briarcliffe Mall in North Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Some have just begun the road to recovery, others are two to three years along it. Most are about John and Marcia's age, in their 50's and 60's. They share advice, offer encouragement, enjoy outings together, and join each other in laughter and tears, bound by their common experiences. Marcia's dubbed the group "The Wednesday Winners."

"We have a good time and we help each other," says Marcia. "It's good to have someone to talk to who understands what you're going through."

Today the tasks John can do may seem simple, but are marvelous achievements. With his left hand he can pick up marbles and buttons. He can hold a telephone receiver, then lift it to his ear using a shoulder that was

"frozen" before microsurgery.

He no longer relies on his wheelchair in public places. He walks into restaurants, using a slender cane, and no longer worries that someone might be staring.

One recent morning, he walked 20 feet back and forth across a room.

"I'm imagining I'm holding my granddaughter's arm," John said in a determined voice as he pulled himself from the recliner and turned to cross the carpeted floor of their home on the Sunset Beach mainland. Ever so slowly, he edged forward about 10 feet, then rewarded himself with a filled chocolate chip cookie from a tray on the coffee table. He returned to his chair, quite tired.

It's a milestone on the long road of recovery: The first time he has walked without a cane or someone's arm in nearly 12 months. Tears fill his eyes and those of Marcia and a visitor.

"I wonder what I'll be doing a year from now?" he asks, clearly optimistic as he reflects on his achievements.

The Warning Signs

Symptoms or warning signs of stroke and transient ischemic attack (TIA), or a temporary interruption of the blood supply to the brain, are similar, though they may last momentarily with TIA.

Any one or more of these warnings should prompt a call or visit to your doctor:

- sudden inability to speak, or to understand speech, or both
- sudden numbness, weakness or paralysis on one or both sides of the body
- weakness or clumsiness of an arm or hand
- loss of balance
- dizziness
- difficulty swallowing
- slurring or slowness of speech
- sudden impairment of vision

Prevention Lifestyle

Stroke is the leading cause of disability in older adults, the Number 2 killer of women over 60, and the third most frequent cause of death among men.

It doesn't have to be that way. A majority of strokes can be prevented through lifestyle changes. To reduce your risk of stroke:

- exercise regularly
- maintain weight at the recommended range
- moderate intake of alcohol
- give up smoking
- control high blood pressure
- follow a healthy, low-cholesterol diet

Marcia and John have met other stroke survivors who simply gave up and stopped trying when progress came too slowly.

"When you have a stroke, never give up," says Marcia. "I'm never going to stop challenging him."

From their support group, they've learned that perseverance pays; improvements may continue for two and three years or longer after a stroke.

John's experience also brought home advice he'd heard before and heeded, and that he likes passing on: "Retire as soon as you can and enjoy yourself because something is going to happen. Don't put things off."

John and Marcia Warring aren't winners on Wednesdays only, but every day of the week, encouraging each other and others in similar situations.

John's own urge to help others is stronger than ever. He especially wants to reach out to people who have suffered strokes and can use encouragement and a role model for recovery. The two welcome calls, and new members for The Wednesday Winners support group. They can be reached at 579-9474.



WOOD STORKS wade through shallow water and marshes in search of fish, frogs, reptiles and insects.

Our Only Stork

BY BILL FAVER

The wood stork was one of the few large water birds to escape being killed for the millinery trade around the turn of the century. Its rough-looking, naked head had no feathers to adorn women's hats and it had little value for its meat. The large birds were cautious and stayed away from humans until their habitat became so diminished they had few places left to go.



FAVER

Wood storks are our only stork in North America and are 35-45 inches long with tall, long legs. They are mostly white with the short tail and back part of the wings black. The long bill is thick and down-curved. The dark, scaly-looking, unfeathered head gives it the common names of "ironhead" or "flinthead".

Storks generally prefer swamps and marshes, where they feed on fish, frogs, reptiles and insects. They wade through still ponds, drying marshes, and along lakes and streams, using the feet to probe for food as they move forward.

Sometimes the outstretched 51/2-foot wingspread and the uplifted foot give the impression of dancing as the stork feeds. Nests are built as high as 80 feet above ground and are a flimsy collection of

sticks and twigs made into a platform. Nests are usually in colonies in the tallest trees available. Three or four whitish eggs are incubated for about 30 days and then the young fly in about 50-55 days.

According to Birds of the Carolinas, wood storks are a "fairly common summer resident and uncommon winter resident of coastal South Carolina from Georgetown southward." In summer and early autumn, wood storks move northward and have been observed near Sunset Beach and at Orton Plantation in our County.

After feeding, members of a flock may gather in the top of a dead tree to sun and digest their catch. Or they may soar high overhead if the air currents are to their liking.

Storks fly with necks stretched straight ahead and long legs trailing behind. They alternately flap and glide and the black on their tail and back edges of the wings are good clues to identification.

In recent years, numbers have declined due to land development, lumbering, and drainage of feeding grounds, all causing loss of the habitat they need to survive. Most of the remaining birds are in south Georgia and Florida with some in southern swamps from South Carolina to Texas. Wood storks are also found in Central and South America.

We can hope we will continue to have some of these unique birds in our area during the summer.