

We thank our lucky stars I knew the signs and symptoms of a stroke

My husband Bill and I love Sundays. It's a time for relaxation and enjoyment. But there's one Sunday we'd like to forget. Not that we will ever be able to.

It was five years ago. We were just getting out of bed, thinking about coffee and breakfast.

When Bill suddenly fell over. He struck his head on a small dresser placed beside the bed.

Bill was 45, a young, vigorous man. Yet here I was, struggling to lift him back into bed. When I finally got him there, I noticed that he could not move his right side. And he couldn't speak. I dialed 911 immediately because I knew these were symptoms of a stroke.

I knew the stroke symptoms because I had finished CPR training four months earlier. Thank heavens I took that course! In a stroke, delay can be fatal.

An ambulance rushed us to the local hospital and then we were transferred to Hamilton General for a brain (CT) scan. They wanted to view the damage done by the blow to his head. The doctors told me they suspected a fractured skull.

The results confirmed what I had thought from the start. My husband had suffered a stroke.

The Hamilton doctors explained that the stroke was so damaging all they could really offer was palliative care and that could be done nearer to our home in Milton. I was told to prepare the family for the worst. Bill had other plans!

In the parking lot of MDH, he moved his right hand and leg, and as he was being checked into the Intensive Care Unit, Bill continued to try to speak. He actually used his right arm and leg to roll over and managed to tell me to "GO HOME".

Recovery continued. He actually started to walk the next day and do things for himself. Speaking was very difficult for him but I felt that he was slowly beginning to make progress.

The likely cause of the stroke was revealed through an ultrasound. It showed that Bill had scarring and plaques on his aortic valve which could have caused narrowing and blockages in blood vessels in the brain. (The aortic valve lets blood flow from the heart's left ventricle into the aorta, the main artery in the body.)

Eight days after the stroke, Bill came home from hospital and continued to do things for himself around the house. He continued to try to talk and we worked with flash cards and note pads to help him communicate. Speech therapy once a week helped. We are forever grateful to the Heart and Stroke Foundation for providing us with information, advice and putting us in touch with supportive groups. The Foundation also provided helpful information about the aortic valve, so that when Bill had it replaced four months later we knew just what to expect.

Two months after his aortic valve replacement, Bill was well enough to return to work.

The only side effects from the stroke were

numbness in his right hand and foot and his speech – mild expressive aphasia. He carried a note pad to write the words when he could not say them and once told the word he would try to pronounce it. He says this helped a lot.

Now, five years later, he is still working at the job that he had before the stroke and his speech has improved considerably. He does have trouble, when he is tired, but, generally, when carrying on a conversation with him, you would not know he had suffered a stroke. Some words are still hard for him to say but he does find ways to get his point across. It has been a learning experience for all of us.

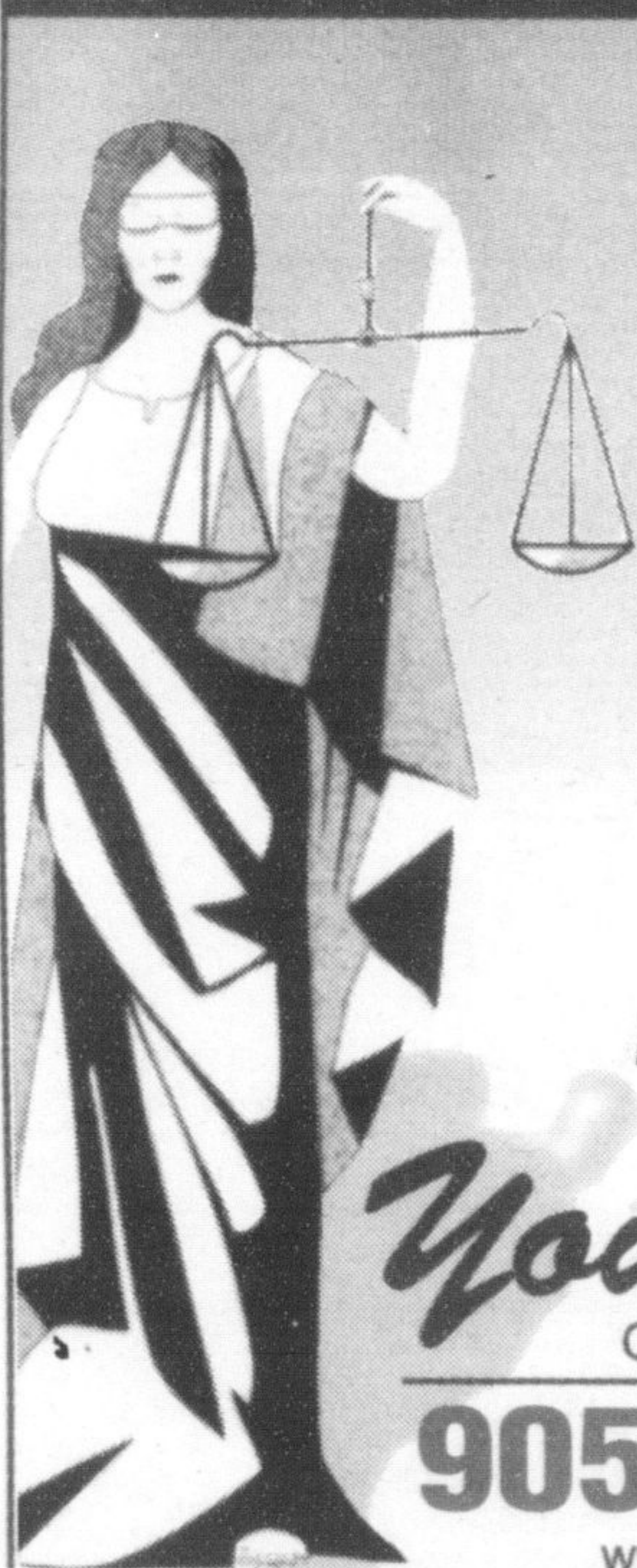
Through the past five years we have had lots of time for laughter especially when trying to teach Bill how to talk again. We truly feel that the laughter has helped all of us recover from his stroke as we did not dwell on the gloom of the situation. We know others are not so lucky.

If you know the signs and symptoms of stroke, the chances are better than ever before that your loved one will receive effective treatment.

For more information on stroke prevention, treatment and rehabilitation phone 905-634-7732 or visit Heart and Stroke Foundation web site at www.heartandstroke.ca

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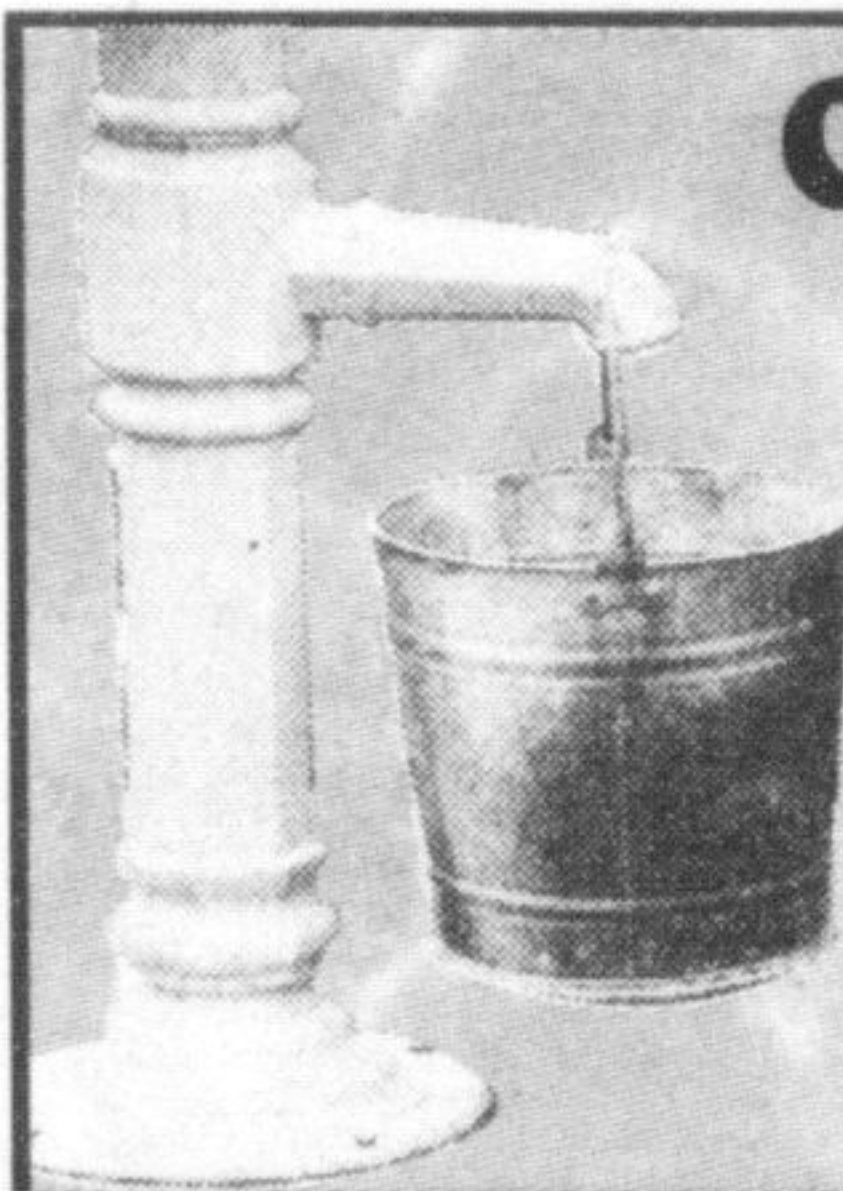
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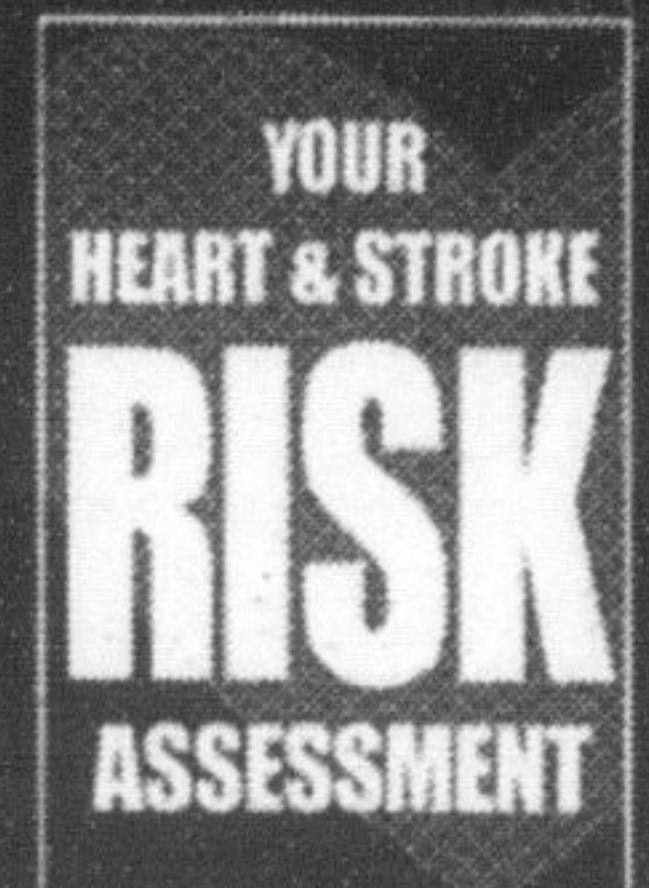
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