

Still Standing

One Man's Battle, Breakthrough, and Belief After a Hemorrhagic Stroke

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Preface

On November 19, 2017, I stood in my kitchen, unable to speak. The words formed perfectly in my mind, but they spilled out in a jumble when I opened my mouth. That was the moment my life changed.

This book is my story—a journey through a hemorrhagic stroke that could have ended everything, but instead reshaped everything.

I wrote this not as a doctor or therapist, but as someone who's lived through it. I've tried things that didn't work. I've found treatments that changed my life. I've hit walls and found ways through them. I hope that, by sharing it all—the setbacks and the breakthroughs—you'll find something in these pages that helps you or someone you love.

My motto is simple: Perseverance. No matter what God allows to come my way, I will keep going.

I also believe in being honest and direct. That's why I include links, tools, names, and treatments that didn't work for me—transparency matters. I've included more details, stories, and videos on my blog if you want to dive deeper.

<https://www.basilganglia.com/>

The journey is full of ups and downs. It starts with shock and knocking on death's door. Then it progresses to fear and hopelessness, trial and error for years, perseverance, ownership, courage to go off the beaten path, and that glimmer of hope to where we are today. It's been over 2,700 days as I write this. Over 2,000 of those days resulted in minimal improvement, but the last 700 days have been remarkable. It is worth it if I can save you 10, 100, 1,000, or 10,000 days. I expect anyone reading this to do the same and pay it forward.

I've always followed three rules when I speak: **Be brief. Be brilliant. Be gone.**

I'll do my best to honor that here, but this story isn't about being polished—it's about being real.

Let's begin.

— Jason Sango

The Day Everything Changed

It started with a routine morning on November 19, 2017—nothing dramatic. I was 54 and had just left my friend Paul's house with a replica of my daughter's wedding cake. About three-quarters of the way home, something felt off. I couldn't put my finger on it, so I shrugged it off. I stopped to get gas a mile from my house and kept driving.

When I got home around 10:45 a.m., I realized I couldn't speak properly. The words in my head sounded fine, but they came out wrong. I thought I just needed to rest. Thirty minutes later, my wife Brenda got home from church. She immediately noticed something was wrong.

She began asking me questions. My answers made perfect sense inside, but the look on her face told me they didn't sound that way on the outside.

Without hesitation, she loaded me into the car and drove straight to the ER—thankfully, only two miles away. I walked in, barely, with my right side starting to fail me. That's the last thing I remember clearly from that day.

The doctors quickly realized I needed more specialized care and transferred me to another hospital six miles away. I remember bits of the ambulance ride and little else. Once admitted, tests confirmed I had experienced a **hemorrhagic stroke** on the **left side of my brain**, specifically in the **basal ganglia**. The hemorrhage grew larger by the next day, and a neurosurgeon—fittingly named Jayson—removed the blood clot early Tuesday morning. He did a masterful job.

I spent five weeks in rehab: one week in post-surgery, one week in intermediate care, and three weeks rebuilding basic function. I left the hospital on December 22, 2017. Six months later, I returned to Dr. Jayson for a follow-up, not knowing if things would improve. He said If I chose to get better, I could; if not, I could be like the guy in the waiting room and live in a wheelchair forever. I decided to get better.

Understanding My Stroke

I was now the not-so-proud owner of a **hemorrhagic stroke to the basal ganglia** and diagnosed with **aphasia** and **right-side hemiplegia**. That meant paralysis in my right leg, arm, and face, and significant challenges in speaking, reading, and writing.

The **basal ganglia** is a deep-seated control center in the brain. It manages:

- Motor movement
- Personality
- Sensation

- Muscle control
- Aspects of thinking

When blood can't reach this area, cells die from oxygen loss. My stroke damaged that center badly.

Here's the hard truth:

- Only 13% of all strokes are hemorrhagic.
- Of those, roughly 40% result in death.

Mine came with hard-to-recognize symptoms like:

- Personality changes
- Tremors
- Loss of body awareness
- Difficulty swallowing
- Severe apathy

And for me, the biggest challenge was **aphasia**.

Living with Aphasia

Aphasia affects the ability to communicate, but not intelligence. You know what you want to say, but your brain scrambles it on the way out. You mix up words, forget them, or can't find them at all. It's frustrating beyond belief. Imagine being trapped inside your thoughts, unable to share them.

I also had **hemiplegia**—paralysis on one side—which meant my mobility, balance, and coordination were impaired. Every step was an uphill climb.

Doctors never found the exact cause of my stroke. My diabetes had been under control, and I had none of the other risk factors. That mystery still lingers.

Why I'm Sharing This

I'm 62 now. Every day since that Sunday in November has been about recovery, not just for me, but for anyone else who might go through something similar. Many people have contributed in their special way. You never know how much your friends love you until it is needed. The stroke changed me physically, mentality, and spiritually, but I am better for it.

This chapter of my life isn't about tragedy. It's about **perseverance**.

If my experience can save you time, give you hope, or point you in the right direction, it's worth writing about.

The Long Road of Recovery

Recovery isn't a straight line. I tried many things—some worked, some didn't, and some surprised me. Here's a look at what I explored and why staying open to every possibility is essential.

HORSES: Hippotherapy and Therapeutic Riding

Before I could walk confidently again, I learned to ride.

From May 2017 to August 2019, I worked with Instride Therapy to begin hippotherapy, which uses horse movement to stimulate muscle coordination, sensory processing, and balance. A horse's rhythmic motion mimics a human's natural walking pattern. Just 25 minutes on a horse equals 2,500 steps, which add up.

Special thanks to Paul, Tony, and others who got me to therapy week after week.

Three short videos show how I began:

- [Video #1](#)
- [Video #2](#)
- [Video #3](#)

In 2019, I transitioned to **Freedom Ride** in Orlando. What started as assisted lessons became independent riding, sometimes unclipped. It's not just about physical therapy anymore. Riding has become a passion.

BRACES AND SUPPORT DEVICES

Sometimes progress means accepting support. These tools made a real difference for me:

- **Hip Brace – ODOFIT**
Helped with stability, especially when walking long distances.
- **Grounding Mat**
For sleep, pain, and anxiety. It seemed odd at first, but it was surprisingly calming.
- **Shock Doctor 872 Knee Brace**
Hinged and comfortable. Gave me the confidence to walk without worrying about collapsing.
- **Incrediwear Sleeves**
Increase blood flow and reduce inflammation using negative ion technology. No compression needed.

These small tools add up when you're trying to reclaim your body.

PEMF THERAPY (Pulsed Electromagnetic Field)

PEMF stimulates the body's recovery systems using low-frequency electromagnetic waves. I used two different devices:

- **TheraPlate:**
This was my entry into PEMF. I stood or sat on the vibrating plate, which was great for circulation and muscle tone. It felt subtle but steady.
- **BEMER Home Edition:**
I still use a pricier device. It feels like a “booster” for healing. You lie on a mat and let the system do its work.

Not all PEMF tools are equal, but it was worth the investment.

HBOT (Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy)

This is one therapy I **don't recommend** for hemorrhagic stroke survivors. HBOT is more useful for **ischemic** strokes. I learned this after paying \$8,000 for 40 sessions. It didn't help me, but it may help others depending on the stroke type. Research carefully before investing.

CORE (Center of Recovery & Exercise)

This was a game-changer. My horse trainer, Jeannie, suggested I try **CORE Florida**—and she was right.

They assessed everything from strength to balance. My favorite part? The **Alter G Anti-Gravity Treadmill**. It lifted 65% of my body weight, allowing me to walk freely without strain.

NASA designed the tech. It let me move again—safely.

Learn more at coreflorida.com

Final Thoughts on “Trying”

Some therapies didn't work, and some were expensive. But even when something failed, I learned, and every step brought me closer to something that would eventually help.

Recovery is trial and error. It's exhausting, yes—but it's also empowering. You learn your limits, and then you know how to stretch them.

I was at a point where I felt I had tried everything, and then it came across my Facebook feed.

What Finally Helped

I tried many things during my recovery, but nothing impacted me quite like **perispinal etanercept (Enbrel)**.

Let me say up front that this is not mainstream medicine. It's off-label, controversial, and still under scrutiny, but it worked for me.

The Game-Changer: Perispinal Etanercept

In 2023, I discovered the work of **Dr. Edward Tobinick**, who pioneered a method of delivering the anti-inflammatory drug **etanercept**—not through the bloodstream or spine directly, but into the **interspinous tissue of the neck**, allowing it to reach the brain via the **vertebral venous system**. His work, videos, and client testimonies can be found at <https://www.nrimed.com/>

Why does that matter? After a stroke, inflammation (specifically from Tumor Necrosis Factor, or TNF) continues to wreak havoc on the brain. Etanercept neutralizes TNF and can reactivate dormant brain circuits quickly when delivered to the right place.

We're talking **minutes**, not months.

I took my first dose on **September 14, 2023**, and immediately felt a difference. The video says it all, especially the first one. I've since had multiple doses, and with each one, I've improved.

Watch my progress here:

- [Visit 1 & 2](#)
- [Visit 3](#)

The Science (In Plain English)

Etanercept is FDA-approved for conditions like **psoriasis** and **juvenile arthritis**, but Tobinick's delivery method is different—and that's the magic.

- ◇ **Why the neck?** The venous system has **no valves**, allowing **retrograde flow** (against gravity) directly to the brain.
- ◇ **Why does it work?** TNF can lock brain circuits in "off" mode after injury. Etanercept seems to switch them back on.
- ◇ **Is it instant?** In many cases, yes. Movement returns, speech improves, and clarity increases—usually within 10 minutes.

Controversy & Court Battles

The method isn't universally accepted. The **American Academy of Neurology (AAN)** and many U.S. neurologists remain skeptical. Dr. Tobinick faced legal action in California from Dr. John M. McCoy and endured criticism from medical skeptics like Dr. Steven Novella.

However, in a landmark 2015 court case, the Medical Board of California supported the ruling that post-stroke use of etanercept was within the standard of care.

So why hasn't it gone mainstream? That's a story for another book—complete with politics, patents, and pharmaceutical resistance.

My Visit with the Other Experts

I had the privilege of meeting **Dr. Robert Spengler** (<https://www.facebook.com/Brain-Body-Research-Institute-100068802381069/>), who worked alongside **Dr. Tracy Ignatowski**, one of the key researchers. Dr. Spengler reminded me that if harmful drugs like cocaine can impact the brain in seconds, **why should we doubt that something healing could work just as fast?**

Even in patients who didn't experience dramatic outcomes, some reported small wins, like restored taste or improved speech clarity.

That gave me hope.

Cost and Commitment

This isn't cheap. Each shot is a serious investment, and I plan to continue receiving them every six months until I'm "done"—whatever that means for me. Most people need 1–2 treatments. I'll likely need 7–10. I must relearn everything after each shot (I've had six so far). I deal with the physical aspects, like I get improved speech, but I'm still disabled. I deal with the emotional elements, and sometimes you want to quit, but you keep going, hoping for a cure. You also deal with the spiritual aspects, you have to try a lot to see what works for you, but you always try them because they represent hope. The funny thing is that you become your doctor because no one can feel your pain. I do the most walking; I rinse and repeat a lot.

But let me ask you: **What would you pay to feel "normal" again?**

Final Thoughts

I'm not selling anything, and I'm not on anyone's payroll. This worked for me, and I've chosen to share it because I know what it's like to feel stuck and search for anything that might help.

If you're in that place, I want you to know there is hope. Recovery doesn't always come in the expected form, but it *can* come.

A New Purpose

Recovery isn't just about getting back what was lost—it's about discovering a new purpose.

As my strength returned, I realized my story wasn't meant to stay quiet. I've found new ways to share, connect, and inspire. These are the things fueling my future:

Teaching: Turning My Story into a Lesson

In **May 2024**, I responded to a post from **Dr. Stefanie Johnson** at AdventHealth University. She sought a guest speaker to help her English students understand real-world patient experiences. I offered to share mine.

Dr. Johnson visited me at Freedom Ride to see what horse therapy was like. She also reached out to my friend **Cathy Garrett**, who had a stroke during childbirth and rides alongside me. We built a powerful dual narrative for students across healthcare majors—future doctors, nurses, and radiologists.

We spoke to her class on **September 24th**, telling our stories and answering questions. Then the students read my blog and listened to Cathy's podcast to dive deeper before returning to ask more thoughtful questions. It was meaningful, emotional, and deeply fulfilling.

Listen to Cathy's story here:

- [Spotify](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Website](#)

Our goal was simple: **educate future caregivers about the emotional, human side of recovery**. Judging by their response, we succeeded.

STROKESTRA: Healing Through Music

STROKESTRA® is an incredible program that combines **music, therapy, and community**. It's not just about rhythm and melody—it's about rebuilding confidence and movement in a joyful setting.

Led by professional musicians and clinicians from AdventHealth, this program has helped me reconnect with parts of myself I thought I'd lost.

Watch a session here: [Strokestra News Segment](#)

CORE 5K Run: Running Toward Recovery

Every November, **CORE Gym** hosts a 5K run to raise funds for people in recovery. I've participated in the last two years—and plan to continue. Seeing others in all stages of healing reminds me I'm not alone.

Some are worse off. Some are further along. All are fighting.

Brain Health: Fueling My Mind and Spirit

I've also joined Advent Health's **Brain Health Outreach Group**. These free classes focus on everything from **cognitive recall and speech** to **Parkinson's care, boxing, aerobics, and choreographed dance**.

Right now, I love music therapy, which blends singing with exercise. It's fun, exhausting, and empowering.

✉ Contact: NSI.BrainHealth@adventhealth.com

Speaking Engagements: Share to Inspire

I've spoken at churches, to groups of Advent Health Nurses, and in one-on-one settings. Every time, I see someone in the audience who needs to hear:

You're not alone. You can still fight. There is still more ahead.

If you'd like me to speak to your group, email me at jsango63@gmail.com. Let's work something out.

The Road Ahead

I'm not finished recovering—and maybe I never will be. But every therapy session, talk session, run, and note of music is part of my purpose now.

If you've read this far, thank you. I hope my story gives you the strength to keep going, too.

A Few Thank Yous

This journey—this fight—was never something I could have done alone. I've always had a Type A personality that says, "I've got this." But when I had my stroke, I realized something essential:

You don't recover by yourself.

You recover with a community.

First and Foremost: Jesus Christ

My foundation, my hope, and my strength.

If you don't know Him as Savior, I invite you to consider this:

- We are all sinners.
- The penalty for sin is death.
- We cannot pay that penalty ourselves.
- Jesus paid it all.
- Believe in Him, and receive eternal life.

I saw God show up in undeniable ways. He built my support system and carried me through when I couldn't stand alone.

Brenda, My Wife

Thank you for standing beside me, day after day.

To endure the strain, the frustration, and the slow pace of recovery,

For loving me when I couldn't even speak the words back to you.

You carried more than I ever could've asked. I'll never forget it.

Paul

From hospital visits to countless horse therapy trips... from helping me relocate to Orlando... to being there, you were my anchor. Your presence was unwavering, and your friendship unshakable.

Fred

You flew down from Colorado not long after I got home. You didn't let me wallow. You snapped me out of self-pity and showed me what grit looks like. You helped me tell myself,

"Don't let anyone tell you that you can't."

Charlene (My Mother-in-Law)

You never stopped praying.
You encouraged, supported, and quietly contributed when we needed it most.
Your faith was fuel.

Tony

You brought me to therapy, taught me to drive again after a year off the road, and made our move effortless. You even helped cover one of my treatments. You didn't just show up—you **showed up strong**.

Ritch

You mowed the lawn. You stepped in wherever needed. You reminded me that church family isn't just about Sunday mornings—it's about loving each other in real life.

Madeline

Your encouragement lifted me every time we crossed paths on our walks. You may not even realize the difference you made, but your kindness mattered deeply.

Jeannie

You believed in me at **Freedom Ride** and helped me gain strength and purpose. You're why I found the **CORE Gym**—and that connection changed everything.

Laura & Brother Dave

Thank you for helping cover the cost of my treatments. Your generosity directly contributed to my healing. I am beyond grateful.

Cathy & Stefanie

Together, we built something powerful. The class you helped bring together didn't just teach—it healed. Thank you for believing in the impact of stories.

Rich & Nolan

You challenged me at **STROKESTRA**, helping me push further than I thought possible. Thank you for the music, the movement, and the joy.

Gary

I don't even have the words. You covered multiple treatments, offered encouragement, and stood with me through it all. You helped me take steps others couldn't see—and I'll never forget it.

To Everyone Else

You know who you are—family, friends, volunteers, instructors, nurses, prayer warriors, neighbors, and strangers. Each one of you made this recovery possible.

It takes a family to raise a survivor.

And I thank God for every single member of mine.