

IT IS POSSIBLE TO TRAVEL AFTER A STROKE

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Travelling doesn't have to be a grand affair, it can be a very short-day trip, a weekend away, an interstate trip if you are lucky, or if you are extremely lucky – an overseas holiday. I hear you say, **'but I have had a stroke!'** Yes, so did my husband Clive. He suffered a near fatal stroke at the age of 50: he was not expected to last that first night. His legacies were life-threatening. Life was 'touch and go'. At first, I was told that he would need to go into a nursing home: this most definitely was **not** going to happen whilst I was by his side.

Clive suffered his stroke on September 21 1991 and was admitted to hospital. On October 10 he was reluctantly, due to the severity of his legacies, accepted into a rehabilitation hospital, and finally discharged into his own home on December 20 that very same year: *almost* an independent person in a wheel chair - I might add! Our 89-day journey had been long and hard, but we didn't ever give up on *HOPE*. Not bad for someone who didn't have a future!

Clive had come a long way, and for this first phase of his journey he had proven his determination to be the best he could be. Even so, we still had no guarantees that he would live, let alone *have* a purposeful life. Our life, as we knew it and had become accustomed to, would never be the same again: we learned to live our life on the edge of a razor blade. ***Our life had changed forever.*** The echoes of our previous life became trapped behind ***that*** door that slammed shut on that fateful day, the day of his stroke. What we couldn't do was allow ourselves to become complacent with the progress Clive had made: the life we experienced at this particular phase. We were both aware of how quickly life's circumstances can change.

Clive was a willing participant to work with therapists and go the extra mile. I eventually ran my own programs from home: one could say I became his case manager. ***BUT*** at the back of my mind, I was conscious of the saying, *'all work and no play is not a good combination'*.

I approached our daughter Sarah who lives in Hong Kong and travelled frequently. I asked her to take note of where she travelled, keeping in mind her father's predicament and the possibility of taking him on an overseas trip. She not only did this, with her father's predicament and enthusiasm to push himself to that next level fresh in her mind, she wrote and self-published a book *'Wheel Away Disabled Travel Hong Kong'*. It was an excellent disability guide and covered: planning, transport, hotels, sights, dining, day-trips and maps. Unfortunately, Sarah's book is no longer available: **it is out of print.**

We are now going to fast forward to 2001, ten years after that fateful year. Clive was to turn 60 on June 18, and it was his wish to return to Singapore for the celebration. I can remember thinking, **'but he has had a stroke'**: I was convinced because of our changed circumstances he would probably not be able to go. I started to put plans in place.

Firstly, I contacted his physician who said *'take him whilst he is well enough to go; people like Clive rarely get that opportunity'*. The physician gave me the referral letter to start the process and continued to monitor Clive's health. I then booked the flights, worked out the travel insurance (which didn't cover him for pre-existing conditions); contacted the airlines to ask what assistance

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they could offer me, and ensured I had assistance to board and disembark from the plane: bit by bit our plans eventually started to fall in place.

Sarah, due to her travel experience and in-depth knowledge of her father's condition, arranged the itinerary, transport and accommodation for the duration of our holiday.

The thought of travelling was a great incentive to Clive; it gave him a purpose to work hard at speech (he had chronic aphasia), look at his mobility (he had a right hemiplegia) and look at his diet (he had anaphylactic reactions to peanuts and some foods), plus he suffered epilepsy, and would need to travel in his wheelchair. Although he could walk short distances with the aid of his quad, the bulk of the trip he would be in his wheel chair. For this, we both had to look at our fitness level to ensure that we could manage. Clive increased his gym activities and therapies, and I started my early morning walks before I went to work: we really did work well as a team.

For Clive, it was a wonderful dream come true. When he suffered his stroke and was discharged into his own home, he thought the life he then experienced would be permanent: never in his wildest dreams would he have thought that he would be going on a holiday – an overseas holiday!

THE DREAM: Our daughter Penelope, Clive and I flew to Singapore, where we met up with our youngest daughter Sarah: this magical phase of Clive's life had now become a reality. He was so emotional, he couldn't stop touching us and saying '*thank you, thank you*' and bursting into tears; such was his gratitude. On the flip side, we couldn't wipe the smile off his face! Not only did we go to Singapore to celebrate his 60th birthday, we then flew to Hong Kong to stay with Sarah.

During the flight from Singapore to Hong Kong, airline staff announced Clive's birthday over the PA system. They had prepared a cake, and everyone in the cabin sang '*happy birthday*' to Clive – *how wonderful was that?* The last time he was in both these countries was 1987. This trip was a magical experience; it stimulated Clive's speech to such a degree he started to come out with new words. This experience changed his whole outlook on life, so much so, he wanted to return to Singapore and Hong Kong in 2003 to celebrate my 60th birthday.

The seed had been planted and the travel bug had bitten: although he had a severe disability, his whole outlook on *his* life changed.

I must admit, travelling with Clive was quite a challenge, he was in a wheel chair, and although he was mostly independent within the familiar surroundings of his own home, going overseas and comparing the 'disability' sector was quite a challenge. My duties increased three-fold, bathroom and toilet facilities were not always 'disability-friendly': compromising and adapting became the game. The girls and I shared the 'wheelchair pushing'. At the time we travelled to Singapore, although the terrain was flat, public transport was not quite geared up for wheel chair travel: it was walk everywhere or catch a taxi. The girls and I took turns to go on 'wheel chair duty'. Hong Kong was different again, it was very hilly not flat like Singapore, pushing Clive in a wheel chair was both exhausting and challenging. In my opinion, at that stage, Hong Kong was further advanced with disability wheel chair travel than Singapore.

Clive and I travelled six times in ten years, visiting Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Cambodia (Siem Reap). Every trip we ensured we went to Hong Kong to spend time with Sarah. *We grasped every opportunity whilst we could.*

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Nothing is permanent in this life as we know it. Sadly, in March 2011, Clive had been diagnosed with terminal cancer – a carcinoma of the small intestine. My comment, *'never become complacent with the life we have grown accustomed to'* had come back to haunt me.

In 2011, Penelope, Clive and I made our final trip, we travelled to Hong Kong to spend Christmas with Sarah and her partner Stephen; they had just moved into their new apartment a few months prior. Due to Clive's declining health, the following year Sarah and Stephen changed their wedding plans and arranged to marry in Australia on April 7 2012. As ill as Clive was, he proudly gave his daughter away. Clive sadly lost his battle with cancer on September 26 that year: twenty-one years after his stroke.

I look back on those twenty-one magical years. Despite the hard times, I wouldn't change anything: I would do the same all over again.

What Clive felt was an impossibility, with the assistance of my beautiful daughters, this so-called impossibility became a reality: ***a dream come true***. Life is so unpredictable, no one knows the future.

My attitude still remains to this day; grasp the dreams, tailor them to suit your needs, and endeavour to make them eventuate.

In closing, I do realise that there are no two strokes exactly the same, and for some, travel may be very difficult or perhaps an impossibility. Clive and I were so lucky.

Good luck with your dreams and travels.



2001 – Clive flying to Singapore for his 60th birthday

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Author: [Echoes of a Closed Door – A Life Lived Following a Stroke](#)

Available in print on [Amazon](#).

