**Marina Kuznetsova**

I was born in 1949. My profession is a teacher of philology. I have been working in school for 30 years. Now I have a position of the Chair of the Directors’ board at the ‘Vigor’ society-which is aimed at the psychological support for stroke survivors and their relatives. Sometimes we have a joke about me being so called ‘’Great Example’’ of our rehabilitation programme. At the moment I work also as a teacher, however, after I had a stroke I was a teacher who was learning how to survive, now I am a teacher who is full of life.

My first stroke occurred in 2001.Two years later I had the second one, however it was not so severe. The initial consequences of the first stroke were complete paralysis and loss of an ability to speak for the whole two months. Only my eyes were helping me to understand what was going on. Approximately in a year’s period I started to walk, in two years’ time I have begun to walk around the city all by myself.

When I started post stroke recovery, the first question for me was- how should I live now on and what for. As a result of a stroke I lost a lot-my job at school (I used to be a headmistress) and my dream to improve the school and make it the best for everybody-for teachers, for pupils, for their parents. I have also lost my social status. My tendency to idealize people has gone. It seems that I have taken off my rose-tinted glasses, while before, looking at life through them used to bring me a lot of pain and disappointment.

After surviving a stroke I also have gained a lot,-first of all- the new friends, who will never betray me. My life is more real now, I started to understand certain things better, with more consciousness.

Now I can easily talk to people, who are badly behaved or acting unfair, because life is so fragile, it is not worth to waist it on rage.

I do appreciate tolerance a lot. If somebody does something wrong I would think hundred times (trying to find an excuse), before I would do anything, which could make trouble for someone.

Nowadays I don’t just love my family (I always have) but I adore my sons, their attitude towards me was tested on practice. All four years, every single day I do feel the attention and care. Generally after having a stroke the personal attitude becomes brighter, as life is not about business deals or social status anymore.

By all means, my life has changed after the stroke. My earlier life has been vivid, fast and I never had time even to think about it. Now, my life became too slow, sometimes even livid. There is not enough motion, dynamics in it. Now I fill up my life myself, while earlier, it was happening by itself. Emptiness frightens me…

The most painful thing, which has not healed for me, is my school.30 years of work experience cannot be thrown away.

It is so nice when former pupils and colleagues remember me, sending their congratulations on red letter days or special occasions. Sadness caused by leaving the school merges with the pain of loss. It would make it easier for me to know, that the person, who has replaced me, will bring to life our projects, ideas- I had plenty of them. I feel heaviness in my chest as I have not accomplished my task, which was possible to achieve (then I had power to do it)-my dream to create a great school. I have put off a lot of cases till later times, thinking that I will be able to fulfil them soon. I have wrongly considered the important matters to be insignificant. I have been working on image, façade and missed the meaning. I feel regret and gilt because I have wasted my time. I have taken on things alone, which was a mistake. I was thinking-I have a lot of energy… As a result of that I have done my assistants an ill turn, as when I was by their side they have performed really well, but without me they were not able to learn how to work. Now I do listen more attentively. I have been the ideas’ generator before the illness occurred. Now I take into consideration the ideas of other people and only then I can contribute my thoughts to the task. Now I think first before doing anything, while earlier it was vice versa. Sometimes it seems that I lack activeness because of my speech disorders.

I find it hard to get used to live slowly. It is difficult to walk slowly-I have an urge to run-no matter where to. I like the fast life rhythm. Common and cautious ways of life sound to me like a boring routine. After having a stroke I try to have my life’s rhythm to be controlled, but if I start feeling a little bit better I want to do everything by myself and do it fast and well. Now I am starting to accept the new life’s pace.

What makes me most happy is the joy of genuine communication. It’s great there is no rush. While before, I did not have time to really enjoy the chat with my friends. Now I can afford it!

Now I am able to appreciate the little things just like the children do –with admiration. For example-I cook lunch myself, I can even make chips or mould dumplings. I can water the plants, do grocery shopping. I already can swim 25 metre swimming pool‘s length and perform 15 metres backstroke! In truth it does not look pretty, but at least I can do it! I also do horse riding in Vaivari, which makes me forget that my arm and leg are paralysed- and I feel myself like being a queen.

When I am incapacitated in some situations-it drives me mad, it hurts. For example I am not able to cut my own nails, I cannot push the tip of the thread through the eye of the needle and sew anything, I cannot even iron.

But I have discovered that I can be helpful to other people (I have an urge to help the others)-by being a volunteer to help the other stroke survivors. For me, it is essential, that looking at me and what I have achieved the other stroke survivors will start believing that they are able to recover as well. I truly believe in that and I want to pass that hope to others as well.

I do need constant permanent job and at the moment I am looking for one. Soon I will start the IT course at ‘’Apeirons’’- the Latvian Society for disabled people to get the Internet skills and find out new information, projects, contacts.

In what way the stroke has changed me? Definitely I was and I am a good person. However, if earlier I used to be frivolous and careless person, now I became smarter- I started to look into things deeper. This is the time to start thinking…Obviously now I am limited because of the problems with my memory and speech, however I am able to live my life and ask for help. I can offer my help to others as well. Life goes on!

*The conversation/interview was carried out and recorded by volunteer - Natalya Ivanova*