

Chris's Story - Stroke at 37



"It is strange to say that my life changed for the better on May 2nd 1996 as the result of an Acute Cerebellar Infarct.

One minute I was a beer-swilling, football playing, fast-food eating (but hard-working) Commercial Co-Coordinator for an oil company earning a good living, wanting for nothing, living with an attractive, intelligent lady – but next I am alone in an Aberdeen hotel (on business) spending several hours vomiting large green lumps of bile, whilst lying on a toilet floor to keep from feeling nauseous and terribly giddy, with the prospect of hospitalisation for months and a complete change in life. All of this at the tender age of 37.

I was originally diagnosed by my GP as only having an ear infection as I was a "fit and healthy young man", and allowed to travel by air to Aberdeen on business (I have since changed my GP!!). The actual medical condition for all of you bloodthirsty types, as explained by a consultant neurosurgeon at the wonderful Aberdeen Royal hospital was tasked with saving my life (all in a day's work for him and his staff) was that I developed a blockage or thrombosis in one of the small blood vessels to the left side of

my [cerebellum](#), which is the part of the brain which controls balance and coordination, especially in the left arm and leg. The area of the left cerebellum supplied by the blocked artery swelled and caused pressure and a blockage of the flow of fluid through the back of the brain. Initially, a [ventriculoperitoneal](#) (this is the longest word I have ever typed) shunt was inserted on the right side, where a small drill hole was made behind the right ear and the fluid diverted through a [subcutaneous shunt](#) system (still in situ) down into the abdomen, bypassing the blockage.

Usually, this manoeuvre will solve the problem, but me being me, further swelling and pressure on the brain stem occurred, which again put my life at risk or the possibility of permanent paralysis. So, it was necessary to undertake a decompression of the [foramen magnum](#) (not a new ice cream!), whereby an incision was made in the midline of the upper neck and a small amount of bone was removed from the back of the skull and the pressure on the brain stem released. After a spell on a life support

machine all that remained was down to me to regain my strength, speech, taste, ability to swallow and reason – and more importantly, walk. My immediate family and girlfriend stayed with me on and off during my stay in Aberdeen, which was an eventful three weeks, where much moaning and misery resulted in me regaining my ability to swallow (and therefore eat), walk (of a fashion, and more like a cross between a small child and a zombie) develop a slurred speech (maybe it was just a long drunken weekend and I dreamt the lot !!). I also had tremendous support from friends and relatives at home.

I was eventually sent by plane to a hospital nearer home for lots more tests, including my favourite – [MRI Scans](#), where you are squeezed inside a tube for what seems like hours, whilst a machine whirrs and takes images of your brain. Then, plenty of rest, a start at physiotherapy and of course as much chocolate as I could hide in my room! After a restful, chocolate induced three weeks, I was again transferred to another hospital, where the wonderful staff began the task to start helping me to move unaided again. Within days they had me playing tennis, squash, swimming, running, table tennis, trampolining and in the afternoon I would have speech therapy and tests to see how stupid I was. Although the work here was very hard and intense, it seemed to do the trick, and I returned back to my girlfriend within another 3 weeks.

I also went through the “mad stage” where everything was funny and I would burst into hysterical laughter for no apparent reason – which was great for me as a release, but more alarming for others who did not know me or my situation.

I had some fun forgetting things and doing what now appear quite bizarre – like covering my entire head with shaving foam, and only at the last minute armed with my razor remember calmly addressing myself in the mirror “Now put the razor down Mr Pinkerton, and let’s have a rethink shall we?”- suffice to say this episode was followed by one of my laughter fits....or noticing an odious smell in my car to realise I had put the rubbish on the back seat of my car which was actually en route to the dustbins.... I also had some fun with the various doctors at my disposal who were tremendous in their own spheres, from the brain surgeon and various consultants, numerous nurses, physiotherapy consultants, psychology consultants, speech therapists and various GPs. Just two episodes that come to mind one when asked to touch the end of “one’s nose” I reached out and squeezed his nose with some force (he didn’t ask again), and a conversation with another consultant that went as follows

“Can you run Mr Pinkerton?”

“No, why is that so important?”

“Well it would be beneficial if you had to run from danger, or to catch a bus” To which I replied straight-faced “Chris Pinkerton does not run from danger and Chris Pinkerton certainly doesn’t run for a bus “.

I now, probably as a consequence of the stroke and stress and cholesterol, also have had some heart problems ([angina](#)) which have recently been resolved via inserting metal [stents](#) into my arteries, increasing the blood/oxygen flow, and I am hopeful that this will be an end to it, as although I like the food and the nurses' attention, I think I have had enough of hospital for one lifetime.

I still get confused at times, am on medication for life for blood pressure and cholesterol. I have headaches and realise that my left side will never recover its full coordination or strength, but considering my original diagnosis, I have, through hard work and determination, got through with not too much to complain about (although believe me I do!!). I now work part-time, swim, walk, play golf, have relearnt to drive, and even nearly kicked the chocolate habit.

I hope you can see my humour has played a large part in dealing with my problems. I would also recommend that other stroke survivors take time to write a summary of events, as I have found it beneficial and therapeutic and you should never forget what happened, nor be ashamed of it (and the girls love it).

Chris Pinkerton's Further Progress



Well if they do, they don't show it. I am now single and have been for five years – maybe the old charm is wearing thin, or it is the aftershave. I have also noticed that girls are quicker than they used to be, and I have definitely slowed down. I spend my time down on the South Coast where the females seem that bit older, so there is more chance to catch them.....but no luck yet.

The relationship with my girlfriend has sadly ended – a casualty of the war that is a stroke. I do miss her and wish it could have been different, but it was not meant to be and life goes on. She now apparently has everything she wanted but I was unable to give her. I find it hard enough to look after myself, so maybe it was for the best. Since the last instalment, I have continued to improve and adapt my life. I had a year of not working due to the “improvements” made to my arteries. I now have two [stents](#) (bits of metal) inserted in two main arteries to increase oxygen and blood flow to the heart, but although I am very careful with my diet (apart from the odd

chocolate binge), exercise on a regular basis (golf, swimming, gym, walking, following potential partners until they start running...) I have recently been in hospital again where more damage to my arteries has been found and a bypass is on the cards. I do not know/have not been told if the artery problems are as a result of the stroke or the corresponding medication, but suspect the blood pressure and stress have a lot to answer for. I must confess to feeling a little “cheated” as I have been so good, but I will continue with my current lifestyle.

I am on lots more medication with lots more side effects. With all of this modern technology, why can't they develop a tablet that tastes of chocolate and has a side effect of making your hair grow back? I also have had problems with my stomach – I am convinced it is a combination of the “cocktail” of medication I have taken for years and the lack of chocolate, but the doctors say it is [IBS](#) (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) and a naughty little ulcer in my [duodenum](#) (wherever that is).

I obviously have to be careful what I eat, which in itself is a major science. Simply put:

ALL nice tasting things – NO

ALL boring things – YES

As I also have high glucose levels diabetes also beckons. I reckon it is best to get all ailments out of the way by the time you are fifty so that you can be healthy on the golf course from there on in. When I discuss the various ailments I have I can't help thinking people must think I am some kind of [hypochondriac](#) (had to look up the spelling) and whenever I am in hospital or doctors waiting rooms and conversing with my fellow sufferers it becomes like a game explaining how ill you are – the more ailments the higher the score!

I now work self-employed as a Cost Manager for London Underground three days a week. The uniform is a bit tight, but I do get to shout “move along inside PLEASE.....”. The money is nice but more important is that it gives you a purpose to carry on and you then feel part of it all. Three days a week is enough for me as I still get incredibly tired.

You do not realise how far you have come until you take stock, like writing this article has made me proud and glad I persevered. It has taken me a long time to get to know and like the new me and I feel it is an ongoing process that has a while to go yet. I have got this far, and I am not going to give it up now. You might need to be selfish. A physiotherapist at the Devonshire spoke with me when I finally was allowed to go home.

“You need to be selfish and think about yourself and what YOU want now.”.

This was good advice. My current plan (and everyone should have a plan) is to buy a house in the country with my mother and get on with it, meet a rich, single lady and learn to chill. A major change in my life has been the adoption of a cat, Larry. He was called Murphy but this sounded a bit

strange for a cat so I renamed him Larry. A benefit to all of this has been that I have become closer to my mother. This might seem a strange thing to say, but I think how often I used to see her or call her and wonder why so little. I have become a real mummy's boy and anyone who has a problem with that can see me in the car park..... As I hope this article will be well circulated, I feel I should take the opportunity to say:

Single Male, non- smoker, GSOH, likes taking medication and discussing ailments, seeks single (rich) lady with nursing background (and therefore a uniform) for a lasting relationship. I will continue to be positive, keep taking the medication and stick to my plan.

Chris Pinkerton's Continued Progress



Another year, another illness – Since the last enthralling episode I have had a triple [heart bypass](#) to add to my expanding list of achievements in the medical world, and as I write, I am suffering from shingles, whereby an attractive blister type of spot develops around the cheek and then because it is lonely invites its friends to join it and cause more misery. My chances of finding a life partner are becoming less by the minute and perhaps joining a freak circus is more likely.

The stents I had inserted in the previous episode did not take, so as the arteries had again deteriorated it was decided to have the bypass as I was so young, history of illness etc etc....and I had nothing better to do for a few months. I now have more scars than a bloke with lots of scars and am thinking of having a bolt fitted to my neck to complete the picture. Surely this should also enhance my quest for a rich, single, lady?

Eight fun-packed years have passed since I had my stroke, and as the anniversary looms. It makes me think about 'where I am'.

On the plus side, I am still breathing (very important for us humans), I have a part-time job (four days a week), still minding the gap at London Underground as a Cost Manager, STILL single (although I have been seeing a lovely lady occasionally, who has been very supportive, and caring). I am also living on my own in a wonderful apartment overlooking Box Hill in rural Surrey, which involves cooking, ironing and housework – I don't know how I fit it all in....

Larry the cat is still with mother, as I figured the stress of moving him from the place where he is totally spoilt would be too much for him and do you know how much cat therapists cost?

So the consultant says to me in a jovial, almost convincing voice that he thinks rather than keep adding metal stents to my diminishing arteries a bypass should do the trick. It would have been better if he was wearing a fez and informed me in a Tommy Cooper voice and then said "Fanky you very much, ha ha ha" and then disappeared.

At first, me being me, thought "how exciting – a bypass" – "loads of attention, hospital food, nurses, new tablets, scars, more stories to tell" – then I felt sorry for myself for about an hour then thought "pull yourself together pink curtain" and looked forward. If I hear one more person tell me that "bypass operations are very routine these days" or relate to an uncle or friend that had one and is "stronger than ever" I swear I will commit murder or might even pay for them to have a bypass to appreciate what it involves. It is not pleasant and I would not recommend it.

First, you are walked through the niceties of a bypass and given an in-depth description of what happens. Basically, arteries are taken from your legs or arms and chest and replace the damaged ones that service the heart. A discussion ensued about where the arteries would be "harvested" from. It sounds almost romantic. The consultant wanted to take two from my arms and two from my chest. My response was "Isn't there a supply of these arteries in a big NHS Freezer? And then you just snip off what you need?" I did not want to have scars on my arms as I live in designer short-sleeve T-shirts and did not want the scars on show. The freezer line was ignored, and we agreed on no arm incisions. We then agreed upon a date and I paid the non-returnable deposit.

The next step is a consultation with a nurse to explain what happens and what you can and cannot do. This was very informative, but I was still in shock having only just been told I would have the bypass. A conversation followed discussing the course of events, diet, exercise, what happens after the operation including a classic conversation that went:

Nurse: "you can have sex after a month of the bypass"

CAP: "Blimey, these bypass thingy's are good, I haven't had sex for years, not only is the bypass going to stop my chest pain it also means I have sex! Do I get to choose my partner??"

She went red and I giggled. Then I left before she called security, armed with loads of literature about bypass operations and a smile on my face. Then the waiting began and the constant thoughts of what is happening to you.

I had negotiated a six-month wait until the operation as I had Christmas in between, and some work commitments to finalise. I eventually had a triple bypass with two arteries taken from my chest and one from my arm (despite my request of no arm incision). The operation was obviously a

success, but I can safely say that I had three of the most uncomfortable and painful days in my life. I am a tough geezer and I now have the bypass scars to add to my collection. One is down the front of my chest, and the other the length of my forearm, very cute.

I then decided to spend two weeks in a rest home as I live alone and did not think it right to ask my mother to look after me. So it was the old people's home down on the south coast for me. Two weeks of the warm stuffy smell of old people, homemade food, and being as cheeky as I wanted, as most people could not understand me or hear me. It was fantastic! I now have an enviable collection of false teeth, and [hearing aids](#) and am in twenty-five wills as the sole beneficiary.

Having been through the rehabilitation from my stroke helped me enormously, and I do not want to appear flash when I say the recovery from the heart operation was a walk in the park compared with the aftermath of the stroke. As part of the carefully thought out rehabilitation, I was enrolled on what seemed to be a "keep fit for old people after heart surgery" programme. So armed with my new leotard, I headed off to the impressive East Surrey Physiotherapy Department where the lovely Lindsey and her team of masochists put me through my paces.

I am still having nightmares about this episode, but the shaking and sweating have now stopped. Worse than that Lindsey wouldn't marry me, but the regime was good and was very beneficial to my progress. I think that being aware of the fact that I had come through the stroke helped me, that, and the inbuilt will to get on and overcome another hurdle.

One should obviously not assume that heart problems follow a stroke. My philosophy is that I have been unlucky, and although I am not a seriously religious man, believe that "Him Upstairs" is saying, "Look, you have had a lovely time, but you need to slow down now."

Having said that I am getting bored with being ill. I have tried most of the pills about and they do not taste nice. So as usual, it is getting on with life and take it all in my stride, which is getting shorter by the year.

Even more progress from that man Pinkerton – October 2005

Unbelievable! I've had a three-year stint in the life of Pinkerton without a major illness! Only a dizzy spell, a runny nose and a grazed knee. I feel cheated. I have had problems with my blood pressure though, which went high (well high considering I am on medication that should keep it within the guidelines). I went through the usual process with my GP of trying new medications, with all of the exciting, weird side effects, until I found one that my body seemed to like and the blood pressure is back under control again.

I still see my GP on a monthly basis to review my medication, check my blood pressure, and discuss any problems, which is very reassuring, as I feel you need to have that crutch to always be there.

Things have moved on for me, in quite a way; new home, new girly, and new vocation in life (still got the same haircut though !!). The new home is a rented house in sunny Rustington, West Sussex, famous for having the convalescence home that I stayed in to recover from the wonderful bypass operation. I think the convalescence home has named a bench after me and there is a Pinkerton Pudding on the menu. Our house overlooks the sea, which is very relaxing, and I walk most days along the coast, when I am not working.

I must be the youngest and fastest bloke in the town, which is fantastic. Even I have been known to overtake a couple of people whilst walking, but they usually catch me up as I loiter near the sweet shops. People down here on the south coast seem more courteous, albeit a bit grumpier, and the pace of life is slower, and the roundabouts and verges are finely manicured, a bit like me. The only danger is being run over by one of the electric mobility chariots, that the locals like to travel in. Some are so fast, that they leave scorch marks on the pavement. There is even a local powerchair race meeting along the seafront.

I have taught Larry how to fish and bought him his own fishing gear (cat-fish model?), so he catches his own meals from the sea. His swimming is also going well and he has his own catty paddle technique. He is now known as "Lord Larry" due to his lifestyle, and the look he gives you when you annoy him, or don't give him enough food. He really does have a fantastic life, a bit like me, but for me, it has been a long, hard journey, and I figure the best is yet to come.

I decided that I had done my bit, working in London as a cost manager. The travelling and the hours were getting me down. So I had a long chat with myself (in front of a mirror) and decided to start my own company called [MediPAL](#), which is a hard wearing plastic credit (the size of a credit card), that is used to show, name, DOB, Emergency contact details, current medication, medical history and GP details. There is an impressive web site and the response has been good. I advertise in several leading medical journals, and attend exhibitions and hospital awareness days in search of that big deal.

I do not get stressed by having my own company and rather enjoy the freedom to do as I want. It is good to feel I am helping others, by providing a service that will help people in a hectic world that could also save lives. I share the house with my bird, Wendy, and Larry the cat. I still get confused, and often try to take Larry shopping and put Wendy in the cat litter. Having been single, and living on my own for so long, I was not sure about living together, but it has been very successful, and I think we are well matched. She also controls my chocolate addiction. Well, she thinks she does, but she hasn't found my hidden supply yet.

The bypass is still intact, and apart from fatigue, a few chest pains and a bit of shortness of breath, the old ticker is behaving itself. The scars on my

arm and chest now compliment the collection on my head, and if you join up all of the points you spell my name.

I have made many new friends with my new venture; caring people in charities and health professionals that take time to help. I think I will try and give something back myself, maybe as a health volunteer part-time. I have joined the local gym and nine-hole golf course, as the exercise is very good and concentrates my mind on the exercise, not other stressful things. I now take exercise and diet, very seriously, as do not want this bypass thing or stroke to be repeated.

So, I figure with taking the tablets, exercising, avoiding stress, a good diet, and extra laughing, I will be writing these updates for years to come!

....and as a man of my word with more progress up to May 2016

Medical details first: no major problems. I have had a few problems with my friendly shunt in my head. It's a bit painful at times, but those that know best have assured me it is all working, which is nice. I have noticed that my balance is getting worse, with difficulties in confined spaces especially, but I guess I am getting older. I have had a few heart scares, but luckily no new stents or bypass revisions. I am taking the tablets every day and keeping positive. My exciting Aberdeen stroke adventure was twenty years ago, unbelievable! I can still taste the mashed potatoes and still appreciate all of the help and support at the time from my family and friends, then and since. So, all in all, apart from the ageing process, I feel very fortunate to be able to write this update.

Larry died of cat cancer, which was so sad. Nothing could be done for him, so it was best if he was then put to sleep rather than suffer. We had been through so much together, although obviously he did not realise. He just wanted food and a safe place and loving – Don't we all?! He is buried in my mother's garden and I suppose I must tell her sometime.

I have a new cat called Ruudi (he already had the name). He is known as the rude boy, a different character to Larry but good company and amusing. Wendy and I have gone our separate ways. She wanted to go home to Cumbria, and I had started a new life here, so we decided to split. It was sad, but for the best.

I had various financial problems, which meant that I had to work again. Looking back, I did not want to burden the state with hand-outs and was fortunate to get a full-time job. Paying a minimal amount to get me back into employment was very hard but had to be done – I'm too proud to rely on someone else.

Stroke and heart problems do not aim their hatred at only one social area. I was doing ok and these problems caused my job and life to stop. I was lucky that eventually, over time (twenty years) I am nearly back to where I was financially – never socially and never within myself, but I feel OK.

Anyway enough of the worry – positive things!

I now live next to an equestrian farm in downtown Headley (Surrey) and work yet again in Leatherhead as a senior cost specialist. This is no disrespect to the female partners in my life but I have now re-found (is there such a word) my future. I knew Abbie back in the day (BS – Before Stroke) and I met her again recently through my company. I asked her about marketing for it and our relationship just grew. I now just want us to be together until the end and beyond.

Then Abbie found she had breast cancer, so I became the supporter and carer. I hope this has helped. We are going to sort it out together and we're nearly there. She has been through the chemo and has just started a month of radiotherapy. Life can be so much fun. Bring it on!

We are very happy and I have now finally met her children (George and Mildred). The plan is to keep both of us healthy, keep taking the pills, sort out The Mighty MediPAL and be with the dustbin lids when they're not with their father. I am still a Mummy's boy, and she still puts me straight and I do as I am told (sort of). Abbie and I will be together whatever. We have the same humour, thoughts, and dreams. What else is there?"