

SURVIVING STROKE

Husband's quick thinking in dialing 911 saves wife

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Larry Britten knew there was something wrong when he couldn't understand what his wife was trying to tell him.

His wife, Louise Britten, had gotten up in the middle of the night and taken the flashlight she always used when trying to navigate their darkened home. What she was trying to tell Larry when she returned to bed was that she couldn't turn off the flashlight.

"He couldn't understand what I was saying, so he thought, 'I think I better call 911,'" Louise said.

It was 3 a.m. on March 17, 2014, and life for the couple had changed in a matter of seconds.

Larry's instinct to call for help immediately probably saved his wife's life.

Louise, 83, had suffered a major stroke and, within minutes, was on her way to the emergency room at Salem Hospital. She spent nearly three days in the ICU and, after that, began the long process of being "reintroduced" to the left side of her body.

Long hours of physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy helped Louise relearn how to do things she had done all her life. Her brain had to "rewire" itself to compensate for the damage caused by the stroke.

May marks one year since Louise "graduated" from therapy and while she may not be 100 percent the woman she was on March 16, 2014, she's regained much of what she lost. This month also is "Stroke Awareness Month."

Louise's story serves as a good cautionary tale — the Brittens believe her stroke could have been prevented. She also could be a poster child for how to work through recovery — with plenty of support from her husband and team of therapists looking to help her re-establish a normal routine.

"I personally didn't know anything about strokes," Larry said, recalling that fateful night. "Both of our families never had any experience with a stroke."

He didn't recognize the symptoms, but doctors were able to diagnose it quickly. The likely cause was atrial fibrillation, or an irregular heartbeat, which formed a blood clot that made its way to her brain.

Louise had been aware of her condition, but not that it could cause a stroke. She cautions anyone who has an irregular heartbeat to research it and seek treatment if necessary.

"Find out all you can, because I think her stroke could have been prevented," Larry said.

Lorraine Brazier, Louise's speech therapist, said Larry's reaction in the early morning of March 17,

Do you know?

Key symptoms of a stroke can be remembered using the acronym **FAST**:

F — Facial asymmetry or weakness on one side.

A — numbness or lack of motor control in one arm.

S — Slurred speech.

T — Time, the faster the patient has medical care, the better.

2014, was unbeknownst to him, exactly what he should have done.

"I think it's important for the family to realize that the patient, the person with the symptoms, may not be the best person to be making decisions about whether or not 911 should be called," Brazier said. "I think the person closest to the person having symptoms needs to step up and make the call, because the person with the stroke may not have the insight to realize there is something wrong with them. Louise lost her whole left side and didn't know it."

"She had to be reintroduced to her left side."

That process began quickly for Louise, in the form of a physical therapist she nicknamed "Sarge" for her no-nonsense manner.

She appeared in Louise's room in the ICU on her third day in the hospital.

"We are starting therapy this morning. Here's your walker. I want you to walk to your door and make a left turn and go down the hall," Louise recalled the therapist telling her.

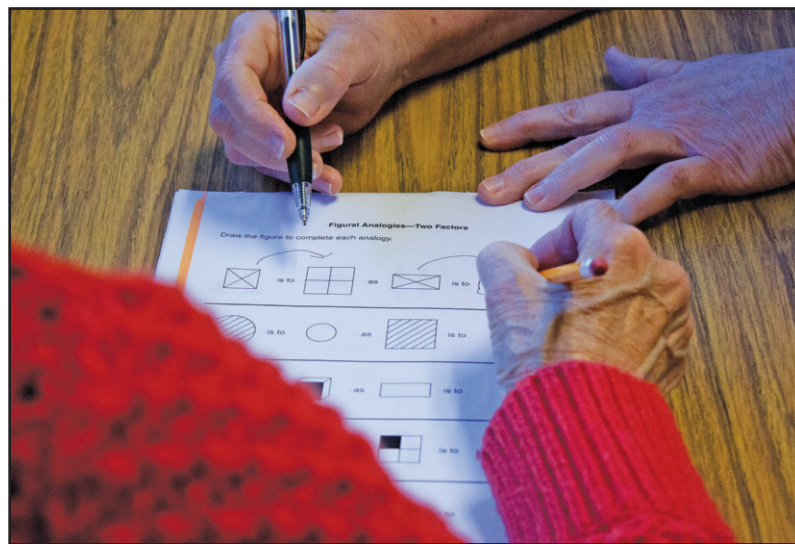
"That's pretty far for the first time walking (without assistance)," Louise recalled saying.

"She said, 'Do it' ... I nicknamed her Sarge, but she had a tender heart."



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Louise Britten, left, with the help of her husband, Larry, and a team of physical, occupational, and speech therapists has recovered much of what she lost after suffering a stroke in March 2014.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Britten worked with speech pathologist Lorraine Brazier on exercises similar to these to recover her speech and ability to read and write.

Louise looked down the hall and decided it wasn't possible.

Louise recalled saying. "She said, 'Do it' ... I nicknamed her Sarge, but she had a tender heart."



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Britten, right, had clear goals when she began seeing Brazier, left, in out-patient rehab in Monmouth after being released from the hospital. She wanted to cook and write cards and letters again.

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Friday, Saturday, and Sunday May 15 - May 17

Movie	Time	Rating
EX MACHINA (Digital) (R)	(11:40 2:10 4:40)	7:10 9:40
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(11:45 2:50)	6:00 9:05
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(12:15 3:20)	6:30 9:30
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:40)	7:10
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:15 4:00)	6:40 9:20
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (NEC Dolby 3D) (R)	(4:25)	9:40
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(11:30 2:00 4:40)	7:20 9:55
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10)	6:50 9:25
AGE OF ADALINE (Digital) (PG13)	(12:00 2:20 4:45)	7:15 9:35

Monday - Wednesday May 18 - May 20

Movie	Time	Rating
EX MACHINA (Digital) (R)	(2:10 4:40)	7:10 9:40
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(2:50)	6:00 9:05
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(3:20)	6:30 9:30
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:40)	7:10
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:15 4:00)	6:40 9:20
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (NEC Dolby 3D) (R)	(4:25)	9:40
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(2:00 4:40)	7:20 9:55
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10)	6:50 9:25
AGE OF ADALINE (Digital) (PG13)	(2:20 4:45)	7:15 9:35

Thursday May 21

Movie	Time	Rating
EX MACHINA (Digital) (R)	(2:10 4:40)	7:10 9:40
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(2:50)	6:00 9:05
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (Digital 2D) (PG13)	(3:20)	6:30 9:30
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:40)	7:10
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (Digital 2D) (R)	(1:15 4:00)	6:40 9:20
MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (NEC Dolby 3D) (R)	(4:25)	9:40
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(2:00 4:40)	7:20 9:55
PITCH PERFECT 2 (Digital) (PG13)	(1:30 4:10)	6:50 9:25
AGE OF ADALINE (Digital) (PG13)	(2:20 4:45)	7:15 9:35
POLTERGEIST (Digital 2D) (PG13)		8:00 10:00

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