

*Wheel is used for physical therapy to build up author's right arm.*

# I Came Back from a Stroke!

**T**HE FIRST SATURDAY morning of last January, I awoke before the dawn. As I moved to get out of bed, my right side seemed heavy. Trying to lift my right arm and leg, I found them almost wooden. Levering myself, I managed to stand and totter across the rug to the bathroom. There I leaned weakly against the door, exhausted.

Mentally, I was slightly disoriented. It was a feeling of bewilderment rather than confusion, of wonderment rather than panic. "What's the matter?" I kept repeating. My immediate reaction was that my leg and arm had "gone to sleep." I was surprised, though, that there was no prickling or tingling sensation.

Awkwardly, almost tripping, I lurched back to the bed where I sat down. Still, there was no pain, just the clumsy unpliability of my right side. An immense weariness settled on me. I nudged my wife. Sleepily, she wanted to know what was the matter. Explaining to her, I became conscious of a difficulty in my speech. It was not so much that I couldn't think or express myself as it was a general awareness that I had to form my words before speaking them. It was something like trying to talk through puffed-up lips after being hit hard on the mouth.

Fully awake now, my wife called the doctor. By the time he arrived an hour later, my right arm and hand were completely immobile. I could just barely wiggle the toes on my right foot. With my weariness came a mounting anxiety, not about anything in particular, just an overriding uneasiness of mind.

I had suffered a stroke, which is the nation's third largest killer, behind heart disease and cancer. Strokes claim 200,000 lives annually in the United States alone, cripple an estimated half-a-million other victims. There are more than 1,800,000 individuals of all ages who have had one or more strokes and are now in hospitals, nursing homes, or other institutions, as well as those being cared for at home.

I was lucky that my stroke came when it did. Only a dozen years ago, little could have been offered me except chronic invalidism and kind words. Today, much can be done. I've just about licked my own stroke, and only a few months after my attack. I work a full day, speak effortlessly, walk nearly normally, and already have regained two-thirds use of my leg and arm.

Until my stroke, I, like most people, thought these accidents happened mainly to the elderly. I'm only 45, but stroke in my age group, I found, is common. In fact, in the 35 to 44 group it ranks fourth as a cause of death, after cancer, heart attacks, and accidents. High-tension jobs, so of-

