# Still HARRY



A Stroke Survivor's Journey

by Author: Harry Wheat

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# Legal Notice

This memoir reflects my personal experiences as a hemorrhagic stroke survivor. It is not intended as medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Every stroke journey is unique, and outcomes vary widely.

Readers should not rely on this book as a substitute for professional medical care. Always seek the advice of qualified healthcare providers with questions regarding any medical condition, treatment, or recovery process.

The names and identifying details of certain individuals may have been changed to protect privacy.

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# The Day Everything Changed

"It felt like my body was trying to speak in a language I no longer understood."

It started with something small. A flicker of confusion. I was reaching for my phone — or was it a cup? I'm not even sure anymore. My arm didn't follow the command. It just...hung there. Dead weight.

At first, I thought maybe I'd slept on it funny. Maybe it was numb. But then I tried to speak.

Nothing came out.

Inside, I was screaming. On the outside, I was still.

Time bent in strange ways. Every second was thick, like syrup. My heart was racing, but everything else felt frozen.

Someone saw me — a family member, a coworker, maybe a stranger — and their face changed. Panic. They were calling my name, asking questions I couldn't answer. I heard them but couldn't respond. The words in my head didn't know how to escape my mouth.

The ambulance came. I remember flashing lights, voices clipped and urgent. "Stroke alert," someone said. That word — stroke — hung in the air like a verdict.

I didn't know it then, but nothing would ever be quite the same.

### Before the Storm

I am Harry Wheat — 53 years old when my life changed. Before the stroke, I worked as a computer tech. Fixing things came naturally to me. Computers made sense — they had logic, order, patterns. If something broke, I could find the problem and make it right. That was my world.

I lived a steady, structured life. I kept busy, stayed reliable, and didn't stop to think much about my health. I didn't feel sick. I didn't feel weak. I had routines, responsibilities, and people who depended on me.

At 53, I had no reason to expect my life would be derailed by a sudden, invisible force. But strokes don't wait for invitations. They arrive without warning — and they don't care how capable or prepared you think you are.

That day, everything changed. But I'm still Harry Wheat. Just...a different version of him now.

### The Moment It Hit

I didn't feel pain.

That's what surprises most people when I tell them. There was no explosion, no warning siren. Just a

strange, heavy stillness — like part of me had quietly disconnected.

I was standing — or maybe sitting — it's a blur now. I reached for something, maybe a glass or my phone, and my arm didn't move. It just...hung there. Useless. I tried again. Nothing.

Then I opened my mouth to speak — and no sound came out. My thoughts were there, but the words wouldn't follow. I knew something was wrong. I just couldn't say what it was.

That's when the panic started — not just in me, but on the faces around me. Someone saw. They asked me something. I couldn't answer. My mouth was moving, but the words weren't right. I could hear them. I just couldn't get them out.

They called 911.

Even then, part of me didn't fully grasp it. But I remember one phrase clear as day:

"We think he's having a stroke."

I was Harry Wheat, 53, computer tech, fixer of problems. But I couldn't fix this. I couldn't even name it until they said it for me.

And from that moment forward, nothing was the same.

# **Emergency and Diagnosis**

The ambulance arrived fast — faster than I expected. I was aware, but barely holding onto what was happening. Everything felt distant, like I was floating behind a sheet of glass. I could hear the voices of the paramedics, but their words felt muffled, like I was underwater.

They asked me questions I couldn't answer. I knew the answers — I just couldn't speak them. My mind was working, but my body wasn't listening.

They moved quickly. Blood pressure cuff, oxygen mask, IV — efficient, steady hands doing what they were trained to do. I remember one of them saying, "Possible stroke, let's go Code 3."

The ride was fast. Sirens. Blurred lights through the window. I wasn't in control anymore. As someone who'd spent a life fixing systems, this was the hardest part — realizing I was the system now, and I was breaking.

At the hospital, they rushed me through doors I barely saw. Straight to a CT scan. Nurses and doctors surrounded me, talking to each other, not always to me. I caught pieces: "Time is brain," "Right-sided weakness," "Speech impaired."

Then came the words that settled everything: "You've had a stroke."

There was no dramatic moment of realization — just that sentence, flat and final. And in that moment, I knew life had split into two parts: *before the stroke* and *after the stroke*.

### **First Reactions**

The doctor didn't sugarcoat it. "You've had a hemorrhagic stroke," he said. Bleeding in the brain. A blood vessel had ruptured — suddenly, violently — and now everything was about managing the damage.

I could tell, even in my foggy state, that this wasn't the kind of stroke where you just "wait and see." The tone in the room changed. Voices got lower, faster. Urgency thickened the air. They weren't just talking recovery — they were talking survival.

I wanted to speak, to ask "What does that mean?" but I couldn't form the words. I understood enough to feel afraid. I knew bleeding in the brain was serious. And I knew I wasn't in control anymore.

When my family arrived, they were quiet — too quiet. They looked at me like they were trying not to cry. I could see the weight in their eyes. I wanted to tell them I was still here. That I could hear them. But I couldn't get it out.

The doctors explained that the bleeding had likely caused pressure inside my skull — that time was critical. They started talking about managing blood pressure, monitoring swelling, and the risk of more bleeding. Every word felt heavy. Every second, more real.

And inside me, the fear settled in.

What if I don't come back from this?

What if this version of me — the one who can't speak, can't move — is permanent?

But I wasn't done fighting. Not yet.

# The Fog Inside

Nothing made sense.

I could see people moving around me, hear voices, feel things being done to me — but it was like watching life from the wrong side of a window. I was in the room, but I wasn't *in* it.

I didn't know what day it was. I didn't know how much time had passed. I didn't even know, at first, what part of me still worked. I tried to move — nothing. I tried to speak — silence or slurred sounds I didn't recognize. My body didn't feel like mine anymore. It was like my brain had disconnected the wires and forgotten the manual.

The fear was constant, but quiet — like a pressure pressing in on all sides.

What happened to me?

Is this permanent?
Will I ever be able to talk? To walk? To work?

But the worst part was not knowing what I *didn't* know. Was I making progress? Was this as good as it would get? I couldn't ask. I couldn't even cry.

Inside, I was still Harry Wheat. I knew who I was. I knew what I used to be able to do. But outside, I was trapped in a body that wouldn't cooperate — and no one could tell me for sure if I'd get it back.

I felt like a stranger inside my own life.

But even in the middle of that fog, somewhere deep down, I knew one thing:

I wasn't ready to give up.

# Waking Up to a New Reality

The hospital room was quiet, except for the steady beeping of machines. That sound would become the background music of my life for a while. I was awake, but it didn't feel like waking up. It felt like surfacing—slowly, unevenly—into a life I didn't recognize.

The first thing I noticed was that I couldn't move the way I used to. My right side was weak. Heavy. My arm wouldn't lift. My leg wouldn't respond. Even blinking or shifting felt like a task I had to *think* about — like every tiny movement now required conscious effort.

Then came the voices. Nurses. Doctors. Family. All talking *about* me at first, not always *to* me. That hurt more than I expected. I was still here — still Harry — even if I couldn't speak for myself yet. I wanted them to know I was listening. That I wasn't gone.

Everything was unfamiliar. The way people looked at me. The way they held their breath waiting to see if I understood. The way they celebrated the smallest movement, like I was learning life all over again.

It was humbling. And terrifying. But it was also... grounding.

I started to realize this was my new reality. Not temporary. Not a pause.

A restart.

No one could tell me how far I'd come back. Some said, "We'll have to wait and see." Others were more hopeful. I held on to the hopeful ones.

And in those early days — stuck between who I had been and who I might become — I made a decision:

If there was even a chance I could fight my way back, I would take it.

### The Mirror Moment

At first, I didn't want to know.

In those early days, part of me thought — hoped — maybe this was just shock. Maybe I'd wake up one morning and things would feel normal again. That my arm would lift. That my words would come back. That this was temporary.

But slowly, I began to understand. This wasn't just a bad day. This was the new reality.

I couldn't move the right side of my body. Not my arm. Not my leg. Lying there in the hospital bed, I'd stare at my hand, *willing* it to twitch — even just a finger — and nothing happened.

Speech was broken, too. I could think full sentences in my mind, but when I tried to say them, they came out jumbled, slow, or not at all. It was like someone had cut the wires between my thoughts and my mouth. I hated that. I wanted to scream, and the silence made it worse.

And then there were the little things — things I never thought to be grateful for before. Buttoning a shirt. Holding a cup. Scratching an itch. Gone. All of it.

Even memory had its gaps. I'd lose track of what day it was. I forgot conversations minutes after they happened. My mind, which used to be sharp and fast — like when I was working with computers — now felt foggy and unreliable.

The hardest part wasn't the pain. It was the **loss of independence.** 

I couldn't walk to the bathroom on my own. Couldn't speak my needs. Couldn't even trust my body to hold me up if I sat too far on the edge of the bed.

That's when it hit me — really hit me:

This is what the stroke took.

But it wasn't going to take everything.

Not if I had anything to say about it.

### Not Alone

In the middle of everything I lost, the one thing I never lost was this:

I wasn't alone.

There were people — family, friends, even strangers in scrubs — who refused to let me disappear into that hospital bed. They reminded me, in a hundred different ways, that I was still here... and still worth fighting for.

My family was there early and often. I don't even know how they did it — balancing fear, exhaustion, and the unknown — but they never let me see them break. They held my hand when I couldn't hold theirs. They spoke to me even when I couldn't speak back. They celebrated every small twitch of a finger like it was a miracle — and maybe it was.

The nurses... I'll never forget them. Not just for what they did, but *how* they did it. With patience. With kindness. With quiet understanding. They didn't treat me like a broken man. They treated me like Harry — someone who mattered, even if I couldn't talk, move, or respond the way I once did.

One therapist, in particular, stands out. She looked me in the eye and said, "You're going to hate me some days. But we're going to get some of this back." I didn't have the words to thank her then. But I remember feeling it — that spark. That belief. It wasn't much, but it was something to grab onto.

And there were friends — some who showed up, some who sent messages, some who just quietly waited until I was ready to let them back in. They reminded me who I

was before this — and helped me see who I still could be.

I had every reason to fall apart. But I had even more reasons not to.

# Rehab Begins

They told me, "We're starting therapy today." I wasn't ready. I wasn't even sure I could sit up without help, let alone do anything. But there's no perfect moment to begin — just a decision to try, no matter how much it hurts.

Physical therapy came first. The therapist rolled me into the gym, where other patients were already working — slowly, deliberately, painfully. I watched them and thought, *That's where I am now*.

She asked me to shift in the chair. I tried. Nothing happened. She smiled and said, "Good. That's a start." I thought she was joking. But I realized later, she meant it. In rehab, a thought is a movement. Even trying counts.

We worked on standing. I couldn't do it. Not that day. My legs felt like cement. But she held me up. Let me feel what it was like to be vertical again — just for a second. It was exhausting. But also, something in me woke up.

Occupational therapy was next. It felt strange, almost childish at first — picking up pegs, stacking blocks, brushing my teeth with help. But it mattered. I wanted my hands back. My grip. My ability to hold a fork or button my own shirt. These little tasks suddenly meant everything.

Speech therapy was the hardest. I had the words in my mind. I could see them, feel them, but when I tried to say them — they came out wrong. Garbled. Crooked. Or not at all. My therapist was patient. She'd nod and say, "Try again." And I would. Again and again.

Sometimes I wanted to quit. To scream. To disappear. But I kept showing up.

Because every tiny win — a word said clearly, a toe that moved, a hand that steadied — reminded me:

I'm still in here. And I'm coming back.

### The People Who Carried Me

I didn't get through rehab on my own.

Every step I took, every word I struggled to say, every moment I felt like quitting — someone was there, holding the line with me.

There were **therapists** who became more than professionals. They became my teammates. They celebrated the small stuff — a toe that twitched, a spoon held steady — like it was gold. One physical therapist, in particular, never let me fall — not physically, not mentally. She pushed me, but never past my edge. She believed I could stand before I did.

My **speech therapist** had the patience of a saint. She'd listen to me stumble through syllables and still smile like I'd just read Shakespeare. She reminded me that my

voice was worth recovering — and helped me find it again.

And then there was my **family**. They showed up every day. Sat through the hard sessions. Encouraged me through the tears. When I couldn't speak, they spoke for me. When I couldn't move, they held my hand. They reminded me that I wasn't just a patient — I was still me.

There were days I felt broken. But these people — they held the pieces until I was strong enough to start putting them back together myself.

They didn't save me.

They helped me save myself.

### The Mental Battle

Rehab worked on my body, but the real war was in my mind.

I expected pain. I expected fatigue. I didn't expect the silence. The long hours lying in a hospital bed, thinking. Feeling stuck. Watching the ceiling. Feeling like time had slowed down, while the rest of the world moved on without me.

There were days when frustration was all I felt.

I couldn't move how I wanted.

I couldn't talk how I wanted.

I couldn't be who I used to be.

That version of me — the confident, capable, fastmoving tech guy — felt far away. And I didn't know if he was coming back.

Then came the **darkness**. Not just sadness — but a heavy, dragging kind of hopelessness. A question that sat in my chest:

Is this it? Is this who I am now?

I didn't always tell people how low it got. I didn't want to worry them. But there were moments I felt like giving up. Not dying — just... stopping. Stopping the fight. Stopping the effort. Because what if all this work only brought me halfway back?

The fear of the future was worse than the stroke itself.

Would I walk again?

Would I ever work again?

Would people still see *me* — or just the damage?

But here's what saved me:

I allowed myself to feel it — all of it.

The grief. The anger. The fear. The unfairness.

And then, piece by piece, I started using it.

Not to break me. But to build something new. A version of me who could be proud — not in spite of the stroke, but because I faced it head-on.

### Who Am I Now?

The hardest part wasn't the physical loss. It was the identity loss.

Before the stroke, I was Harry Wheat — tech guy, problem solver, independent to the core. I didn't ask for help. I didn't need to. I fixed things, figured things out, moved through life with confidence. That was who I was.

After the stroke, I couldn't even put on my own socks. I couldn't speak without effort. I couldn't walk without support.

And it hit me like a punch:

If I'm not who I used to be... who am I now?

There's a strange grief that comes with losing parts of yourself that no one else can see — not just your movement, but your *identity*. I didn't just miss walking. I missed being relied on. I missed being *useful*. I missed feeling like *me*.

Independence was something I never thought about until it was gone.

Suddenly I needed help with everything — bathing, dressing, even eating. And every time I had to ask, it felt like a piece of my pride chipped away.

But over time, I started to see it differently. Needing help didn't mean I was weak. It meant I was *still fighting*.

And I realized: the stroke took a lot, but it didn't take my will. It didn't take my humor. It didn't take my stubbornness. It didn't take the heart of who I was — it just forced me to meet that person all over again.

I'm not the same Harry I was before.

But I'm still me.

Just... rebuilt.

### Moments That Held Me Together

Recovery isn't a straight line.

It's a storm — messy, unpredictable, full of false starts and quiet victories.

But every so often, in the middle of all the frustration and fear, there were moments.

Moments that reminded me I wasn't done yet.

I remember one day in therapy — maybe a few weeks in. The therapist asked me to try lifting my leg. I thought, Why bother? It hasn't worked yet. But I tried anyway.

And it moved.

Barely. Just a tremble. But it *moved*.

I looked at her, and she smiled like I'd just walked across the room. And that's when I felt it — not just the muscle firing, but something deeper: **hope**.

Another time, a nurse wheeled me past a window. The sun was pouring in. For the first time in weeks, I felt warm. Not just physically — emotionally. I realized I hadn't even looked outside since the stroke. That simple sunlight cracked something open in me. I wasn't gone. The world was still out there. I just had to get back to it.

And then there was the moment I heard my own voice—clear, steady, after days of garbled sounds. I said "water." Just one word. But it was *mine*. I owned it. And I cried.

These moments didn't fix everything. But they held me together when I was falling apart. They whispered, *Keep going*.

And I did.

### Setbacks and Surprises

Recovery doesn't follow the rules. Just when I thought I was turning a corner, something would pull me back.

One of the worst moments came when I was starting to make real progress in therapy — my speech was improving, and I had taken a few steps with support. I felt proud. Hopeful. Like maybe I was finally getting some control back.

Then one day, my blood pressure shot up unexpectedly. I got dizzy, my speech slurred again, and for a moment, I thought I was having another stroke. The fear hit hard — not just for me, but for everyone around me. The medical team acted fast, ran tests, and thankfully ruled out another bleed. But the scare rattled me. Deep down, I wondered: What if this keeps happening? What if I'm never truly safe?

There were smaller setbacks too. A fall during rehab that landed me back in bed for days. A plateau in therapy where nothing seemed to improve. Frustration built up. I started doubting whether the effort was even worth it.

But then... there were surprises. A few good ones.

One morning, I realized I could lift my hand just slightly higher than the day before. Another day, I spoke a full sentence without stopping — just once, but it

happened. And every time someone said, "Did you just do that?" it reminded me that healing wasn't always loud. Sometimes it whispered.

The setbacks tested me. The surprises kept me going.

I learned that recovery isn't about perfection — it's about persistence.

# What the Struggle Taught Me

I didn't ask for this journey.

I didn't want it.

But I can't deny that it taught me things I might never have learned otherwise.

#### Lesson #1: You're never as alone as you think.

There were moments when I felt isolated — locked inside my body, unable to move or speak. But people showed up. Family. Nurses. Therapists. Even strangers. And I learned to let them help me. That was new for me. And hard. But necessary. I found out that accepting support isn't weakness — it's strength in disguise.

# Lesson #2: Progress is rarely visible while it's happening.

Some days, I felt like I was doing everything right and getting nowhere. But then — one day — I'd move a toe. Or speak a full word. Or sit without help. I realized that recovery is like building something from the inside out — you can't always see the structure forming, but it's there. Quiet. Steady. Real.

# Lesson #3: You can lose a part of yourself and still be whole.

The stroke changed me. Physically. Emotionally. Mentally. But it didn't erase me. It forced me to look closer at who I am beyond what I do. I had to rebuild confidence, rediscover patience, and find new definitions for words like "success" and "independence."

#### Lesson #4: Life is fragile. And powerful.

One blood vessel. That's all it took to shift everything. But I'm still here. Still standing — even when standing looked different. And I've learned to appreciate the small things: a full sentence, a short walk, a hand I can finally move. Nothing is too small to celebrate.

I wouldn't wish this experience on anyone. But I also wouldn't trade what it taught me.

Because through all the pain, fear, and loss... I found out who I really am

### Lessons in the Hard Way

The stroke didn't just challenge my body — it stripped away everything I thought I knew about control, pride, and strength.

And through that loss, I learned things I couldn't have learned any other way.

### I learned patience.

Not the kind you need in traffic or at the grocery store —

but the kind that comes from watching your body refuse to move day after day... and still showing up to try again. That kind of patience hurts. But it builds something solid inside you.

# I learned that strength has nothing to do with muscles.

Before the stroke, I thought strength meant independence — doing things on your own, pushing through, being tough. After the stroke, I learned that real strength is asking for help. Letting others lift you when you can't lift yourself. That was humbling. And necessary.

# I learned to grieve what was lost — and still fight for what's left.

There's no manual for losing parts of yourself. It's not just movement or speech — it's identity. Pride. Purpose. I had to grieve that silently at first. But eventually, I realized that grieving wasn't giving up. It was part of healing.

### I learned to celebrate everything.

A clear word. A step. A smile. A quiet moment of peace. Every small victory felt like a mountain climbed. And I began to realize: if you only celebrate big wins, you'll miss your whole life.

### And maybe the biggest lesson?

You never really know how strong you are until strong is the only choice you have.

# Small Wins, Big Hope

They say not to sweat the small stuff. But after a stroke, the small stuff *is* everything.

The first time I held a spoon without dropping it — I felt like I had just conquered a mountain. The first time I took a step with help, I wasn't thinking about distance. I was thinking: I'm standing. That's what mattered.

There was one day in speech therapy when I finally got a full sentence out. Just six words, simple ones. But the way the therapist smiled, the way my family reacted — you'd have thought I'd given a TED Talk. And in that moment, I felt more powerful than I had in months.

Another day, I brushed my own teeth. That sounds small, right? But it took coordination, focus, and muscle control that hadn't been there for weeks. It wasn't just hygiene — it was independence. And it felt good.

There were also quiet victories. A good night's sleep without fear. A conversation where someone waited for me to finish speaking instead of finishing my sentence for me. A moment when I looked in the mirror and saw not a "stroke victim" — but *Harry Wheat*, the man still in the fight.

These wins didn't happen all at once. They came slowly, in fragments. But each one lit a tiny fire. And those sparks added up.

They reminded me that I was still moving forward — not always fast, not always pretty — but forward, still.

And forward is enough.

# Joy, Reclaimed

It's strange how the simplest things — things I never noticed before — became the milestones that meant the most.

The first time I walked across a room with a cane, I didn't care about how I looked. I cared about how it felt. Every step was shaky, slow, uneven — but it was me, on my own legs. I remember thinking, This is what freedom feels like.

Writing came back slowly. At first, I couldn't hold a pen steady. But then one day, I scribbled my name — messy, crooked, but mine. I stared at those letters like they were a signature on a second chance.

Speaking was the hardest. There were times I got stuck on words, frustrated by the traffic jam in my brain. But then there were moments — full, clear sentences that flowed out like nothing had ever happened. The first time I told someone "I'm doing okay," and they understood me — that was joy. Not because it was perfect, but because it was possible.

And then there were the quiet joys:

• Drinking coffee without spilling.

- Laughing at a joke I actually understood.
- Holding someone's hand without needing help to do it.

Each of these moments felt like little pieces of myself returning — not all at once, but just enough to remind me that life after stroke isn't just survival.

It's rediscovery.

### A New Kind of Normal

Life after stroke isn't about "getting back to the old me." It's about learning to live as the *new me* — with new routines, new priorities, and a deeper understanding of what matters.

My mornings are slower now. I don't rush like I used to. Every movement takes more focus, more time. But in that slowness, I've found something I didn't have before: *presence*. I notice more. I appreciate more.

My routine includes therapy exercises, stretches, and breaks. I plan around energy, not the clock. I still miss the freedom of just *going* — walking, driving, working without thinking about it — but I've learned to give myself grace. Progress isn't a straight line, and neither is living.

Relationships changed, too. Some people drifted.
Others stepped up in ways I never expected. I've learned who really listens, who really shows up. And I've learned how to ask for help — not because I'm weak, but because I'm still rebuilding.

I've also found new purpose. I share my story. I encourage others going through the same fight. I remind them that it's okay to grieve what you lost — and still be proud of what you've kept.

My passions have shifted. I don't spend hours behind a computer like I used to, but I still solve problems — just different ones now. I find joy in writing again, in walking outside, in conversations that used to exhaust me but now feel like victories.

I'm still Harry Wheat.

Not "back to normal."

But forward — into something new.

And maybe even stronger.

# What I've Let Go — and What I Still Hold On To

There's a strange peace in accepting what's out of your hands.

And there's power in refusing to accept what still belongs to you.

I've had to let go of some things.

The old version of independence — the kind where I never had to ask for help.

The speed I used to move through life with — physically and mentally.

The illusion that I could always "fix" things, like I used to fix computers.

That was a hard one — realizing some things can't be fixed. They can only be *faced*.

But there's a difference between giving up and letting go.

And there are things I haven't let go of.

I'm still fighting for my speech — to communicate clearly and fully, without hesitation.

I'm still fighting for more movement, more control, more strength on my right side.

I'm still fighting to walk farther, speak longer, write more steadily.

I'm still fighting for confidence — not just in my body, but in *myself*.

And most of all, I'm fighting for purpose.

This journey didn't end when I left the hospital. It didn't end when I reached certain goals. It keeps going. Every day, I wake up with a choice: to mourn what's gone... or to work with what I still have.

And I've still got a lot.

I may move differently now. I may speak a little slower. But I'm still *me*. Still Harry Wheat.

And I'm still in this fight — not out of obligation, but because I still believe in what's possible.

### What I Wish I Knew

If I could go back and speak to myself on that first day — lying in a hospital bed, scared and silent — here's what I'd say.

#### To other stroke survivors:

You're still in there.

Even if your body feels foreign. Even if the words won't come. Even if nothing makes sense — *you* are still here. Hold on to that.

Recovery won't be fast. Some days it won't feel like it's happening at all. But it is. Slowly. Quietly. In ways you won't notice until one day you move, speak, feel something you thought was gone.

You'll cry. You'll feel angry. You'll grieve. That's okay. That's not weakness — it's healing. And one day, you'll surprise yourself. With a step. A word. A laugh.

Keep showing up. Even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard.

### To caregivers:

Thank you.

You may not wear a white coat, but you are doing sacred work. You hold us up when we can't stand. You speak for us when we can't talk. You believe in us when we're ready to give up.

But please — take care of *yourself*, too. Rest. Eat. Talk to someone. You can't pour from an empty cup. You're not a machine, you're a lifeline. And we see you, even when we can't say it.

#### To medical professionals:

Your words matter more than you know.

The way you speak to us — not just about us — sticks with us. A small dose of kindness, patience, or hope can change our entire outlook.

Please don't rush past our fear. We're not just cases. We're people — trying to understand what our life looks like now. And sometimes, your belief in us becomes the only belief we have left.

If you're reading this — just starting the recovery process, or helping someone through it — know this:

You are not alone.

You are not broken.

And you are not done.

### What the Stroke Taught Me

I didn't want this journey.

But I've lived it.

And I've learned from it in ways I never imagined.

# I've learned that control is an illusion — but courage is real.

Everything I thought I could control was gone in seconds. My body, my voice, my independence —

stripped away. But what stayed? The decision to keep going. That was mine. Every day I chose to show up, to try, to believe in progress — that was courage. And it was real.

### I've learned that strength looks different now.

It's not loud. It's not always visible. Sometimes strength is lifting your arm an inch. Saying one clear word. Holding eye contact. Asking for help. Admitting you're afraid — and still pushing forward.

# I've learned that progress isn't always about getting back to who you were — it's about discovering who you still are.

The stroke took a lot, but it didn't take everything. And in the quiet, in the work, in the grief and healing, I found pieces of myself I didn't even know I had. Patience. Resilience. A deeper kind of empathy. Gratitude.

# And I've learned that healing doesn't mean "back to normal."

It means *forward into something new.*Something slower, yes. But more intentional. More awake. More human.

I'm not the man I was before the stroke. I'm not less. I'm different. And in some ways — I'm more.

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### **Moving Forward**

The stroke changed everything.

But it didn't end me. It began a different kind of life — one I'm still learning how to live.

I don't know exactly what the future holds.
I still face challenges. Some days are easier than others. Some goals take longer to reach. But I'm not standing still. I'm moving — forward, always forward.

I hope to walk farther, speak clearer, write stronger. I hope to keep rebuilding this life in a way that reflects who I am now — not just who I used to be.

But more than that, I hope to give back.

To share this story. To remind someone — maybe someone reading this right now — that they're not alone. That progress is possible, even if it's slow. That life after stroke isn't about going back... it's about becoming.

I hope to keep showing up — in therapy, in conversation, in life. I hope to love more deeply, live more mindfully, and celebrate every win, no matter how small.

And I hope that, someday, when someone asks what happened to me, I won't just say "I had a stroke."

I'll say, "I survived. I adapted. I moved forward."

Because I'm still Harry Wheat.

And I'm not done.

# Why I'm Telling My Story

I'm not writing this for sympathy.
I'm writing this because someone out there — maybe you — needs to know that recovery is possible.

That hope is real.

That even when everything feels broken, there's still something inside you worth fighting for.

I want you to see what a stroke survivor really looks like — not just the hospital scenes or the therapy rooms, but the *quiet victories*, the *mental battles*, and the *resilience that grows in silence*.

If you're a survivor: I want you to know that it's okay to be angry. It's okay to grieve. And it's okay to need help. But don't give up on yourself. You are still here. Still capable. Still you.

If you're a caregiver: I want to thank you. You may never realize how much your presence matters. Even when we can't speak, we feel your strength.

If you're a medical professional: Please never forget how much power your words have. What you say — and how you say it — can shape someone's entire recovery.

And if you're anyone else — I hope you walk away from this book with more understanding, more compassion,

and maybe even more gratitude for the things you once took for granted.

I told my story not because it's perfect — but because it's real.

And if my story helps one person hold on, one person try again, one person feel less alone... then it was worth writing every word.

# "One moment changed everything. But it didn't end me."

At 53, Harry Wheat was a computer technician — sharp, active, and always fixing things. But when a sudden hemorrhagic stroke took away his mobility, speech, and independence, he found himself facing a problem he couldn't troubleshoot.



Harry Wheat is a stroke survivor and former computer technician who rebuilt his life one step at a time. After surviving a hemorrhagic stroke at 53, he began writing to process his experience and to reach others going through similar challenges. Still Harry is his first book — a personal account of resilience, identity, and hope. He lives with his family and continues to advocate for stroke awareness and survivor support.