

## Dear Diary...



*Margaret had all the signs of a mini stroke but thought she was fine. After a friend instructed her to go to A&E, Margaret realised the damage could have been a lot worse.*

*She recalls the event in this diary:*

### December 2012

Saw my cardiologist at Manchester Royal Infirmary and he felt the time had come to take me off amiodarone but to keep me on aspirin 75mg twice daily.

### 28.2.12

Tachycardia (fast heart rate) started so my daughter rushed me to hospital – I almost lost consciousness! After eventually being stabilised I was sent back home.

### 17.4.12

Tachycardia strikes again. Neighbour took me to hospital – once again felt as though I was 'going out'. After a while I was administered on bisoprolol (beta-blocker) and reverted to normal sinus rhythm. It was suggested I needed anticoagulation again until my expedited cardiology appointment at Manchester Royal Infirmary.

### 26.4.12

My friend Ann was staying with me. The day began like normal; preparing daily porridge for myself and Ann (who was taking a shower). At the time everything seemed to be going well, but now looking back in hindsight, it was not.

Firstly, the porridge boiled over the top of the pan (I took it very light-hearted), served it in bowls and spilt it while carrying it to the dining-room table. Then, as I am aware now, a typical sign of stroke – I lost control of my bowels.

Without acknowledging this as anything of concern, I continued going about my usual daily routine; had a shower and then planned to meet up with walking friends for a long stroll around the local

beauty spot reservoir. Ann at this point was totally oblivious to what was 'going on' with me, as was I. She was driving to the meeting point while I was giving directions. Poor Ann drove backwards and forwards on the main road due to my complete confusion. By the time we arrived our walking friends must have given up on us because they were nowhere to be seen! So Ann and I did a smaller walk with the intention to meet up with everyone later.

Pam, the leader of the group and also a retired nurse (thank goodness), took one glimpse at me and instantly knew something wasn't right. She told me to look into her eyes, at which I laughed and also to squeeze her hands tight. Unbeknown to me she was extremely concerned. She instructed Ann to get me to hospital immediately, but I still could not see what the problem was!

I asked Ann to stop by at the supermarket to buy something for tea. I don't think she could still grasp what was going on. I just felt as though I was walking around the supermarket in a daze.

Eventually we arrived at A & E where Ann explained to the staff what Pam had said. They noticed I was not able to follow simple commands, plus my speech was slightly slurred.

Immediately I was taken for a CT scan which showed right-frontal infarct. I was admitted to hospital - but as far as I could see things were fine in every way, so I was taking the whole situation very light-heartedly.

The following day I had an MRI scan, which was so frightening. The noise inside the scan was truly unbearable and something I shall never forget. This determined I had suffered an ischaemic infarct.



For the first 48 hours I was kept under constant nursing supervision - they were excellent. Plus the occupational therapists were checking my lucidness, asking question after question - brain draining is what it felt like. I was finding it difficult to do basic things like climbing the stairs, walking and simple kitchen skills. This was very frustrating because I'm used to getting things done quickly.

### A few days later

I was told there would be another MRI. I was so apprehensive and frightened following the first one. Thankfully, to my great relief, this time it was a lot easier and I was now ready to go home.

I received many conflicting reports regarding my medication; that I was back on amiodarone and warfarin. My cardiologist telephoned my daughter in Nottingham to tell her what had happened. Should I have suffered a TIA? Was there a breakdown in communication between different hospitals?

### **June 2013**

After six weeks of a very slow life at home, I was finally able to drive again. It felt like I was finally living my life again!

I am now all too aware of the effects of a TIA: crossing the road can be very difficult and I am unable to cope with stress, plus I need to 'pace' myself more.

This experience made me realise life could be very tragic. So, I finally got to grips and arranged my own funeral/epilogue service (even the music) and gave one to each of children.

Life is now wonderful! But following the TIA I have vowed never to say 'I am fine' - just 'not too bad and things are good'.

I am eternally grateful to Pam. If it wasn't for her, I may not have still been here.

### **Update – November 2015**

Three years after having my one and only TIA I am now thankfully monitored by my EP - he immediately prescribed an ongoing course of Pradaxa (dabigatran). Now I have been diagnosed as having paroxysmal atrial fibrillation and my GP keeps an eagle eye on me which gives me a lot of peace of mind. Thankfully I do not have many problems with the side effect with the Pradaxa. I carefully monitor myself on a daily basis, use my common sense, and of course keep tuned in to any signs of tachycardia.

Now the time has come when I do feel a lot more confident. I'm going away with my two daughters and granddaughter to enjoy a girlie time in Budapest!! The first plan had to be 'tucked away' following the one that had been arranged prior to TIA. This is my story, this is my song!! We can, to a degree overcome Atrial Fibrillation, rather than just end up being 'stuck with it'!

**Margaret Long  
(2015)**