

q love: THE AMAZING MARIA VENUTI

An honest reflection on my mother Maria Venuti's stroke, one year on
By Bianca Venuti



This month marks the first anniversary of my inspiring mother Maria's stroke. You may know her as a performer and charity queen. I know her as my Mum and best friend.

As I reflect on the year that has been, so many emotions surface – pride, hope, anger, frustration, exhaustion and most importantly love.

While Mum has made amazing progress in her recovery, it has been a slow process and there is still such a long road ahead for her. For us. What happened on November 5, 2016 changed both our lives forever.

I was told that the stroke that mum suffered was one of the worst hemorrhagic bleeds the intensive care nurses had even seen. It savaged the left side of her brain. At first we didn't know if she would survive, but Mum is a fighter, she hasn't and she won't give up. When I asked about recovery potential based on the best they had seen for a bleed like this, the doctor replied that they hadn't. People who have a bleed like Mum's don't even make it out of the ambulance, I was told. So I knew from the very beginning, that in true Maria Venuti style, she was forging her own path to show everyone what was possible.

It has been heartbreaking to see at times though. In an instant, Mum went from being a vibrant and vivacious entertainer (we had been in Melbourne for the Cup just days before) to not being able to comprehend, talk, walk or even swallow. But Mum never lost her spark, no matter how tough things got, her spirit has shone through. While she can't get her point across with words, she talks with her eyes and expressions, and this drives us both forward.

Mum spent six weeks in intensive care, then over four months in rehabilitation before she was able to come home. Of course she could no longer live alone at her house. She now requires ongoing 24/7 care at her now wheelchair accessible home with me. Everything requires detailed thought, special equipment, support, and time. Alongside the support of beautiful friends and a team of carers, we do our best to try and make her life as meaningful and happy as it can be while she continues to recover.

It is so good to have her out of hospital and in the types of environments she enjoys. I am relishing the opportunity to give Mum back the love and a little of the care she has provided to me all my life. Today, it is not about her performances to her audiences, it is about her performance in rehab. We celebrate the key milestones with little yellow stars. When she spoke her first word, when she stands up, when she tries to sing!

We have good days, bad days and days where we feel like we are just treading water, sometimes even drowning a little. I constantly ask myself "how do I make this work?", "how can I provide her with everything she needs to thrive?" and "how do I ensure balance, so that we can both continue to lead beautiful lives too?"

The reality is we are in the process of finding a “new normal” and it’s a huge challenge. Stroke is brutal, but Mum is larger than life and so much bigger than her stroke.

October 29 marked World Stroke Day, and the theme was “What’s your reason for preventing stroke?” It is an important question we all must ask ourselves.

As Maria’s daughter, her family, and now ‘a carer’, I had no idea what this journey would entail. My reason for preventing stroke is to stop other people from having to unnecessarily suffer through this too.

One person has a stroke in Australia every nine minutes. It can strike at any age, changing lives in an instant. The real impact of stroke is far reaching. It doesn’t just impact the survivor, it changes families.

So, I urge you and your loved ones to learn more about stroke and take action to reduce your own stroke risk.

Stroke is largely preventable, it can be treated and it can be beaten. Two key risk factors for stroke that we can change are high blood pressure and physical inactivity. Please, go to your local pharmacy, or have your blood pressure checked when you are next at the GP. Know your blood pressure and if it is high, do something about it and continually monitor it. Learn techniques to better manage stress. And if you are not getting enough exercise, which most of us are not, get moving. Jump off public transport a stop early, use the stairs and not the lift and go for a walk. By introducing lifestyle changes like eating healthily and moving more, you can reduce your stroke risk.

Mum and I will be marking World Stroke Day and the 12 month anniversary of mum’s stroke with a special benefit lunch with close friends, to reflect on all of her amazing achievements and keep encouraging her that her dreams can come true – talking, walking and singing again!

Life is so precious and the show must go on.

Find out more about stroke at www.strokefoundation.org.au and about World Stroke Day at <http://www.worldstrokecampaign.org/>

