



Grateful stroke survivor Dan Taylor has a new lease on life and a new red Vespa.

# THE COMEBACK

RETIRED MOVIE SOUND-SYSTEM EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCES FULL STROKE RECOVERY, THANKS TO QUICK ACTION AND EXPERT CARE.

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Last November, South Bay resident Dan Taylor spent the morning shoveling snow off the deck of his second home in Park City, Utah. Last summer he and his wife, Debbie, took a six-week, 6,000-mile driving tour in their Airstream trailer. The couple traveled to Canada, across the Canadian Rockies and down through Montana to Utah.

"I had no issues hooking and unhooking the trailer," he says. Such physical endurance at age 74 is impressive. It's even more so since Taylor suffered a serious stroke just over a year ago.

## SOMETHING'S WRONG

Sitting at his home office desk paying bills, Taylor, a retired movie sound-system executive, felt a snuffle. He started to reach into his pocket for a tissue, but his left hand wouldn't cooperate. So he decided to get a tissue from the box near his front door.

Taylor could barely push his chair back from the desk but was determined to get to the tissue box. Making his way down the stairs of his multilevel home, he felt the left side of his body becoming more numb. Taylor realized he might be having a stroke.

He called Debbie, who was out doing a nearby errand. She immediately recognized from his voice that her husband was having a stroke and called 911. When the ambulance arrived, Taylor says, "They assured me right away: 'Sir, you're going to be fine. Torrance Memorial is a certified stroke center. We've alerted them we're coming.'"

## HIGHEST-LEVEL STROKE CARE

As a certified Comprehensive Stroke Center, Torrance Memorial Medical Center meets strict standards set by the American Heart Association, the American Stroke Association, and the safety and performance-certifying organization DNV GL. This designation affirms the hospital can treat the most complex stroke cases and provide top-level stroke care 24/7.

"Stroke care begins with the Emergency Medical System (EMS)," says stroke program coordinator Marco Pech. "Paramedics perform several neurological assessments to determine whether the patient is having a stroke and its degree of severity. They notify Torrance Memorial's emergency department a stroke patient is

coming and provide the patient's scores. That activates a 'code stroke' here."

Sheila Kelliher Berkoh, fire captain with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, urges people to quickly call 911 if they think they are having some kind of heart or neurological issue. "They are not bothering us; this is what we do," she explains. "If we check you and it's nothing, no harm no foul. But if it's the beginning of a heart attack or stroke or aneurysm, we will provide the proper medical care in the ambulance and will have the specialists you need ready for you at the hospital. That time-saving action is crucial."

As soon as a potential stroke patient arrives at Torrance Memorial, an emergency department physician will immediately examine the patient to determine whether he or she is experiencing a stroke, Pech explains. "If so, the stroke team meets with the patient at our CT scanner for evaluation," he says. "The team includes a neurologist who evaluates the patient and determines the course of treatment. The neurologist might be physically on-site or based at Cedars-Sinai but 'present' via our telestroke robot, which allows the physician to assess patients remotely through videoconferencing."

#### **CLEARING THE CLOT**

That was the sequence of events for Taylor, who received the clot-busting medication tPA (tissue plasminogen activator) soon after arriving at Torrance Memorial. This medication can break up blood clots in about 30% of cases. However, it must be given within 4.5 hours of the first symptoms to be effective. Although Taylor received the medication well within that window, he still required further treatment.

"He had a large area of his right brain without a blood supply," says Richard Krauthamer, MD, the interventional radiologist who treated Taylor. "His speech was slurred, but he was comprehensible and understood what was going on. That's always a plus." (People who have strokes on the left side of the brain often cannot communicate or understand what's happening.)

"Taylor had a large amount of recoverable brain, so we knew we had to move fast to preserve it," Dr. Krauthamer says. "Fortunately, he had what we call collateral blood vessels that bypass the blockage similar to how people use side streets to bypass a blocked freeway."

In the interventional radiology suite, Dr. Krauthamer performed a thrombectomy (clot removal) aided by biplane imaging technology, which provides simultaneous views of the brain's arteries from the front and side. He accessed the clot by feeding a tube through Taylor's groin to the blocked artery and removed the clot via suction.

"I'm lying on the table, and suddenly I'm feeling sensation come back in my left arm and hand, and then my left leg," Taylor recalls. Tweaking Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature line from *The*

*Terminator*, he announced, "I'm back!" Taylor returned home from the hospital after three days and needed minimal physical therapy.

"This was one of the more dramatic cases where we got a great result," Dr. Krauthamer says. "Not everyone has the bypass collateral vessels. Recovery also depends on how quickly we can administer treatment." He says Taylor has an excellent prognosis and can compensate for the tiny amount of brain function he lost.

#### **MOVIE MAGIC**

Taylor started in the motion picture industry in 1970 as a projectionist. He soon became involved with motion picture sound equipment and served as vice president of marketing and sales for a company that manufactured it. In 1993 Taylor moved to Southern California from the Boston suburbs with his wife and three children when Sony Pictures recruited him to join their new program to put digital sound on film.

"The motion picture industry was only about 75 years old when I started, so I have been in it for close to half of its existence. It's been an absolutely great career and so much fun," says Taylor, who retired in October 2023. He remembers seeing actors like Jack Nicholson walking on the lot and enjoyed visiting sets including *Jeopardy!*, *Wheel of Fortune* and *Men in Black*. "Back then security was more lax, and studio doors were just open. It was magic."

#### **RISK FACTORS**

Taylor had two factors that increased his risk of stroke. He had mitral valve repair surgeries in 2011 and 2022. "Valve surgery can lead to a clot building up on the valve, which can slip up into the brain," says Dr. Krauthamer.

Taylor also has a history of atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that prevents the heart from pumping efficiently and can cause blood to pool in the heart and form blood clots. Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke by five times.

Blood thinners can help reduce the risk of blood clots in those with atrial fibrillation, and Taylor now takes blood-thinning medications. For people at risk of falling or who have other factors that might disqualify them from taking blood thinners, a surgical device called the Watchman Implant, available at Torrance Memorial, may help. It involves inserting a circular implant about the size of a quarter to close off a small part of the heart where clots generally form.

Today Taylor shows no signs of slowing down. He and Debbie will spend Christmas in Puerto Vallarta with their children and grandchildren and just returned from a visit to New Zealand in February. Most days you can find Dan scooting around town on his red Vespa.

"I have no residual effects from the stroke," he says. "I know it's because of the speed and caliber of the care I received and the fact Torrance Memorial is a Comprehensive Stroke Center." •