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Surviving and Thriving with a Streak of Stubborn, Great Therapy and a Robo-Arm



Occupational and certified hand therapist Dr. Kathy Ondak and Melvin Brown

At 63 (and he'll joke with you that he doesn't look 63), four-time stroke survivor Melvin Brown finds peace and gratitude, just sitting on his front porch and saying hello to passing neighbors. He's learned, the hard way, how to slow down, and he says slowing down doesn't mean withdrawing from life or losing hope. Mr. Brown's focus now is on healing, resuming doing what he loves, and learning all the great intricacies of his new 'Robo-Arm'.

Mr. Brown was able to survive four strokes, but he had to deal with the physical challenges that resulted—the loss of the use of his arm, some paralysis in his face, and general weakness on one side. But what he gained was the use and strength of an arm brace and a caring team of therapists that helped him progress in his healing.

“They are something else! If you think you are going to therapy and not doing anything (beyond being present for therapy), you're in for something! Your mission is not to just go, and then not to follow through on what you have to do (as homework from therapy). I think these therapy services are underrated! These are dedicated people, who come to work and do what they do ... they help me, and we have fun! They'll tell you, 'Mr. Brown is a character.' I guess I am,” he says with a gentle laugh. “I've always been the type of man that refuses to sit down. It isn't my time to lay down either, so I keep on moving, as much as I can,” he surmises. “I guess I've always been stubborn too.” While he attributes his strokes in part to that same stubbornness, he also

attributes his healing. And as far as not slowing down, well he says he's on a different path now. "MetroHealth helped me find the Peter B. Lewis Aquatic & Therapy Center. I went to the Menorah Park Mandel Adult Day Center and it was brought to my attention that the Aquatic Center offered occupational and physical therapy for strokes, and I said I am all for it, count me in!"

"What I learned from this is that it's important to those who are on medications to take them accordingly and follow the doctor's orders. I was stubborn and non-compliant, and I didn't want to take a lot of medications, so I tried to wean myself off of them, against doctor's orders. Me working 104 hours a week with three jobs didn't help. My high blood pressure and diabetes didn't make it better. I had a lot of stress and that didn't help. I'm stubborn like the typical man, and I didn't follow the doctor's orders," Mr. Brown says in hindsight. "Now, I try. I'm doing better than I have been" "My last stroke in 2010 took out my left side and before I got therapy at the Center, I was just dragging my arm along. Now it's more functional and the therapist got me a brace. I couldn't believe it was approved! The brace is helping me learn how to straighten my elbow and fingers so I can use my arm in a more normal fashion. They took a picture of me with my arm brace on and I said you've got me looking like Robocop! They helped me get back to good! I would like therapy to get me back to using my left arm as normal as possible, and with the brace and the therapy I think it's going to happen. I got a problem with someone telling me I can't do something, that's bull and I refuse to accept that coming out of anyone's mouth."

Mr. Brown believes that putting effort into one's own recovery is key. Now fitted with his amazing 'Robo-Arm' he is energized to not only be as good as he was but perhaps even better. At home in East Cleveland, he says he will learn to slow down to heal. He has much to look forward to in his coming years. Time with family is especially important to Mr. Brown, who has four grown children, three daughters and one son. He has seven grandchildren. "Every year that I have been getting therapy at the Center, it just gets better. I definitely recommend the Center. It helps, as long as someone has the will to go and not give up. Yes, it definitely helps."