

Hobbies After Stroke

BY LYNN BRONIKOWSKI

JENNIFER WHITE WAS A MARKETING executive in 2000 when she collapsed in her downtown Atlanta apartment, managed to call 911, woke up in ICU and learned she had survived a stroke.

After extensive rehabilitation, she is thriving at her home in Springfield, Mo., where she and her husband moved to be close to family.

"I never went back to work again," said 43-year-old White. "But I ... still wanted to do something that challenged me so I looked into finding a hobby."

Her mother-in-law, Marilyn White, a quilter, convinced her to give quilting a try. Already she has made 14 quilts. She's even donating one to a local group to raise funds for stroke awareness. She has also taken up gardening and cooking — things the businesswoman who traveled a lot and worked seven days a week never dreamed she could do.

"And I've found I'm good at it," said White. "This experience has transformed me from total workaholic into someone who enjoys the beauty in life — a flower in my garden or cooking a great meal. I don't have a job but all of this brings me gratification in a way I never thought possible."

For stroke survivor Paul Berger, who builds model railroad sets, hobbies are a way to connect with people — a time when people look past disabilities and simply share common interests.

"After a stroke you have to look for more than just therapy," said Berger of Falls Church, Va. He had just finished jogging in 1985 when he had a stroke at age 36. "Hobbies are good to take you through the blues following a stroke and also get you through the winter blues."



Jennifer White discovered quilting after her stroke.

Berger has written several books about life after the stroke that left him aphasic but determined to return to work, travel Europe and do the outdoor sports he loved such as skiing and swimming. These books are sold at www.strokesurvivor.com, Berger's website.

One of his books, "How to Conquer Hobbies with One Hand," gives practical tips on everything from finding a hobby to building a work area and modifying tools and equipment to accommodate stroke-related disabilities.

"Hobbies take you away from your day-to-day problems," said Berger. "I don't think about my disability when I'm working on my model railroad. And hobbies don't have to be expensive. You can simply visit a hobby store and see what might interest you."

Karen Hookstadt, lead occupational therapist at Spalding Rehabilitation Hospital in Aurora, Colo., said the most common obstacle to pursuing hobbies after stroke is one-sided weakness.

"Patients should tell their therapists what interests they've had in the past and they can work with them to adapt their hobbies or interests," said Hookstadt.

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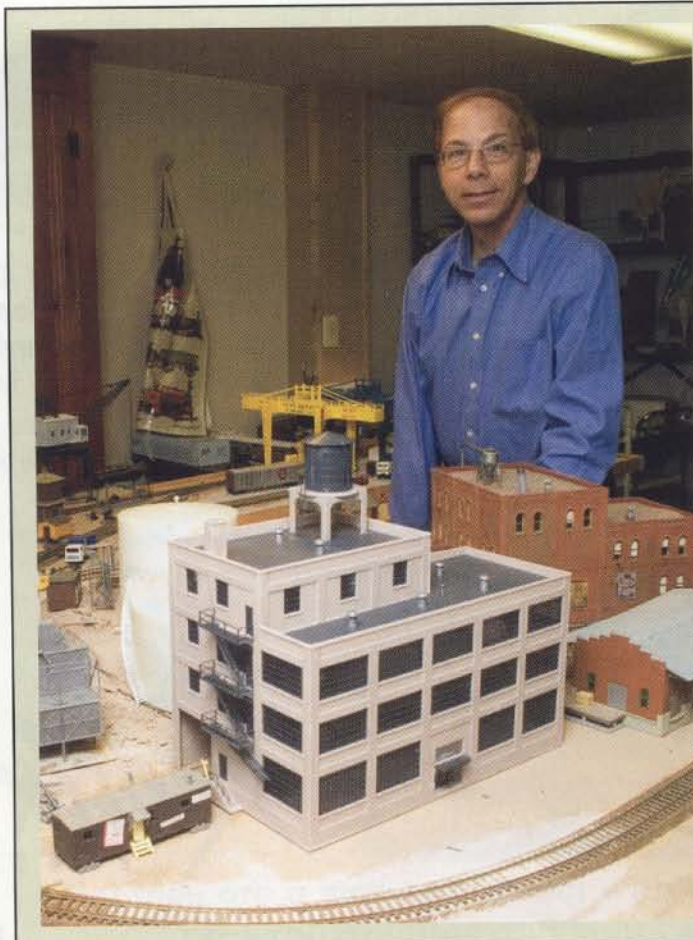
She has seen several success stories among her patients.

- One woman played bridge by using a deck holder.
- Another used an adaptive keyboard that allowed her to not only surf the web but also continue her volunteer work for a non-profit organization.
- A golfer got back on the course through an adaptive golf program (www.golf4fun.org).
- An artist with hand control problems found tools to help control her brushstrokes.

“We go through a check list to gauge their interest in various hobbies and then find a way to adapt the hobby to their needs,” said Hookstadt. “It’s exciting when patients come back to see us. We see some of the most creative people around.” ■



Stroke survivor Paul Berger has learned to adapt his hobbies.



5 Simple Ways to Find Hobbies After Stroke

1. Walk around a hobby store to see what interests you.
2. Join a stroke support group and ask other survivors about their hobbies.
3. Read books like the one mentioned in this article to get ideas.
4. Search for adaptive products on the Internet.
5. Get ideas from your therapist about how to adapt old and new hobbies to your needs.

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