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## No stroke of luck for Bill

Collie River Valley Bulletin, Collie



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## People: NOLA GREEN

EARLY in December, 2013, the Vernon family of Hull Road was preparing for Christmas. Bill, the head of the family, was a fit 53 year-old miner who rode his bike to work at the Premier Mine.

On December 2, he was water skiing and enjoying life; little did he or his family know that everything was going to change forever in just three days.

"Bill used to do everything for me, and he was a huge mentor to our kids," his wife, Denny, said.

"I didn't realise it at the time, how much he did for me and the family."

For Bill Vernon, life changed in the blink of an eye, in the beat of a heart – in a stroke.

It also changed for his wife, Denny, and for his five children – and it will never be the same.

Bill was literally struck down at home, at 1.15am on December 5, and Denny immediately called an ambulance.

Some ambulances in major cities carry lightweight brain scanners, so patients can get a scan immediately to determine if a stroke has been caused by a clot or a bleed.

Different medications are needed, and if administered straightaway, make a world of difference to a patient's recovery.

Within 25 minutes of his stroke, Bill arrived at the Collie hospital. Stroke patients at remote country hospitals have a much harder time than those

with access to well-equipped and well-staffed major city hospitals. Collie is classed as a remote country hospital.

"Bill was not diagnosed immediately. Minutes are important in strokes; you need to be diagnosed quickly," Denny said.

"If I had known what was going to happen, I would have spoken up - if I had known then what I know now.

"We need to educate people – and that includes doctors – what the signs of a stroke are. GPs are supposed to know everything, but they don't.

"Bill was in hospital within 25 minutes, but he was left overnight. He was sent to Bunbury the next morning, and they transferred him to Royal Perth Hospital immediately.

"He was admitted to the intensive care ward at RPH. He was left paralysed, and could not speak or swallow.

"He had to learn to walk again, and learn to eat.

"Having a stroke is like getting a filing cabinet and tipping it upside down, and then trying to put it back together again.

"It would have been less serious if he had had a needle straight away."

While Bill was still in intensive care, a bed became available at Shenton Park Hospital and Bill was sent there.

He was an inpatient for almost four months, then for the next eight months, he was an outpatient.

"We stayed in a rental house," Denny said. "We had people coming to see Bill, as he showed progress – far more than was

expected.

"As a family, we have always worked hard together to get Bill to where he is today. As a mum, watching our kids cope has been a struggle, knowing that their mentor will no longer mentor them. Now they are his mentors, teaching him about life all over again.

"We have been very, very lucky, and Bill has worked so hard. He is inspiring – he never complains.

"His life before is a blank to him: he couldn't remember his kids' names.

"It's hard to watch the kids knowing how much they miss their Dad – yes, we still have Bill and we are so grateful, but we grieve 'my Bill, their Dad'.

"Bill is not the man I married," she said sadly.

Bill continues to work hard on rehabilitation, going for walks every second day.

"When we first came home, people would see him and pick him up and bring him home," Denny said.

"The dog always goes with him, and if anything happened, the dog would come and get me.

"He walks to mum and dad's place in Denton Road.

"He goes to exercise at Teresa Briggs' senior fitness class. When he first went, it was all women."

Denny has learnt a lot since Bill had his stroke, and she wants to pass her knowledge on to others.

She is an advocate with Australian Stroke Alliance, taking part in two or three zoom meetings a year.



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“I am another voice, to tell Bill’s story. I got pushed forward into this role,” she said. “We are on a stroke journey.”

For more information about the work of the Australian Stroke Alliance and their aim to address major gaps in health outcomes for Australians in rural, remote and Indigenous communities go to: <https://austrokealliance.org.au/>



**FIT:** Three days before his stroke, Bill Vernon was water skiing.



**NEXT GENERATION:** Bill and Denny Vernon with 12 of their 15 grandchildren: Leni, Charlie nursing Wilde, Lace, Keet, Coah, Brax, Salv, Jimmy, Quade, Steele and Jagger.



**FAMILY:** Liam, Kiri, Bill, Denny, Axel, Temily and Teke Vernon.



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