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Talkative, Observant Friends Come to Aid of Silent Stroke Victim

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Aug. 20, 2008) Having talkative and observant friends may pay a dividend on any workday, but it's crucial during a stroke. Robert Lucas, West Valley Division 8 bus operator, proves that.

Lucas was finishing a 10-hour shift, on May 17 when he struggled out of the relief car he was driving—he remembers the seat belt giving him fits—and entered the division headquarters.



Bus Operator Charles Hall, left, read the symptoms in time to help stroke victim and fellow operator Robert Lucas, below.



According to the National Stroke Association, stroke symptoms include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg—especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.

On his way inside, Lucas passed Charles Hall, another West Valley Division 8 bus operator, without saying a word. It was approximately 4 p.m. and few operators were around.

"Robert didn't talk to me, which was unusual," Hall remembers. They usually talked about their workday and personal things. "I like to talk. He likes to talk."

On that hot and humid Saturday, Hall watched Lucas head for his car to drive home. When Lucas dropped his seat cushion and made no effort to pick it up, Hall called after the part-time operator, yelling, "Robert, are you OK?"

Lucas picked up the cushion and walked slowly to his car. Hall followed Lucas and noticed he could not open the car door.

"I felt I didn't have the strength to open my door," Lucas recalls. "I thought the door was locked, but it wasn't."

Finally, Lucas gathered his belongings and returned to the Division 8 building, passing close to Hall again, still not greeting him. Lucas sat in a chair and did not move. Hall asked Novel Semerdjian, transit operations supervisor, to call the paramedics.

"I think Robert is having a stroke," he told her.

"I couldn't say 'hi' to him; I couldn't talk to anyone," Lucas recalls. "I could motion; I couldn't talk."

- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Ed Blaz, a West Valley Division 8 bus operator, answered Hall's request and watched over Lucas while Hall waited for the paramedics. Because of his frequent conversations with Lucas, Blaz remembered his friend had had a previous stroke.

Blaz wasn't nervous, but he said he was very worried. "[Lucas'] face was really flushed. He really didn't look good. He

couldn't even stand."

Lucas remembers that above the chair where he was sitting was a poster listing the signs of stroke. "I kept pointing to that sign and pointing to me." Lucas said he was aware of everything going on around him, including the arrival of the paramedics. He simply could not speak.

Silent though he was, Lucas was able to press a button on his phone and hand it to Blaz. It was the number for Lucas' wife. Blaz told Lucas' wife Vivian that he believed her husband was having a stroke.

Within eight to 10 minutes, the paramedics arrived, about the same time Lucas' wife arrived, and she gave the paramedics her husband's medical history. The paramedics asked Lucas to move his hand, then gave him oxygen. After 10 minutes of examinations, the paramedics took him to the hospital.

Although Hall said he didn't want to overdo things by having Semerdjian call the paramedics, he knew time was of the essence. "I just wanted people there as fast as possible."

Hall, who has worked out of Division 8 for four years, has advice for those suspecting someone is having a stroke. "My only advice is if you have a hunch about something, tell someone. I wouldn't just assume that nothing's going on."

"I'm getting better every day," Lucas said this week. "I hope to be back as soon as possible." He credits his quick, although incomplete, recovery to receiving the proper drugs within three hours of having his stroke.

"Within an hour, I was moving my arm and leg on the right," he reported. He estimates he now has about 85 to 90 percent of his movement.

His advice for bystanders suspecting someone is having a stroke? "The thing they should do is get help right away. They [stroke victims] cannot speak for themselves."

Jerome Jenkins, a cash clerk at Crossroads Depot Division 2, is another Metro stroke survivor. To read his story: [Click here](#).