Interview with Valerie Greene
Author of “The Fire Within”

This interview, by Kathy Bosworth, was first printed in StrokeNet, the monthly newsletter of The Stroke Network.

I wanted to interview Valerie after seeing her story in the Stroke Connection magazine. After a massive stroke at the age of 31, Valerie has gone on to become an advocate for other survivors. Her newly released book, “The Fire Within” is a must read for survivors and loved ones of stroke survivors. It details the honest, deeply moving journey as Valerie went from being a victim to being a survivor. Valerie graciously consented to an interview with me.

Kathy: Many of our readers have read your story in the Stroke Connection magazine. One part that caught many people’s attention is the fact that you had stem cell injections. Since they are unavailable in the United States, can you tell us where you received such a “cutting edge” procedure and how do you think they helped?

Valerie: Stem cells have been used safely and effectively in other countries for nearly 70 years. They benefit many types of neurological injuries such as a stroke, and in my case were extremely effective. My remarkable recovery clearly demonstrates its effectiveness.

Kathy: Do you think the United States will ever catch up with this medical breakthrough for stroke survivors? Is there anything that the public can do to speed this process along?

Valerie: I believe the citizens of America need to make known that they want this treatment made available. I am personally doing my best to share my experience with as many people as I can. Nancy Reagan has also sent a strong message to Congress to expedite its approval. (see the article on my website listed under Stroke Resources)

It is very important that people be educated to learn that stem cells do NOT have to destroy a human fetus. They can be harvested from a human umbilical cord or from a lamb, which is where I received mine.

Kathy: Do you know of any other new medical approaches that are being tried right now?

Valerie: I have heard about the cork-screw surgical method to break up a blood clot.

Kathy: What type of stroke did you have?

Valerie: I had an Ischemic stroke. A large blood clot totally occluded my brain stem.
Kathy: I have had the pleasure of reading your book and found it very poignant, educational and honest. How long did it take you to write your story? Did you find it therapeutic to write or was it painful?

Valerie: My book started out as my personal journal that I had been writing for years. It was an excellent way for me to release my thoughts and frustrations. When I showed it to a friend one day, she assured me that I had written a book. I quickly replied, “Don’t be ridiculous.” It was from that day on that nearly once a day someone would say, “You know, that would be a great book.” So, I took that as a message to share my experience with the world hoping that it might help someone who might be going through a similar circumstance.

Kathy: Your determination to overcome and continue on in your life was true inspiration. How can others find that fire within?

Valerie: Seek, and you shall find it! It’s within us all.

Kathy: What is the advice you give to other survivors that they seem to connect with the most?

Valerie: Never, Never give up!!!!

Kathy: After reading about your misdiagnosis on more than one occasion, it is painfully obvious that the medical world needs a lot more knowledge about recognizing the signs of a stroke. I hear many stories of patients sitting in ER rooms for hours on end with one side paralyzed and nothing is being done. If your stroke symptoms were properly diagnosed immediately, what do you think would or should have been done differently?

Valerie: If my stroke symptoms were recognized earlier, I could have been started on a blood thinner. Even an aspirin might have made the difference.

Kathy: I understand that doctors were assuming that you could not be having a stroke due to your young age. Have you met other survivors in your age group that have had the same story?

Valerie: Yes, and it is heartbreaking to hear about. I know my life was spared. That is why I’m on a mission to warn people of the symptoms and demonstrate that it can happen at a young age.

Kathy: Congratulations on walking the marathon at Disney World in January. I am so impressed that you not only completed the 13 miles but also raised $11,500 for the Train to End Stroke. Can you tell us about that program?

Valerie: Train To End Stroke is a marathon event to raise money for stroke research and education. Whether you walk or run, you have a coach that helps you train several months prior to the event. It is challenging, I cannot lie; but one worth accepting and doing. The accomplishment is very gratifying! If I can do it, so can you! Put on your walking shoes and reach deep. Find your fire!
Kathy: Please tell us what it felt like to finish the marathon when just a few years ago you didn’t know if you would ever walk again?

Valerie: Exhilarating! I cried tears of joy! I DID IT! I DID IT!!!

Kathy: You have obviously accomplished so much already. Do you have any new goals set for yourself?

Valerie: After my book hits the bestseller list, and I’m on Oprah and all around the world, I plan on opening a health center for challenged individuals. It will be state-of-the-art facility and have every luxury you would find at a major health center all geared for special needs.

Kathy: It is important for caregivers to understand how a survivor feels immediately following a stroke so they can provide the best care and words to say for encouragement. What would you tell a new caregiver, overwhelmed with worry about saying or doing the wrong thing?

Valerie: Be patient. A stroke is like a file cabinet being turned over. All the files are there; it’s just going to take time for them to find their way back to the right place. This is not easy and is terribly frustrating for everyone. So, be patient with them and yourself. God bless caregivers. You are special people.

Kathy: What would you offer for advice to a recent stroke patient that is overwhelmed with doubts about their future?

Valerie: Manifest your future. Reach for the impossible. Set your sites high. Hang up pictures of things you can visualize on and stay focused on them. I had a wall covered in inspirational affirmations and pictures of walking, running, hiking, swimming, horseback riding, and I achieved them all! Don’t sell yourself short! Go for it!!

Kathy: Most writers I know who write non-fiction or personal stories do not do it for riches and fame, but rather a need to connect with and touch people that are caught in a similar situation. If you could afford to give your books away, where would you most like it to be available?

Valerie: I give books to stroke survivors that ask because they are on a tight budget and cannot afford to purchase one, or to anyone who cannot physically see to read, I send an audio.

Kathy: Have you received interesting feedback from readers of your book or people that were present at functions where you spoke? Can you share any with us?

Valerie: I speak at so many functions. It is truly a blessing to hear the feedback. I recently received a manila envelope filled with letters from high school students that I had spoken too. I was taken aback as one by one they said how I had inspired and changed their life and were now grateful for their health and their life.
I also spoke at the 20th Annual Stroke Conference in Orlando where survivors lined up to meet me afterwards and say how I had restored hope. One lady even admitted she was suicidal until after hearing my story.

Kathy: Your writing is focused, passionate and personable. Do you think you will write a sequel to your book?

Valerie: Thank you. Yes, I am certain of it. The response has been so powerful that I realize people need inspiration and hope.

Kathy: Is there a question you wish I had asked or any other information that you would like to share with our readers?

Valerie: I think you covered just about everything.

Kathy: Please let our readers know where and when they can purchase your book, "The Fire Within." You can also list your website here if you would like.

Valerie: Thank you.

Kathy: Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your insight and knowledge. I wish you much success in your writing and all other areas of your life. You are truly an inspiration to us all!

Valerie: Thank you!!! Blessings

The First Limited Edition copies of The Fire Within can be ordered at: 1-800-247-6553, or it is available by clicking Amazon.com.

Book details can be found at http://www.bookmasters.com/marktp lc/rr01129.htm
Valerie's Website can be found at http://www.thefirewithin.net/

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