



Donna Isaacs

**I**n August 2003, a tiny blood clot triggered a catastrophe that resulted in the partial paralysis of the left side of my body. I folded like a rag doll when I tried to sit on the side of the hospital bed and I fell twice when I impulsively attempted to walk. For days I could not understand, much less accept, what had happened.

During the six weeks I spent in the hospital, my world changed completely, not the least of which was the way other people related to the new me.

One of the early questions I asked was: So, who am I now? I knew I had to find that answer.

I remembered a long time ago in a beauty salon in Fort Worth, Texas, when I overheard a stylist remark, "I'm so far behind — I have three heads waiting." Heads, she called us, not customers, not clients, not beautiful women with money to spend, but heads!

Decades later, in the hospital, I overheard a nurse remark, "This end of the hall is for strokes." Strokes, she called us, not intelligent, creative, precious and loved people who've survived a horrendous

# 8 Eight Simple Rules

cardiovascular accident, but "strokes." Well, this "head" marched right out of that beauty shop in Fort Worth, and this "stroke" decided while lying flat on my back, unable to walk out of there or anywhere else right then, I would never again be reduced to just a thing — never allow myself to be defined by that stroke.

I am/have been/and always will be a child of God, a woman, mother, grandmother, daughter, sister, aunt, niece and friend. I am a teacher, a student, a reader, a writer, a homemaker, a museum member, a symphony supporter, a taxpayer, an astute political analyst and committed voter, a shopper, a traveler, and a connoisseur.

I'm a singer, dancer, actress, and *fashionista*. Sometimes I'm Princess Di, Martha Stewart, Wonder Woman and Dear Abby.

I am also a good and brave citizen. Soon after I left the hospital I attended the trial of the man who had robbed me at gunpoint two years before. I was a star witness. Afterward, I looked him in the eye and said good luck to him, as he got ready to board a southbound bus to serve 15 years in prison for his crime. Recently, I was re-elected president of the board of directors of a rural water utility in East Texas. It's my fourth term. The other six directors are conservative, successful, outspoken men.

At the beginning of this year I bought a two-year planning calendar, and I fully intend to fill up all 730 days.

To survive and prosper in this strange new world, I had to reconsider every behavior that had served me for six decades and figure out what would get me what I needed and wanted for the rest of my life. The result was a set of guidelines I now refer to as My Eight Simple Rules For Getting Along in the Normal World after Stroke.

(continued)

## Donna's 8 Rules

1. Be Positive.
2. Don't Complain.
3. Anticipate Ignorance.
4. Be Tolerant and Polite When People Are Being Ignorant.
5. Ask For Help When Necessary.
6. Keep a Sense of Humor and Find or Make the Fun. Remember, things could have turned out much worse, so remember No. 7:
7. Be Grateful and Give Back.  
Finally, and possibly most important:
8. Never Let the Stroke Define You.

These eight rules are my daily goals — where I've set the bar for myself. Certainly, there are times when the whole world crashes around me, but most days, I follow them, and they get me what I want and need.

*Donna Isaacs, Survivor • Tyler, Texas*



### DO YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS?

How is property distributed when people die without wills?  
Do married couples who own property together need separate wills?  
If a person doesn't have a lot of money, is a will necessary?  
Are laws on wills pretty much alike throughout the 50 states?  
Do people without dependents need wills?

To answer these and many other questions, send for our free booklet *37 Things People "Know" About Wills That Aren't Really So.*

For more information, please visit us at [americanheart.org/plannedgiving](http://americanheart.org/plannedgiving) or e-mail us at [plannedgiving@heart.org](mailto:plannedgiving@heart.org).

**Please send to:**  
American Stroke Association  
Planned Giving Department  
7272 Greenville Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75231-4596

**American Stroke Association.**  
A Division of American Heart Association

Please send me the free booklet *37 Things People "Know" About Wills That Aren't Really So.* (CBA)

Please have a representative contact me to discuss how charitable estate planning can benefit me. (CBD)

I am considering a gift to the American Stroke Association through my will/estate plan. (CBC)

I have already included the American Stroke Association in my will/estate plan. (CBB)

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