

Life after Hospice

Stroke survivor, now 86, is dancing in her wheelchair, singing out loud

by Erin Quinn

ON JANUARY 6, 2021, Marie Notaro of Newburgh suffered a stroke.

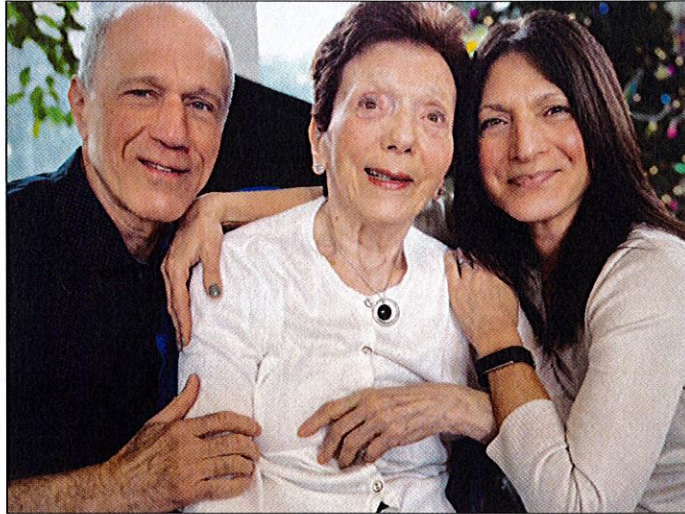
Her children believe it was brought on by the stress of the insurrection of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. "She was so upset, I kept telling her 'Mom, turn off the news,'" said her son Roy Notaro, a musician with the band Sleight-of-Hand.

When he and his other siblings did not hear from her the next day, Roy went over to check on her. She was unconscious on the floor.

Marie had suffered a massive stroke. Her brain bleed required an operation and a two-week stay in the ICU. "This was still during Covid-19, so it was hard for us to see her," said Roy. "We'd visit through a window. It was awful."

One thing her children did know was that she was not faring well in the hospital. "She was in New Rochelle, and then we brought her to St. Luke's to be evaluated and receive PT, but she kept getting worse," said her daughter, Christine Notaro-Barton, a registered dietitian. "She was down to 108 pounds."

Previously a robust, active woman in her Eighties who was part of the local singing group the Sweet Adelines, Marie was wasting away. Her three adult



Marie Notaro (center) with her children Roy Notaro and Christine Notaro-Barton.

children did not know what to do. At this point, they were trying to wrestle with the likelihood that they would lose their mother.

She was sent to Kaplan House in Newburgh, a hospice center. "She was barely eating, she couldn't lift a fork. And then, all of a sudden she started getting stronger," said Notaro-Barton. "It was like night and day."

"I think her brain was beginning to heal from the surgery. It just took time," explained Roy, who would visit his mom and play Tony Bennett performances for her on YouTube. Tony Bennett is her favorite. His music heals.

"She loves to sing, and was always

singing when we were growing up in Brooklyn," said Roy, who like his brother took up his parents' love of music.

After nine weeks of hospice care, Marie became so healthy "that she no longer qualified to stay here," said Notaro-Barton. "So we moved her here [New Paltz Center on Jansen Road], and she's continued to thrive. She's now at 138 pounds, she has her sense of humor back, she's eating, taking part in activities. It's such a blessing."

Roy and his sister, still very involved in the care of their mother, are appreciative of the staff. "They're wonderful, and we have a great rapport with them.

They know she's very cared for."

Marie, 86, "is dancing in her wheelchair, singing out loud, and is such a joyful part of the community here," said Jeff Jacomowitz from the New Paltz Center. "It's so rare to see someone have this kind of comeback." Statistics from the National Health Institute (NIH) report that approximately 90 percent of patients survive less than six months after entering hospice care.

"According to a study published in the Journal of Palliative Medicine in 2021, roughly half the patients who enrolled in hospice passed away within three weeks, while almost 36 percent died within one week," Jacomowitz said. "This is just one of those stories that defeats almost all of the odds — right here in New Paltz on Jansen Road!"

Roy conceded that her recovery had been "a real roller-coaster."

"She went from hospital to hospital, and now she's doing so much better," he said. "She's incredibly social, and really lights up during any type of group activity here."

In the siblings' estimation, both their parents were always community-orientated. When they moved from Brooklyn to Newburgh, they began to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. When the kids were younger, they both volunteered to do marriage counseling for Marriage

Encounter "They have two sons that are musicians, and they were so supportive of us," said Roy. "My dad soundproofed the basement for us so we could practice our instruments, and my mom just loved any type of live music and performances. She's just the exemplification of love. She'll talk to anyone, listen to your story. She's just one of the best humans. We're so grateful."

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