

La Croix Calloo – Transcript

My name is La Croix Calloo. I was 22 years old when I had an ischemic stroke, that is located at the back of your brain, where your balance and speech is all contained in that one area. To say the least, it was a very scary moment in my life. And it's not a moment that I expect anyone to have to go through, especially at the tender age of 22. Um, but to have said that I lived through that and I get the pleasure to share with you all my experience, is something that I can never take for granted ever.

I lost the ability to walk. I lost ability to transfer any of my mind or my thoughts in my head to my mouth. So I knew exactly what I wanted to say 110%, however, my brain or getting my mouth to say what my brain thought, was a little foggy. It was the scariest moment in my life and definitely my parents' life, because they had never experienced or knew anybody that had a stroke so young. When the doctors even came to see me, they said, 'Oh, so where's the stroke patient?' looking at my parents. Thank you, Jesus. Nothing's wrong with them. It was me. It was me with the stroke. I couldn't even say hi. I was slurring my words. I, even to this day, I keep little drawings that I actually drew when I had the stroke, and that, compared to my skills now, is completely different.

I am a visual artist. As well, as I am an English teacher and a visual arts teacher. I pride myself ever since I was six years old, to be able to draw, to be able to create, to be able to make stories and memories through my art, and any facet that is in, whether that is drawing, whether that's poetry, whatever it is, that's the person that I am.

And I wear my heart and my art on my sleeve and my skin. So, to not be able to do that, was the most devastating moment in my life. And to say that I had a devastating moment at 22, is surreal. It doesn't seem like it should have happened to me, but in retrospect, I'm looking at it now and I'm glad it did. I know I sound absolutely nuts, but I'm glad because it made me who I am.

My parents had the conversation with my doctors that, maybe she's depressed, because there was a moment that I was depressed. I remember being at Toronto Western on the third floor. I don't even remember my room number, but I was going to the washroom and I stumbled out of the washroom. I had to use a walker, like I was 80 years old, but I was 22. And I was in the washroom, and I looked in the mirror and I said, 'Okay, God, if this is what is for me, and this is the lesson you wanted to teach everybody else, I'm okay with it. I'm okay with dying. I'm okay with moving on.'" And the minute that I did that, I don't know if something switched in my brain or, from there it was the stepping stool that I needed to be okay with the situation, or with where I'm at, to know that I can grow from that situation. I was not fearful of death, but I want I did not want to die. And I knew that.

Whether or not you have support, you have to be that support system for yourself. Because, as much as my family was there, as much as my mom was there, because it was a vulnerable moment where I couldn't eat, I couldn't bathe myself. I couldn't do any of those things at 22. That's embarrassing. You left that stuff in the past. So I, it was very, was a vulnerable moment. And before that, you have to be able to do it for you. Because, at the end of the day, even though they are in it or they're there, they're not you. I knew that I had to want it for me. Yes, I could want it for my parents. I could want it for my sister. I can want it for all these things, but I had to want it for myself.

My age now is 28, turning 29 years old. So I'm sitting here in front of you. It definitely sounds like it was eons ago, but it took a while to get here. Now, I am a long-term occasional teacher. I have always wanted to be a teacher since I was six, that's all I ever wanted. I am a visual artist and I am an English teacher, where I am currently teaching English to Grade 12 and university students, as well as college and locally, which gives me such fulfillment in my life, currently. And I can't imagine doing anything else, other than what I'm doing now. I am living now. I am living my best life. *(laughs "ba dum bum ch")*

I want people to know that it's okay, being vulnerable. It's okay to not be okay. And I am only human, and no, my situation does not define who I am. Because for a long time, that is exactly who I thought that I was. Hello. My name is La Croix Calloo and I had a stroke. No. That does not define me. It is a part of my story, but it's not my whole story. It's not.