

Stroke of luck – surviving a killer



Last year, Lee Nicholson suffered a stroke at the age of just 47 and, through her recovery, has learnt so much more about an illness that is the second biggest killer of Australians.

By Lee Nicholson

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lose your eyes for just a moment. Is everything silent?

No?

Is that inner voice chattering away, not letting you get any mental peace and quiet?

Maybe you quietly yearn for that internal voice to be silenced?

Be careful what you wish for.

It was exactly this time a year ago that the internal chatter stopped for me and everything went quiet ... and it nearly killed me.

That mental silence, that inner voice shutting down, was just one symptom of Australia's second biggest killer: strokes.

At just 47 years of age, I have suffered and survived a stroke.

A clot had formed, probably in my heart, and travelled through my arteries to my brain, got caught and starved my brain of oxygen.

I went down so quickly that I didn't even have time to put my hands out to break my fall as I made a coffee in my kitchen.

Life, as I had known it, changed in that split second.

For people who survive a stroke in the Warrnambool district you are bound to come in contact with Pat Groot.

As South West Healthcare's stroke liaison clinical nurse consultant, Groot is the expert who at some stage will help you trawl through your near-death experience, help you make some sense of what you have gone through and understand your new 'normal'.

"People like to know 'what could I have done that would have prevented this'," Groot says.

"There's a lot of soul searching because people would have liked to have avoided stroke altogether, perhaps never become acquainted with it, but they're here and sometimes they're not really sure why."

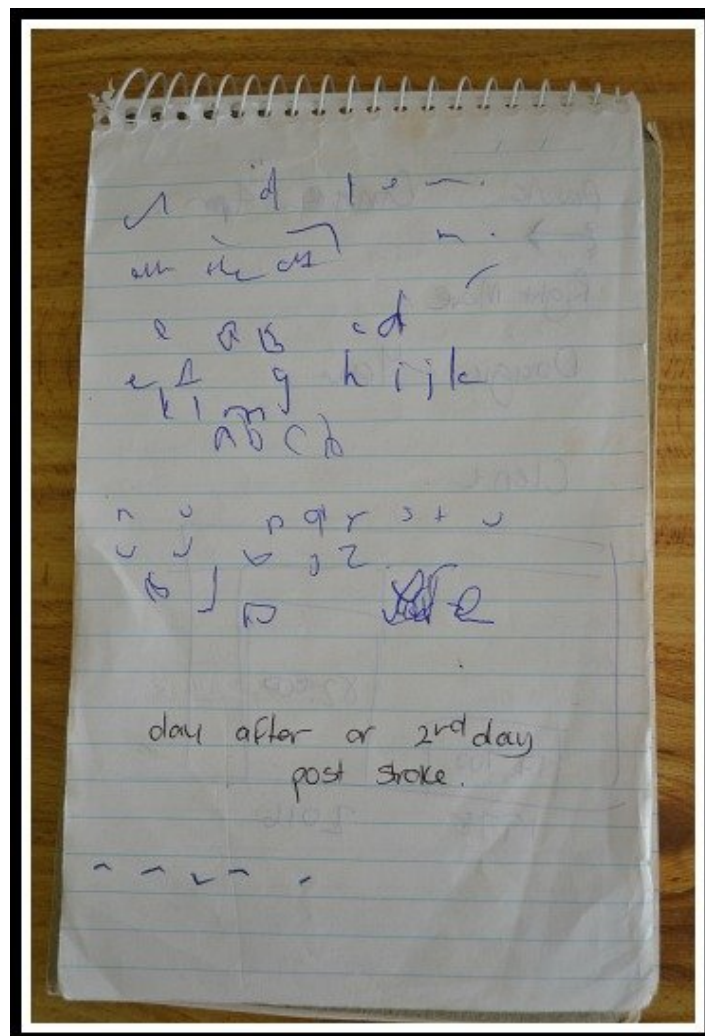
When I was felled by an embolic stroke, I just didn't believe it: the thought that I was "having a stroke" was

inconceivable.

I was violently ill. My right side couldn't move and I couldn't walk. I had to drag myself to my bed and lay there amid the agony of the very worst of headaches.

As crazy as it might sound, I took 24 hours to seek help because I didn't have the 'classic' signs of stroke, in other words, my face hadn't fallen.

The area the stroke took out affected the part of the brain that controls my balance, speech and writing – all of my fine motor skills – and, of course, decision making.



On first glance, this looks like pretty good shorthand, but it is Lee's attempt to write the alphabet the day after she

suffered a stroke.

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was unable to work as a journalist and I had to resign from a job I was enjoying as a business editor in Adelaide. My life was now about trying to relearn all of the movements that I had taken for granted.

Walking, talking, balance, eating, typing, writing, drawing, driving. You name it, every action I did since I was born and was second nature, I had to learn to do again.

The fatigue. You have a stroke and it feels like someone has disconnected your batteries.

That two, three, four or five kilometres you used to be able to casually walk? Forget it.

You will be knackered just getting out of the armchair back to your bed to sleep for 20 hours.

Despite my delay in seeking treatment, I am one of the lucky ones and, fortunately, I have almost made a full recovery.

According to the latest figures from the Australian Stroke Foundation, stroke is the country's second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability.

The financial cost of stroke in Australia is estimated to be about \$5 billion each year.

Stroke kills more women than breast cancer and more men than prostate cancer.

"You see other conditions which seem to be, for want of a better word, sexier," Groot explains.

"Stroke continually fails to attract the attention of funders.

“We know if there was money directed at it we could reduce the instance of stroke by making people aware of the risk factors.”

In 2015, funding for stroke research through the National Health and Medical Research Council represented just 4.1 per cent of the total investment in medical research.

The foundation predicts that this year there will be more than 55,000 new and recurrent strokes or 1000 strokes every week: that’s one stroke every 10 minutes somewhere in Australia.

Around a third of all stroke survivors are of working age, or *under the age of 65*.

This year there will be more than 470,000 people living with the effects of stroke. This is predicted to increase to 709,000 by 2032.

After a stroke, 65 per cent of survivors have to live with a disability which prevents them carrying out daily living activities unassisted.

“The number of people who die within six months of a stroke is fairly high ... about 12 per cent,” Groot says.

He adds a stroke is a symptom of our 21st century lifestyle.

“The truth is we’ve become more sedentary, our diets have become worse, we perhaps drink too much and people who smoke are twice as high risk than those who don’t.”

Developed in the United Kingdom, the FAST test is an easy way to recognise and remember the signs of stroke.

FAST involves asking these simple questions:

- Face – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- Arm – Can they lift both arms?
- Speech – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand

you?

- Time – Time is critical. If you see any of these signs, call 000 straight away.

“When it comes down to it there is so much more we have to learn about stroke, more research that needs to be conducted for us to talk with authority,” Groot says.

Groot urges people who think that they might be having a stroke to act on the side of caution and seek medical help.

“If it turns out to be a stroke mimic, that’s not bad, that’s a good outcome. But if we’ve intervened in time ... that’s a good thing.

“You could be one of those statistics that could be affected due to stroke and not everyone makes a good recovery.”

For more information on the facts and figures, [click here](#).

[box]Victoria

Stroke Association of Victoria: (03) 9670 1117 local call 1300 434 233.

New South Wales

Stroke Recovery Association of NSW: (02) 9807 6422 local call 1300 650 594.

South Australia

Stroke SA Inc: (08) 8352 4644.

Call StrokeLine for free information and advice. 1800 STROKE (787 653)[/box]

The Sleevehearts: putting it out there



The Sleevehearts are a combination of old friends and talented musicians who now play music for the love of it. Photo: David Owen.

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timthumb='on']<http://www.the-terrier.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/lee-nicholson-smaller.jpg>[/author_image]
[author_info>Welcome to *Soundcheck*: a look at the local live music scene with Lee Nicholson.
You can contact Lee at editor@the-terrier.com.au[/author_info]
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very album has the essence of personal experience, but for one of Warrnambool's newest trios, The Sleevehearts, it's an intimate journey that has reunited these experienced musicians.

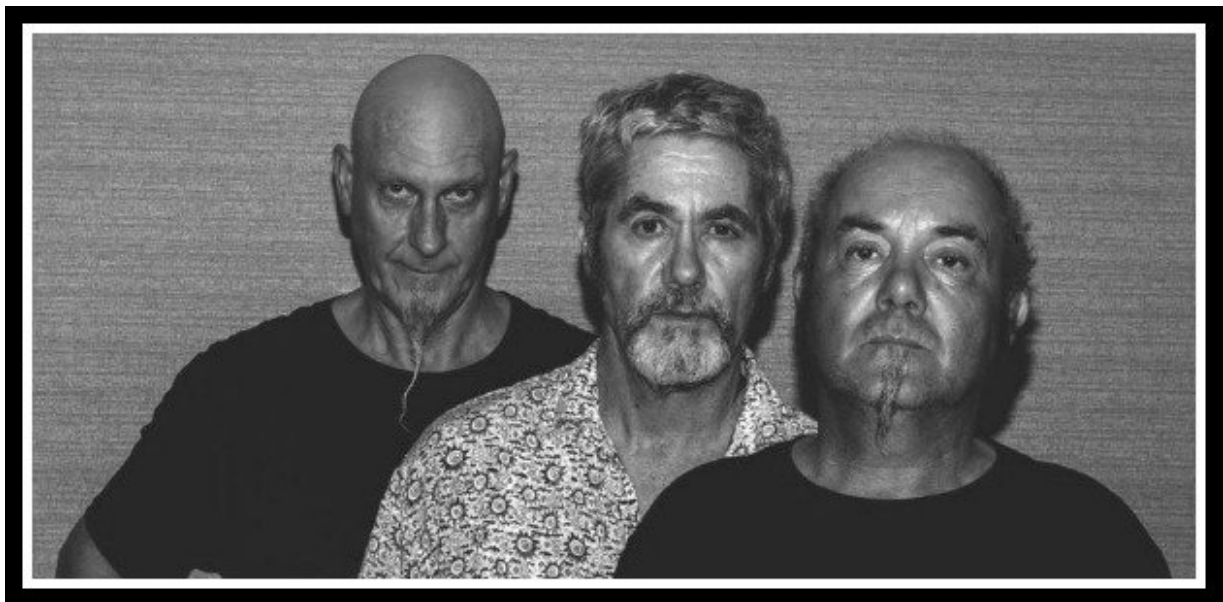
The Sleevehearts – Charles Leslie Box (aka Bryan Keillor-Reed guitar, vocals), Tony Peel (bass, vocals) and Martin Lemmens (drums) – is a product of very recent events.

“A couple of years ago I lost my life partner (Jennifer),” Box says.

“Some dark days came hot on the heels of that and about two months after she died, these songs started trickling up.

“During this process, this guy came along called Charles who – at the time – was a better part of me who tended to orchestrate the songs.

“They became a flow and I had to put a tap on it because they just wouldn't stop, it was great.”



Charles Leslie Box (aka Bryan Keillor-Reed), Tony Peel and Martin Lemmens pulling their scary, serious faces, but behind the look is a lot of fun making good music together. Photo: Tal Lemmens.

Some 60 songs in 60 days later, Box had more than enough material to lay down an album.

Enter Peel and Lemmens who had played with Box, as Keillor-Reed, in some legendary Warrnambool bands such as The Feelers, Breathing In, Breathing Out, Liberty Theatre and Hot Tamale Baby.

"It's a process," adds Lemmens.

"Tony and I ended up mucking around on projects for the past five years or so with another guy and it just petered out a bit and then Brian just popped up and it was just a natural progression."

And what this trio has forgotten about gigging in and around Warrnambool and district is more than some people can remember.

"It really is liberating to play with two guys that I feel totally comfortable with," says Peel.

"There's no pop star aspirations or anything like that, it's about us and if people like it that's a bonus and if they don't, well it doesn't really matter to us because we're doing it for us."

Says Box: "It was really good because I felt really supported, there's a real musical future here and I was a bit excited.

"The songs were part A of getting through (bereavement). Part B was linking up with these two guys and that's an absolute joy.

"Coming together with these guys, they're like brothers (to me)."

one.”

Adds Lemmens: “We’re a bit more relaxed.”

So how does the album sound?

With a strong rock beat throughout, I think *Tantamount* is the perfect antidote to re-energise the evening or to slip into the car stereo to keep you perky on a long road trip.



Tantamount has given an old sound – which will be familiar to large chunk of the “mature” Warrnambool audiences – a bit of maturity.

All written by Box and arranged by Keillor-Reed, Peel and Lemmens, the songs on *Tantamount* are very much autobiographical, even raw, and I kept harking back to the trio’s previous material under different ensembles, but this album has overlaid a 21st-century edge to it.

The album has been recorded and produced with a fullness and final sound that appear to give the music a lot more layers

than from just three individuals.

Of all the tracks, I keep coming back to *The Other Hand* (track 5 of eight songs), somewhat surprising as the song has been built around Box's lyrics spawned by anxiety and depression.

But that is the juxtaposition of this album which touches on some deep issues, but eases the pain by being backed with some good solid rock.

Tantamount tracks:

1. Tantamount
2. EBCar
3. Inside of U
4. When Amy Sings
5. The Other Hand
6. On My Watch
7. 2 Fixed Points
8. Melt the Guns

[box]The Sleevehearts, supported by Blackbelts, will perform at The Loft, Liebig St, Warrnambool, Friday evening, March 24.[/box]