



## MY STORY

I co-founded CentreTEK Solutions [www.centretek.com](http://www.centretek.com) with my best friend Jay Miller in January, 2001. Things were going pretty much according to plan by the end of December 2002. We were on plan building the IT company the way we wanted. We had about 22 IT consultants working on several federal and commercial contracts and every month seemed better than the previous one.

It was then, towards the end of our second year, that I suffered a devastating stroke on December 6, 2002. I was immediately taken by helicopter to Johns Hopkins for initial treatment and then to Good Samaritan Hospital for physical therapy. At Johns Hopkins they told my wife that my stroke had been caused by an aneurism deep inside my brain and that it was inoperable. That all we could do was to wait and pray.

So began a new phase for me; a phase of hardship and struggle not only for myself, but also for my family and my friends.

During my stay at Good Samaritan Hospital I found that I had no movement of my right arm or my right leg. The right side of my face sagged. I had **APHASIA** so I could barely talk, and I couldn't read or write. I had trouble with ambient noise and things such as driving were out the question. The good people at Johns Hopkins and Good Samaritan were wonderful but offered me little hope. While I was there I was limited to my wheelchair.

Everyday my friend and business partner, Jay, was right at my side. I remember that, when I started to talk, one of the first things I asked Jay was, "You're here but who's running CentreTEK?" He just smiled.

I learned later that Jay had been "burning the midnight oil", working nights and weekends. We had also recently hired a dear friend, Jerry Hanline, who was able to step into my role at CentreTEK. I also learned, much to my delight, that some of our consultants were slowly stepping-up and taking over their accounts just the way we had hoped.

I remember one day telling Jay that it was unlikely that I would ever return to work and that I would have to plan for a future without CentreTEK. He just smiled and told me not to think about it. He never told me, but I realized that during this period Jay's number one priority, wasn't to run CentreTEK, it was to take care of me and my family.

When I returned home from Good Samaritan Hospital I felt defeated and without much hope. But then I started thinking of my wife and my kids and how hard it must be for them to see me like this day after day. I thought of my mother and the agony she must be feeling to see her son knocked down like I had been. And I thought of Jay and our precious little CentreTEK. How they had hoped for me to be there with them as we all moved ahead building our little company.

My wife was doing the impossible to continue running our household. My son and daughter were both very active in and out of school. My wife was making sure that things in our home ran as smoothly as possible. Friends cooked meals for us. My dear sweet mom came over from Puerto Rico and stayed with us to drive me to my medical appointments. She would also give me three to four hours of massages everyday.

It's times like this that you really learn the true meaning of love and friendship. I realized that, as tough as this was on me, it had to be as just as hard on them to see me this way. That when you have something as terrible as a "stroke", everyone around you that loves you suffers the same "stroke" right along with you.

I slowly started to work out to try to get better. As time went by I noticed something curious, my efforts to get better had an "up-lifting effect" not only on me but on everyone around me. The more that I tried to get better, the better they felt, whether I was actually improving or not. I decided, then and there, that I had to **at least try** to get better. I needed to try, not only for myself, but for them. I decided that this would be my way of saying "Thanks for being there for me". So I committed my self to 4 to 6 hours a day of therapy, 5 and 6 days a week, even when I didn't think it was doing me any good.

Then something unexpected happened. I started walking again and I didn't have to rely on my wheelchair or even my walking cane anymore. I could go up and down stairs without difficulty. My right arm started moving. I could walk on a Treadmill and a Stairmaster for hours. And I even learned how to drive again.

Everyone was excited for me (almost as much as I was). Then my friend Jay smile and asked me "So when are you coming back to CentreTEK?" I thought for sure he had a loose screw. I was totally convinced that this was impossible. I hadn't simply twisted my ankle or broken my arm, **I had suffered a major stroke.**

Complicating this was the fact that I knew I had been suffering from **APHASIA** and was having difficulty reading and writing (or dealing with complicated documents such as requirements and proposals), dealing with lots of ambient noise and traffic (like having to drive down to meet some of our federal clients downtown Washington D.C. by myself). I wasn't sure I could ever learn to use a PC again; I even hated talking on the telephone.

Jay just smiled and simply told me to let him know when I would be back, not if I would be back (To him it wasn't even a choice).

And so, a couple of months later, I returned to CentreTEK not knowing what to expect. Over time I noticed that returning had an almost therapeutic effect on me. Gradually I adjusted to the ambient noise. I learned how to use my PC again. I could even read those incredibly long requirement documents and proposals. I could drive myself to Washington D.C. and actually contribute to my CentreTEK Solutions, not as much as before, but certainly more than I had expected.

And so here I am once again, ready for yet another phase of life. This time it is a phase of hope. While I joke that my team at CentreTEK will never let me retire, I now split my time between my time at CentreTEK and working with stroke sufferers.

In addition to being at CentreTEK, I've dedicated himself to counseling several "Stroke Survivor Groups" and whoever else will have me. My message is "There is Life after Stroke" and that "It can be a rich and fulfilling life. And it's not the end, only the beginning."

I know I've had a fortunate recovery and I try not to deliver a message of false hope for stroke survivors. I know not that not everyone can recover as well. But, I know through my own experience that stroke victims can and do get better. And as long as they have encouragement from family and friends and are willing to commit themselves, they too will improve and find "**Life After Stroke**".

**José and his wife of 20 years, Lourdes (a software engineer at Northrop Grumman), recently renewed their wedding vows with a ceremony in Las Vegas by Elvis himself. He has lived in Columbia for more than 25 years. They have two children: José Armando 20, in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year at Towson University, and Cristina Isabel 16, a junior at Hammond High School.**

**In 2008 his firm, CentreTEK Solutions, received an Economic Diversity Business Achievement Award from Howard County Maryland for its commitment to José.**

**José is a member of the Maryland State of Advisory Council on Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention and is also a member of the Maryland Stroke Association. He helped establish the Howard County Stroke Support Group. He also constantly volunteers for several stroke related studies at the NIH, VA, University of Maryland and the Kennedy Krieger Institute.**

**[Jose.maldonado@centretek.com](mailto:Jose.maldonado@centretek.com)**