



Recovery drove author

How Tony Finneran found his creative side after stroke.

Tony Finneran has had a fascination with the bus and coach industry ever since he was a child. Buses weren't just a mode of transport for him, they were a friendly, familiar part of life. Buses and coaches played an integral role in connecting communities. The vehicles themselves and their passengers all had a story.

Growing up in the 1960s and 70s in the Sydney suburb of Sefton, Tony associated buses with good times.

This included the joy of the regular school run where you made mates and got to know the driver. He can still recall the sound of chatter amongst the noisy engine, rattles in the body work and strong smell of oil and diesel.

It was a time when bus companies were small, family run businesses and quality bus drivers let their personality and driving skills shine. Public transport was in its heyday because most families were single income and had one car.

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Welcome to the summer edition of StrokeConnections

Welcome to our summer edition. We hope you enjoy our story about Tony Finneran, who found his creative side and became a published author after his stroke. Tony's books celebrate the history of the bus industry, turning a lifelong passion into a tool for recovery and a successful fundraising effort.

This edition also features a story about getting into yoga after stroke. Yoga is increasingly popular with stroke survivors. We spoke to yogi and stroke survivor Sue Bowden about her experiences.

It wasn't difficult to find yoga enthusiasts amongst stroke researchers and StrokeLine team members. They discuss the potential benefits of yoga and provide lots of practical advice to get you started.

We have news about the Stroke Awards, and a new booklet for parents of childhood stroke survivors. Our Family's Stroke Journey will launch soon and will help make the path ahead a little easier for parents.

Wishing you all the best, Emily and Jude and everyone at the Stroke Foundation.

Continued from cover

Tony's enthusiasm for buses and coaches translated to a career working in the bus industry. Tony held many positions including driver, operations manager, trainer and chassis and body salesman.

Yet despite this passion, writing books about buses was not something Tony Finneran ever thought he would get around to doing. That was, until he had a stroke.

Tony suffered a debilitating stroke on Easter Sunday in 2013 at the age of 55. The father of two spent the next three weeks in a coma and was paralysed. His future looked uncertain.

But once out of the coma, Tony used grit and determination to get his life back on track. During months of rehabilitation, Tony learnt to walk, feed himself and communicate again.

Tony credits his family, his team of health professionals and his 37 years in the Army Reserve for helping him when he needed it most.

"I had to be disciplined and determined to achieve the best possible outcome post stroke," Tony said.

"The core values I relied on in my recovery were Courage, Respect, Initiative and Teamwork."

Tony said his stroke challenged him to think about what came next, but one thing was sure, he did not want to sit around and do nothing. He wanted a productive and fulfilling life.

"I didn't know if I would be able to return to work because I had lost control of my right hand, among other things. I knew I needed to learn how to use my left hand for writing and using a computer to give myself the best chance," Tony said.

"Then I got the idea for capturing the spirit and nostalgia of the bus industry by writing a book, thinking it would be fun way to practise these skills.

"Creating the book became part of my rehabilitation because I needed to cut and paste, use a mouse and press the appropriate keys on a computer repeatedly to succeed."

Succeed he did! Tony wrote his first book, a comprehensive pictorial record of the lost liveries of Sydney's route buses. He also returned to work within a year of his stroke.

Flash forward to today and Tony has written six books in his "Gone, but not forgotten" series, with another two in the works. The most recent book "New South Wales regional buses" was published at the end of 2019.

Tony said there was so much history to record about Australia's bus and coach industry, and with each book, more people wanted to contribute images and memories for the next.

"These books are a snapshot of a place and time in history and I'm not the only one to recognise that the industry is not the same anymore," he said.

"Today buses are more generic and there is no communication with the driver because passengers just tap on electronically. Bus travel has lost its charm and personality and that's a shame."

Tony donates part of the proceeds from his books to the Stroke Foundation to help it continue vital programs to help stroke survivors and their families.

He has raised an incredible \$38,000.

"I am thrilled I've been able to contribute to the Stroke Foundation through my books. If my actions can benefit other stroke survivors like me, it is worth it," he said.

Tony added, while his stroke did slow him down, it opened a new door by allowing him to tap into his creative side and write about something he loves.

"It feels wonderful to get the first copy of each book in my hand and see all of that hard work come to fruition. I can't believe I have written six," he said.

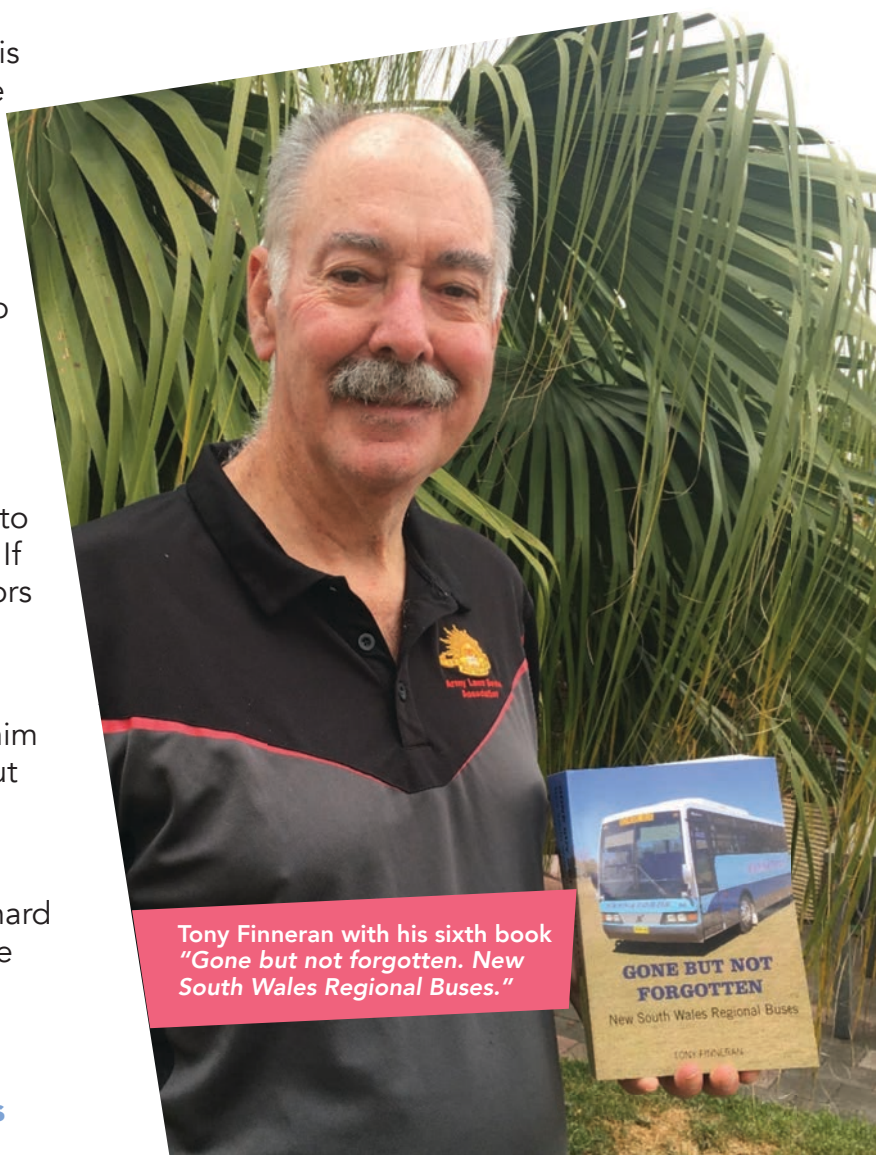
"I urge fellow stroke survivors to pursue their passions and set themselves goals.

Take every opportunity because you never know where it will lead. A positive mindset and determination can make all the difference.

"From little things, big things grow."

Tony is a valued member of Stroke Foundation's Consumer Council, providing a voice for those impacted by stroke. He also runs a stroke recovery group in Bankstown and volunteers on the Bankstown Hospital stroke ward.

For more about Tony and his books visit www.finneran.wixsite.com/gbnf/books



Tony Finneran with his sixth book "Gone but not forgotten. New South Wales Regional Buses."

New childhood stroke booklet launching soon

Between 300 to 500 babies and children will have a stroke in Australia this year. It's a worrying number, and sadly stroke in children often takes longer to diagnose than an adult with stroke.

The Stroke Foundation is pleased to announce a childhood stroke booklet will be launched shortly to ensure parents are well informed about their child's stroke and don't leave hospital confused and anxious about the journey ahead. Our Family's Stroke Journey will help parents navigate the initial crisis, make the path ahead a little clearer, and help improve outcomes for children and families.

Our Family's Stroke Journey is the result of consultations with parents, health professionals and the support group Little Stroke Warriors and is guided by the

Childhood Stroke Clinical Guidelines. Based on our highly successful resource for adults, My Stroke Journey, this new resource will deliver information for Australian parents for the very first time.

If you would like to know more about childhood stroke and support for parents, including the new resource, call StrokeLine on 1800 787 653.



Childhood stroke survivor Zander



Childhood stroke survivor Sophie and her family



Childhood stroke survivor Anika



Childhood stroke survivor Emma

Nominate today for the Stroke Foundation 2020 Stroke Awards

Nominations are open for this year's Stroke Awards. These awards recognise stroke survivors, carers, health professionals and volunteers who have shown an outstanding commitment to improving the state of stroke in Australia.

There are many unsung heroes among the stroke community. Their courage, dedication and compassion to help prevent, treat and beat stroke is inspiring.

Do you know someone who deserves to be recognised for their efforts? Show your appreciation by nominating them in one or more of the six categories:

› Improving Life After Stroke Award – Proudly sponsored by Australian Physiotherapy Association.

› Creative Award – Proudly sponsored by Marmalade Melbourne.

› Fundraiser of the Year Award – Proudly sponsored by Precision Group.

› Courage Award – Proudly sponsored by Medtronic.

› Volunteer of the Year Award- Proudly sponsored by NAB Community.

› President's Achievement Award.

Nominations close on 14 February and can be completed online by visiting strokefoundation.org.au



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Yoga after stroke

Yoga is an increasingly popular form of exercise, and one that many stroke survivors participate in. If you've never tried it, or are thinking about getting back into it, what do you need to know?

Simone from **StrokeLine (1800 787 653)** often gets calls about yoga. As an occupational therapist and someone who practises yoga herself, Simone has plenty of knowledge to share.

"While yoga is not specifically recommended by the Clinical Guidelines for Stroke Management, or by the Stroke Foundation, many survivors use it as a form of exercise and as an activity that connects them with the community," Simone said.

"In the modern world, there is a focus on yoga as a physical practice, but there is definitely more to it. A lot of people find yoga has benefits for the mind as well as the body.

"It's really a mindful practice, where we come back to the present moment."

For stroke survivor Sue Bowden, yoga is a new activity she's enjoying.

"My stroke happened a long time ago in 1993 when I was 22 years old," Sue said.

"I had to learn to walk, talk and eat again. Once I left rehab, there was a huge gap between where I was in my recovery and where I wanted to be. It's been a long and quite difficult journey."

Sue started the new year a few years ago thinking about what she could do differently. She spoke to her doctor and downloaded a stretching app on her phone. Sue did the stretching exercises on the app morning and night for three months before discovering a yoga video. Sue then followed the video at home where it was private and she could concentrate. This led to Sue attending a yoga class.

"I decided to go to a class with a friend and I just loved it," Sue said.

"It was Yin Yoga, where you hold poses for a long time. There were bolsters and blocks to assist with that. After my first class, I was very happy I'd gone and keen to return."

Physiotherapist and researcher Professor Susan Hillier from the University of South Australia has conducted pilot clinical trials studying yoga as a form of rehabilitation after stroke.



Stroke survivor Sue Bowden



Professor Hillier and her team looked at whether yoga can be adapted for stroke survivors.

"We found that yoga could be safe," Professor Hillier said.

"We trained teachers specially, so that they could adapt yoga poses for individuals.

"There were many benefits. People were weight-bearing, stretching, getting into different postures, stimulating muscles and stimulating their minds too. It kept people engaged and connected. It was the whole package."

Professor Hillier added: "By getting to know themselves better, through the mindfulness aspect of yoga, participants reported feeling calmer and more aware of what their bodies were capable of doing. They felt better about their bodies. So those traditional kinds of benefits of yoga popped out in a way that surprised us."



Simone from StrokeLine has some tips:

Talk to your doctor.

Always speak to your doctor before starting any new exercise, including yoga. You may want a physio or

occupational therapist to come along to the class to work with the teacher, look at some of the poses and discuss how they can be adapted.

Check out your options. See what's being offered by yoga schools, community centres and neighbourhood houses in your area. Your local Council is a good source of information too.

Don't dive straight in the deep end. Slower styles can be great to begin with – yin or restorative yoga and chair-based yoga are popular with people with different abilities. Beginner's courses are good too.

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Plan for a home practice. Practicing at home can be a good way to dip your toes in the water, but it's important to find a video or online class that suits you.

If you're thinking about practicing at home, speak with your doctor and an occupational therapist or physiotherapist if needed, so you can be safe and comfortable.

If possible, start with a one-on-one session.

The teacher will get a good understanding of your abilities, any issues like spasticity, sensory or balance changes. They can give you tailored advice and modify poses where necessary.

Connect with the school and the teacher.

Send an email or make a call to talk about what you're looking for. Ask questions about class sizes – you'll get more attention in a smaller class. Ask about access too – are there stairs, is there an accessible toilet? Go early to your first class so you have time to speak with the teacher.

Call StrokeLine on 1800 787 653. We can chat to you about your goals. Do you want to build strength or balance, or is it also the mindfulness aspect that attracts you to yoga? StrokeLine can provide information about the different types of yoga and what you need to think about when starting a home practice or going to a class. If you need to access allied health professionals we can talk about your options.

Finally, Simone noted it's normal to feel apprehensive about starting something new.

"Many people feel a bit scared, but the StrokeLine team can talk through the things that may be holding you back."

Professor Hillier also encouraged those considering yoga to do the preparation with their doctor and allied health professionals.

"In our study, people liked the gentle challenge of yoga in a supportive environment. Many also wanted to challenge themselves and take a few mini risks," Professor Hillier said.

"The results were positive. Why not give it a try?"

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- Belinda R.





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