

My Caribbean 'Staycation'

After two strokes, Sue Ross thought she'd never fulfil her dream of a cruise holiday – until she had a bright idea...

They say it's important to live life to the full and to have no regrets about missed opportunities.

"After suffering a stroke and ending up in a wheelchair aged just 26, it took me a long time to realise how lucky I really was.

"I had a busy social life, a loving boyfriend and great beauty therapy job when I suffered two strokes out of the blue.

"Paralysed and unable to look after myself, I spent a year in hospital. My doctor didn't think I'd ever get out of the wheelchair. Going from being an independent young woman to relying on others for everything was devastating and I became depressed.

"I had to learn to do everything again – from swallowing to walking. My boyfriend was wonderful, but

this time I wouldn't get depressed, I decided to write a dream list of things to do before I died.

"I scribbled my dreams in a diary and the more I wrote, the more empowered I felt. I wouldn't let myself be a prisoner to disability any more.

"Top of my list was going on a Caribbean cruise. I craved the freedom of waking up in a new exotic location every day.

"But after making enquiries, it looked like being on a cruise might not be possible. It was then an idea came to me – I could have the dream cruise I'd always wanted without even leaving my two-bedroom flat!

"It sounded daft, but the idea made me smile. For years I'd felt a prisoner in my own body and now I was determined to live

In the holiday spirit!



clothes in preparation for a relaxing three day 'cruise.'

"I turned the central heating up as high as it would go and climbed into my brown tankini and shorts. Then, I put on my Caribbean CD and nestled into a chair in the living-room – and

I've ticked off numerous things already – swimming with dolphins, visiting Singapore's Raffles Hotel – but there's a lot of inspiring activities on it that I've still to do.

"I know now that there's nothing I can't do if I set my



Fulfilling another wish

our relationship had changed so much after I moved back home that, after five years, we split up. I doubted I'd ever find love again.

"Incredibly I met another man and we married in May 2003. Unfortunately things didn't work out between us and we eventually split up. Determined

the life I wanted. "My friends all laughed when I told them, but thought it was a great idea. They bought me daft presents – a rubber ring, a calypso CD – to help get in the holiday mood.

I bought a six foot blow-up palm tree and put it in the living room, got a pile of books and magazines and laid out holiday

it was much comfier than a deckchair!

"As lazy hours drifted by, I'd flick through magazines and sip on cold drinks – the height of luxury. At night, my friends would join me for cocktails.

"Four years on, I'm now a counsellor and life coach working with disabled people. I couldn't be happier with my life.

"My wish list is still an inspiration for everything I do.

Going from being independent to relying on others for everything was completely devastating

mind to it. After all, if I can manage a living room cruise, I can do almost anything...

Stroke Association
www.stroke.org.uk
0845 303 3100

We'd love to hear your stories! Send them to:
Real Life, My Weekly,
185 Fleet St, London
EC4A 2HS.