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BUSKIRK-CHUMLEY THEATER
INDIANA



mike leonard



A Cautionary Tale

As a township trustee, retired schoolteacher, husband, father, grandfather, and good citizen, Dan “Carp” Combs, 63, tries to keep it between the ditches, as the saying goes. He has little sympathy for irresponsible behavior that could endanger others.

He knew he didn’t feel right when he crawled out of bed on the morning of February 16. He thought his face looked odd when he looked in the mirror. “But there were no shooting pains to the head or anything. All I had was just an absolute weakness on my left side and an inability to talk,” he recalls. “For those who know me, that would be an absolute sign. I felt like I had a mouthful of marbles.”

He called his wife, Pat, who had already gone to work, and she said he needed to see a doctor immediately. But he dismissed the notion of calling an ambulance and headed to his car. “I was dragging my left foot. I kind of felt like Marty Feldman in a Mel Brooks movie,” he says. “When I got to the car, I literally had to grab my pant leg and drag my leg into the vehicle.”

Combs lives in southern Monroe County. “When I got to Old State Road 37, I knew I was in trouble. The center line kept weaving back and forth under my car,” he recalls. “The thought passed through my head, you know, they need to straighten this out.”

When he walked in the door of his Perry Township Trustee’s office in Bloomington, “the place went code red,” he says. Combs’ gaunt complexion and crooked smile said it all. “They had me out the door within seconds.”

The sense of urgency was similar when Pat helped her husband into the emergency room at IU Health Bloomington Hospital. “I’ve been there before and waited and waited. This time I got the wheelchair ride you want. It was high speed down the hallway,” he recalls with a chuckle.

After a quick CAT scan and MRI, the neurologist got straight to the point with his diagnosis — a stroke. “That was the only time I lost it. I started crying,” he recalls. “Even afterwards, after I got my speech back, those were the hardest words I’ve ever said: ‘I’ve had a stroke.’”

Combs was his typical, analytical, storytelling self when we talked in late February. Doctors called it a “major stroke” and for three days he laid in the intensive care unit. “Since then,” he says, “every doctor, nurse, and therapist has been amazed there was no permanent damage, no serious damage.” He even got the okay to travel to England in March to see his daughter, Erin, and his grandchildren, Mathis and Rowan.

But he’s still embarrassed that he got into his car and drove when he clearly had no business doing so. “If mine is a cautionary tale, then good,” he says. “The wisdom I can impart is that you may not know you are having a stroke or had one. I consider myself reasonably intelligent and look at what I did. Somebody else is going to have to tell you, in all probability. I wasn’t thinking clearly enough to know.” ✨