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CONNECTION

Stroke HEALING THROUGH MUSIC
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Surviving to Sing

As a carpenter, Trevor Gibbons knew to step into a building through a door — not a window. But as he was framing windows on the 4th floor of a building in New York City, he suddenly got confused, his vision blurred, and he stepped out of a window into thin air.

A stroke can do that to you.

When he was found three hours later, Trevor was rushed to a hospital. A CT scan confirmed a clot, and he received treatment then was moved to rehab. "After a month there, I was still getting pain in my shoulder," Trevor said in an interview at Beth Abraham Rehabilitation Center in New York. "I thought it was from the stroke, but when they did an MRI of my spine, they found herniation of the cervical spine."

Doctors performed surgery, but the clot-preventing drug warfarin was not started soon enough, and he had another stroke.

"I couldn't speak, and I was in a harness for 14 months. That's when I came to 'Beth Abe,' September 2001," he said. "I was flat on my back for 10 months, counting dots on the ceiling. I was very depressed."

"During my recovery, my key words were endurance, strength and courage, and they have brought me this far."



Trevor Gibbons performing at the Lincoln Center

"Sitting at the window, watching the cars go by, wondering why I'm feeling so empty inside. Don't know why my days are so short and my nights are so long, but I know one day I'll go home again."

Although he has no formal musical training, writing and singing became the focus of Trevor's life. "I wrote three more songs," he said. "By the time I was able to sing, the harness was off me."

He met the well-known recording artist and music producer Moby when he made a visit to Beth Abraham. The entertainer donated money for a recording studio at the rehab hospital.

Within a few months, Trevor had recorded a CD with 10 original songs. Then last fall he was asked to perform at the Music Has Power awards at Lincoln Center. "After I came home that night — I'm in a long-term care unit at 'Beth Abe' — I wrote another song and went into the studio the next morning and recorded it. It's called 'One Thing Sure.'"

Trevor's first CD, "Trevor's Melodies," was released in spring 2004, but it was only the beginning. "During my recovery, my key words were endurance, strength and courage, and they have brought me this far. I keep writing songs, and they have to do with my life. I already have 10 more songs. Music is my inspiration, my escape from sadness and loneliness and pain. When I start to sing, it opens up my mind and I think, 'There's nothing I can't do.'"

That's when he met music therapist Lucy Butler, an intern at the time. "She would bring her piano to my bed and encourage me to sing 'This Little Light of Mine.' My vocal cords were damaged, but I began to try. Her motivational skills helped me overcome so many things. I have a limp on my right side, but I can walk now. I have upper-body motion. My hands are open. I can write."

And he can sing "This Little Light of Mine." In fact, through music therapy, Trevor found that he could not only sing songs, he could write them. "One day Lucy encouraged me to write my own feelings," he said. "At the time, I was looking out the window, and that became the first line of my first song." Then he sings in a clear, strong baritone: