



It was the first snowfall of December of 2020, a day that began like any other. Lola was sipping a cup of her favorite Haitian hot cocoa. Little did she know that by that evening that she would have suffered six seizures due to a stroke. Lola’s life had changed forever that day.

At 40 years old, Lola was a successful staff attorney at the Volunteer Lawyers Project and Attorney at Ananda Legal Services in Massachusetts. In addition, Lola was also the Director of a Pro Bono Program at the Women’s Bar Foundation. Lola has a deep commitment to community which led her to volunteer her time with the nonprofit organization Eagle Eye Institute. Eagle Eye is dedicated to empowering urban people from underserved communities, especially youth of color, to play an active role in caring for the environment. Through this organization, Lola was able in

to introduce many urban youth to nature.



Lola seemed unstoppable. Keeping fit was part of her daily routine. As an avid yoga teacher, she enjoyed taking the journey of heart, body and spirit with her fellow yoga enthusiasts. “Balance is a practice and not a perfection.” Lola’s love for adventure did not stop at yoga. Culture is very much a part of Lola’s life and she explored many different African dances that kept her fit and community connected.

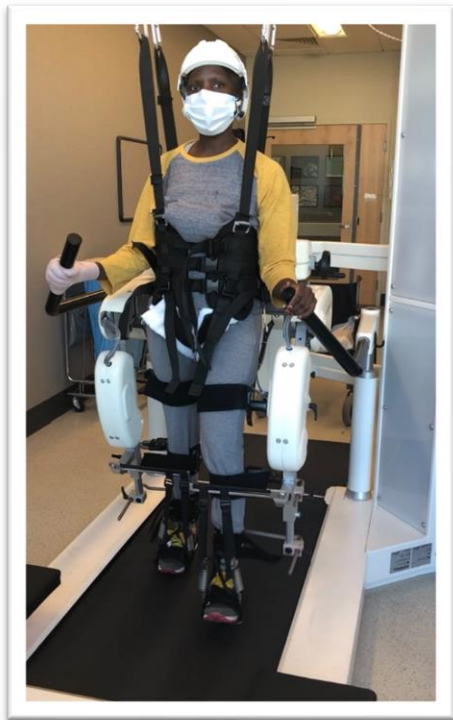
However, without warning, Lola did not know that she would need emergency craniotomy surgery to stop

the seizures she was having from a stroke. According to Spaulding Cambridge Rehabilitation, “Lola woke up with a feeding tube and helmet, a piece of her skull removed during emergency brain surgery. She would need to relearn how to swallow, talk, and walk.” Her first test came when she was asked to sit up for 20 minutes, in which Lola claimed “it was the hardest thing ever.”



Lola was informed that her stroke was from the birth control that she was taking. According to the World Health Organization, research shows evidence of some women on long term low dose birth control had a higher risk of hemorrhagic stroke.





Lola had physically and mentally trained her whole life and she was about to put this training to the test. Gratefully, Lola did not lose her speech from the seizures, although she did have some slurring in the first few weeks, however, she was able to regain her full speaking ability. Once that was established, Lola did not skip a beat. Within days she was learning how to walk again on a Lokomat machine. Being electronically connected to a device can be frightening, however this machine helps to increase the strength of muscles as well as the range of motion of joints in order to improve walking. Each therapy that was presented to Lola was approached with a positive attitude and a smile. Lola's hard work paid off and she was discharged in record time.

Returning home was just the beginning of her story. Lola had wonderful support from her husband Joey. He was trained to help Lola stay safe and assist her with her therapies when she returned home. Joey would create obstacles in the home for Lola to navigate throughout the day. "During the day I was doing lots of stretching and weight bearing exercises. In the evenings it's strengthening." Joey's continued support has been instrumental in Lola's healing. "A lot has changed about our marriage since my stroke. One of my motivations to keep working on recovery is that we still have plans. Things are constantly changing because I'm still getting random functions back so we're staying flexible on what the future may look like. But one thing hasn't changed. We still laugh (a



lot!) every day "Lola has extensively documented her stroke recovery journey."



Although Lola's physical appearance has changed, she has embraced her new body and found a positive way to engineer her new life. From the beginning, she has courageously documented each of her gains. "Out navigating downtown for the first time. Bald, scarred, braced. But no cane. Since my stroke, I often look a little disheveled. My shirt is always crooked because my left arm is slightly out of its socket due to weakness in the surrounding muscles. Yes, it hurts. Every day. On the upside, I've



been working out my smile muscles and my face is almost back to the way it was “.

When it comes to Lola’s new hair style, she exclaims; “How am I feeling about my head scar fading? Mixed. I actually really like my current look and I don’t mind when people peek at it. It literally marks the spot where surgeons saved my life. But, like a few of my other stroke side effects, it’s gotten more and more subtle since my surgery. I guess time does heal.”

To date, Lola has returned to work and embraces all of her challenges and achievements. The key to Lola’s success? “From acupuncture and meditation to l’huile Mascreti, (Haitian black castor oil) Kinesio tape and plain old repetitive exercise”. Mostly, Lola has smiled through it all. Her positive attitude continues to move her forward as she celebrates new achievements with her tight knit family and friends.

We are honored to be a part of Lola’s story and we encourage you to follow her daily life on her Instagram page @ ellohelleh. Her passion for excellence, her raw emotions about her stroke and her infectious smile will inspire you to move forward in your own life as well. We look forward to your story Lola as you take charge every day.

