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WINTER 2022



A STROKE OF LUCK

by Nanci Hellmich

As an entrepreneur in his 20s and 30s, Sean Entin used his boundless energy to build an almost perfect life for himself and his young family. He developed new companies, lived on the beach, and trained to stay in peak physical shape. But in 2011, that world collapsed.



At the age of 39, Entin suffered a massive stroke. Since then, he has been fighting his way back—not only to rebuild his body, but to launch a second act helping other stroke survivors.

“God wanted me to take a new journey, a new path. I call it a stroke of luck,” says Entin, 49, of Tarzana, California.

Go, Go, Go

Entin’s drive to create new businesses started early. At age 21, while earning a degree in business administration and management with an emphasis on entrepreneurship, he was featured on the cover of the business section of the *Los Angeles Times* for launching a teen dance club.

After graduation from the University of Southern California, he produced feature films, commercials, music videos, and a television show. He became one of the first fight managers in the mixed martial arts world, representing big names in the field, such as Mark Kerr and Tim Sylvia.

Later, he moved from Los Angeles to San Diego to work with two start-up companies, collaborating with basketball legend Shaquille O’Neal.

“I was raising money, building my companies, all the time looking for something new,” Entin says. “I was always connecting people. I was wound up too fast and too hard. I was go, go, go. I didn’t slow down, and something was bound to happen.”

By age 39, Entin was on top of the world. He lived on the beach in San Diego with his wife and two daughters, then ages 18 months and four years. “I love being a dad,” he says. “I was born to be a father. We were always off to the beach, the zoo, Sea World.”

Like a Sledgehammer

By this time, Entin was involved with teaching entrepreneurship skills to Navy SEAL veterans. He also trained with them in mixed martial arts. “I loved the sport. I loved athleticism,” he says. But in the fall of 2011, when Entin was doing a mixed martial arts workout, he got choked out.

“I passed out and wasn’t able to tap out,” Entin says. He went home that afternoon knowing something was wrong with his throat.

For about four weeks after the incident, Entin continued to run his business and jet around the country despite the pain on the right side of his throat. On Thanksgiving weekend, he and his family were celebrating the holiday with friends in San Luis Obispo, California, when things got worse.

“I woke up the night of Thanksgiving, and the room was spinning,” Entin says. “It felt like someone was bringing a sledgehammer to my head.”

He walked to the bathroom. “As I looked in the mirror, the left side of my face was drooping badly. My face was ash gray,” Entin says. “I couldn’t speak, and I lost movement in my left arm.” At that moment he asked his wife, Stephanie, to call his dad, a retired medical doctor in Tarzana.



STROKE SYMPTOMS AND WARNINGS SIGNS



You can be better prepared in the event you or someone else suffers a stroke. The American Stroke Association says to watch out for the sudden symptoms below.

- Numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause

“I think my son is having a stroke,” Dr. Allen Entin said. “Call the paramedics right now.”

Entin was rushed to a nearby hospital, then medevacked to Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital, where Alois Zauner, a top neurosurgeon, began treating him.

After several procedures didn’t work, Entin was put in a coma for 10 days. Then the surgeon performed a craniectomy and temporarily stored a piece of his skull in his abdomen to reduce the swelling on his brain.

When Entin awoke from the coma, his father told him he was a paraplegic, paralyzed on his left side.

“I couldn’t stand up. I couldn’t walk,” Entin says. “I had a helmet on my head to protect my brain. I had a feeding tube. I had a peripherally inserted central catheter line going from my arm into my heart, and I had a scar on my head shaped like a horseshoe.” He was also frail, having dropped from a fit 175 pounds to 140.

I Can, I Shall, I Will

Entin was taken for inpatient neurorehabilitation at a hospital near his home in San Diego. “The first neuropsychiatrist who got a hold of me ran a couple of quick tests, and she said, ‘The

right side of your brain is dead. Don't think about driving, working, or walking for a long time."

He fired her.

Then he brought in a team of people who believed in him and adopted his new mantra: I can. I shall. I will. "I kept saying to myself every day, 'Put yourself in the mindset that you can do anything and nothing is impossible.' I knew if I kept moving," Entin says, "I was going to keep improving."

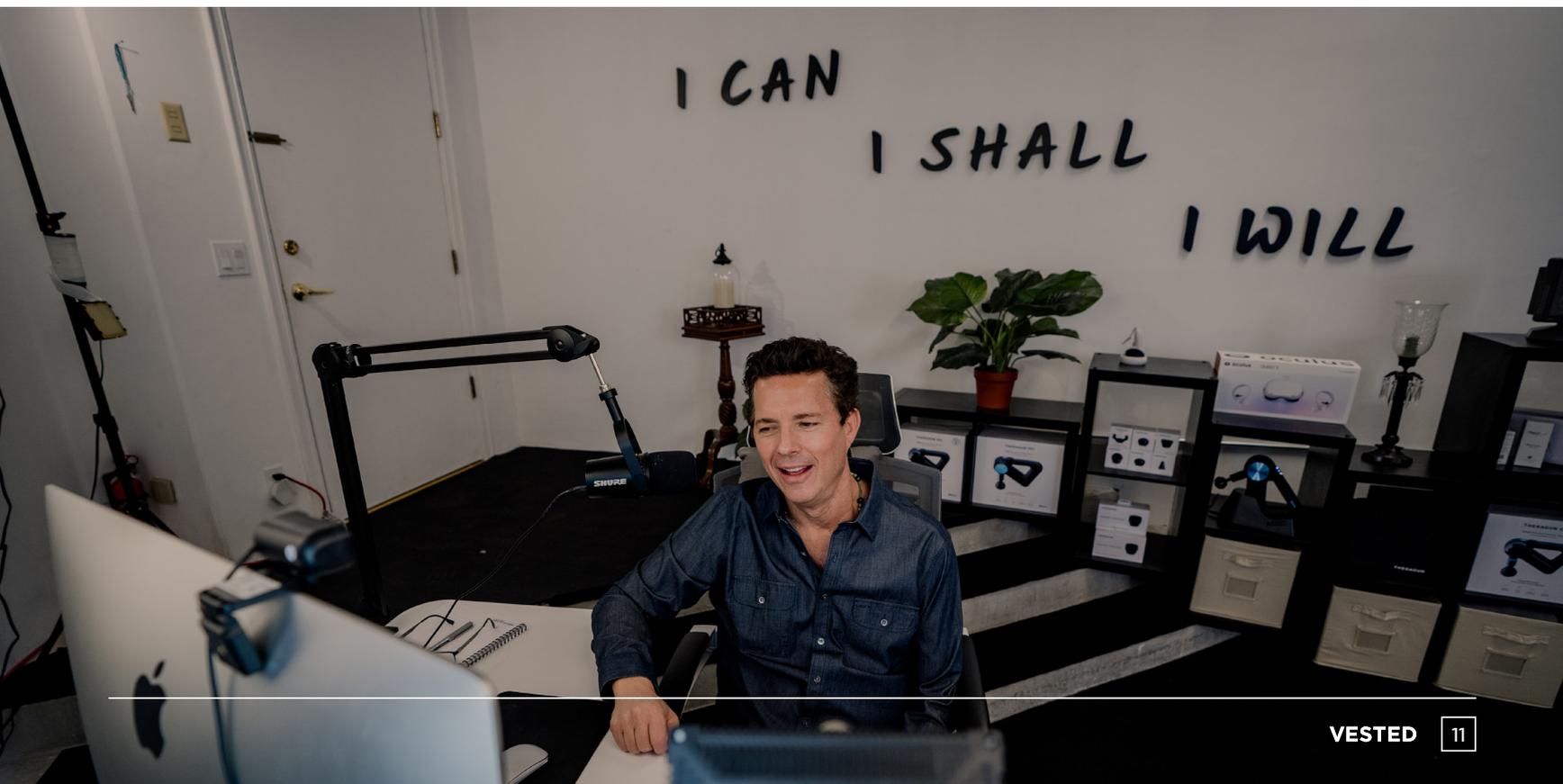
What motivated him the most was the thought of not being able to hold, hug, or kiss his daughters. Entin says the greatest joy of his life comes from spending time with Savannah, now 14, and Shiloh, who is 11. "They are my why. My daughters are the reason I wanted to walk again, not sit in a wheelchair."

So, he worked from early morning until the evening, even calling in medical professionals on the weekends. "I called it my boot camp," Entin says. "I couldn't even sit up straight. I lost the whole left side of my body from my vision to hearing to swallowing to walking. I had to relearn to walk, dress, shower, and use the toilet."

After his stint in rehab, he went back home, but it was too hard on his wife to take care of two young children and him, so Entin moved back in with his parents in Tarzana. "I needed to heal. I needed to do my therapies," he says.

Of course, there were days and moments when he wanted to give up.

"The physical side is painful. But the emotional trauma and the mental anguish was harder than the physical stuff at times," Entin says. His rehabilitation took a toll on the



people he loved—his parents, his family, friends, and his marriage, which ended in divorce. “Everybody felt so helpless, so angry, and so exhausted because they didn’t know what to do for me.”

A sense of humor helps, he says: “Humor heals, but it takes time to get through the pain, the sorrow, the depression, and the darkness.” Once you get through that, he says, your light shines brightly on everybody.

Transforming Lives

About 800,000 Americans suffer a stroke each year, and approximately two-thirds of these individuals survive and require rehabilitation, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Many survivors can have prolonged recovery and some are left with residual neurological deficits. In fact, complete recovery can take months or even years.

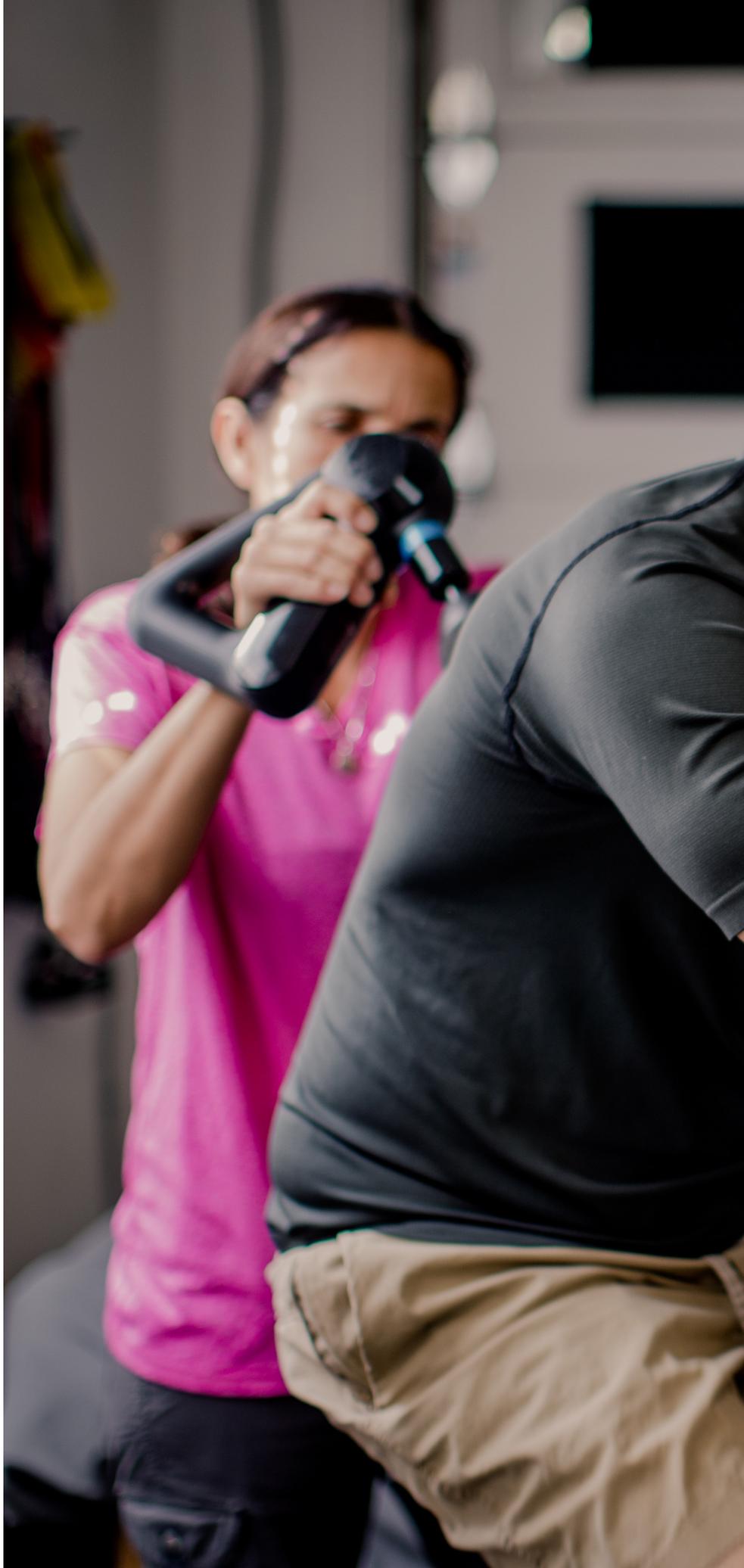
That is why, in 2018, Entin founded *strokehacker.com* and the associated Stroke Hacker Community, with one simple goal in mind: helping others hack their strokes or traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

His work includes one-on-one coaching, encouraging survivors to face new challenges in their lives and helping them begin to plan a recovery road map.

When Entin is not doing national TV appearances or podcasts to tell people what’s possible with a resilient attitude, he works with the families of survivors.

In 2018, Entin founded strokehacker.com with one simple goal in mind: helping others hack their strokes or traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

“You have to get the people around the traumatic survivors involved,” Entin says. His neurologist, S. Thomas (Tom) Carmichael, chair of the Department of Neurology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, agrees. “Survivors need a team of supporters,” Carmichael says. “They need a network of people who will help them recover, and they need a process.”





In addition to *strokehacker.com*, Entin has created Move 2 Improve, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation working on rehabilitating those who have suffered TBIs. Between his endeavors with the nonprofit and *strokehacker.com*, Entin's goal is to help transform the lives of 1 million people overcoming any kind of traumatic injury—whether it's a stroke or spinal cord injury—by 2030.

“Sean is an enormous force for good for those around him,” Carmichael says. “He sees the good in people and brings out the best in them, urging them on to further achievement.”

Entin never gives up, says Gloria Rios, his athletic trainer for the past five years and co-founder of the Stroke Hacker Community. “He always has hope, even when he's down,” Rios says. “The one thing he didn't lose through his stroke is his drive to excel and continue to look out for other people.”

“ *My stroke gave me a deeper understanding of kindness and compassion and most importantly, allowed me a chance to make a difference for others.* **”**

Sean Entin

Entin does rehabilitation three times a week and is seeing improvements. But the signs of stroke are noticeable. “My left arm is still weak, my left fingers don't work as well as they should, and I walk with a limp,” he says.

However, he is not angry about what happened to him.

“This was God's way of me becoming someone new and better,” Entin says. “My stroke gave me a deeper understanding of kindness and compassion and most importantly, allowed me a chance to make a difference for others.”

The Stroke Hacker

Recognized as a thought leader and speaker in the stroke survivor community, Entin is helping survivors



and those around them find new ways to work through challenges, break through plateaus, and begin planning their recovery based on tailored advice.

The Stroke Hacker methodology uses a simple, yet powerful approach.

Ask the important questions. What is your current situation and what do you want to achieve? What is your perspective on your situation, and how does that need to change to get there? What are you doing to accomplish your goals, and what behaviors do you need to change?

Assess opportunities. Each stroke survivor's situation is unique and so are the opportunities available to them. With the support of the Stroke Hacker Community, those overcoming TBIs will have an expert in their corner to help them navigate the host of offerings and opportunities, such as modified therapies to best serve individual needs and custom planning to get them closer to recovery and independence.

Work together to achieve the unbelievable. Overcome difficulties and achieve a new reality with a shared commitment and accountability. Your success is Stroke Hacker's success.

For those who have suffered brain injuries, the Stroke Hacker Community is a place to share stories, accomplishments, and tips for improving overall health and wellness after a TBI. Subscribe at strokehacker.com to start receiving tips and insights into TBI recovery, or visit Stroke Hacker on social media. 

