

After a Stroke, a Torturous Battle to Put Thoughts Into Words, and to Work Again



Angela Jimenez for The New York Times

Mozart Bastien, who suffered a stroke in 1996, is taking maintenance work training in Brooklyn.

By MONICA POTTS

In early 1996, Mozart Bastien was working 12-hour days every day, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., at a plastics factory in Brooklyn. And when he left work, he wasn't done working. Instead, he drove a private car to earn some extra money.

Nothing, it seemed, could slow Mr. Bastien down.



But that February, he went home, got into bed, and woke up in a hospital the next day. Mr. Bastien, now 58, was told he had had a stroke. He had no memory of it, but the same cannot be said of the 22 days he spent recovering in the hospital.

Though the stroke did not affect Mr. Bastien physically, it left him unable to speak any of the three languages in which he was fluent: Eng-

lish, French and Creole.

Being unable to communicate, unable to show the world that his mind was intact, was extremely frustrating for Mr. Bastien. "The brain is the person," he said in an interview.

The stroke also idled Mr. Bastien from work, because of the speech problem and the risk of another stroke. He began to receive Supplemental Security Income, \$415 a month, along with about \$200 in food stamps.

For three years, he could not speak at all. Words would form in his head but would not come out of his mouth. When he wanted milk or soda, he would gesture to his wife and daughter, whose names he couldn't say, and point to his beverage of choice.

Since then, Mr. Bastien has gone to therapy and to doctors' appointments once a month. He has slowly regained his speech but still loses words, his mouth drawn tight in frus-

tration. To answer questions about numbers in an interview, he drew what he meant with his finger on a table, rather than going through the effort of explaining.

He and his wife separated in 2001, and he moved into a bedroom in a private home, which he rents for \$400 a month. Mr. Bastien still suffers from hypertension, and is at risk of another stroke. His doctors warn him that it could be devastating.

Though he is getting better, Mr. Bastien has not been able to go back to work. But he has found an ally in his efforts to stabilize and rebuild his life.

This July he was referred to the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, one of seven beneficiaries of The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, and began its work-adjustment training program. Four days a week, for six hours a day, he trains in maintenance work, learning how to buff floors and clean office buildings.

He and his caseworker, Mfon Ukpe, hope that he will be placed in a custodial position when he is trained and his doctors say that it is safe for him to work steadily.

"Knowing that with high blood pressure he could go into real crisis," Mr. Ukpe said, Mr. Bastien and his bosses need some way to check and maintain Mr. Bastien's health.

Mr. Ukpe applied for \$85 from the fund so that Mr. Bastien could have a heart and blood pressure monitor he could wear on his wrist at work, along with a lightweight uniform.

Though it was a small amount of money, it has provided an invaluable tool. "The blood pressure monitor is very important, very critical, here and at home," Mr. Ukpe said.

Mr. Bastien was a good candidate not only because of his need, but also because of his drive to go back to work and continue doing things that were important to him. "This is an individual who can succeed after that awful experience," Mr. Ukpe said.

Mr. Bastien attributes his drive to one thing.

"La foi," he said in French. After some work, he and his translator came up with the word he meant in

in his life. He prays for his fluency to return.

And he prays to return to work, even though he is eligible for permanent disability payments.

Work means something more than money, he said. "This is liberté."

Previously recorded	\$3,079,742.71
Recorded Wednesday	\$29,014.70
Total	\$3,108,757.41
Last year to date	\$3,429,843.53

English. "Faith."

"I still have my faith in God," he said.

In addition to being a court clerk and then a judge in his hometown in Haiti, Mr. Bastien was a preacher. When he moved to Brooklyn 19 years ago he had a local radio show in French.

People used to call in and ask Pastor Mozart to pray for them, or for ailing family members or friends, he said.

Mr. Bastien still goes to a Baptist church in Brooklyn twice a week, to hear the sermon on Sunday and to pray on Tuesday. He listens to the tapes of his old radio shows, every day if he has the time. But now he says prayers for himself. He prays for the people who have helped him, especially those at the Brooklyn Bureau. He prays for the United States, his country of citizenship since 1999. He prays for the things that are good