



## Interview with Guy LeCharles Gonzalez

*“That morning was a little crazy...”*

**For podcast release  
Monday, August 30, 2021**

KENNEALLY: Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content. Joining me on the line is Guy LeCharles Gonzalez. Welcome back, Guy.

GONZALEZ: Thanks, Chris. Glad to be back.

KENNEALLY: Well, we’re here to talk about the morning of June 10<sup>th</sup>. You and I had scheduled a call to plan an upcoming interview for the podcast. You had recently joined LibraryPass as chief content officer, where you head up the Comics Plus initiative, which provides schools and public libraries with access to thousands of digital comics, graphic novels, and manga titles. An avid comics reader from childhood, Guy Gonzalez evangelizes for the format as a driver of lifelong reading habits.

And just after 8:00 AM that morning, June 10<sup>th</sup>, I received this email from Guy. “Apologies, but I’ll have to reschedule, as I’ve had an emergency come up. Will follow up soon.” Naturally, I wondered what kind of emergency, though I assumed it was nothing serious. We finally spoke two weeks later. I asked you how you were doing, and you told me what happened. So what happened?

GONZALEZ: So yeah, that morning was a little crazy. I had gotten up as usual, probably right before 7:00, laid in bed for a little bit, got up and started getting ready. Just as I was leaving the bathroom, I was turning the faucet off, and my fingers started to feel a little numb. And I was like, oh, that’s weird. And then rapidly, that numbness just kind of traveled all the way up my arm, and I realized something was happening. I wasn’t quite sure.

There’s an old, I think, HBO show, *Six Feet Under*, that had a meme years ago where the guy was having a heart attack, and the whole scene is him saying numb arm, and then it drifts off into narm, and then he passes out. Because I have no sense in serious situations, I’m thinking about that as a joke while also kind of wondering, man, am I having a heart attack? What’s happening?



I turned around and went into my daughter's room, because my wife had already left for work. I went to wake her up and kind of startled her awake, and in the process of getting her awake, my speech slowly – well, quickly, really – started to slur. And by the time she was awake enough to understand what I was trying to tell her, my ability to tell her what was happening was really limited, and I was able to kind of slur out for her to call her mother, my wife, that something was happening.

I was still lucid, and I still had control over everything but my arm and my speech. So the first thing I thought was, all right, I'm probably going to leave here in an ambulance. I should get dressed. I don't want to be the guy that gets taken out of the house in his pajamas and anything crazy like that. All practical thoughts while I'm having this experience.

Finally was able to get some clothes on with one arm, went down to the living room, sat on the couch. By then, my wife had gotten on the phone, so she and I talked for a minute. I told her what was happening. She's like, you know, what are you doing? Call 911. So I got off the phone with her, called 911. She started heading back from home, and they kind of got there at the same time – the EMTs, and my wife was maybe 30 seconds behind them.

They took my blood pressure. It was surprisingly high for them. They were like, all right, definitely something's happening. I had done some quick looking online and determined that maybe it was a stroke, that it wasn't a heart attack. The speech had come back. Like the slurring had faded, and I was able to kind of talk normally. The numbness was still over the majority of my arm, but slowly receding, where I was at least able to move my arm, even though I still had no feeling in my hands.

So they get me into the ambulance, and they get me on an IV. And I'd say no more than an hour after the first symptom, I'm in the ER. They've got me all hooked up. I spend the next 36 hours with a variety of tests – EKGs, TEE, where they stick the tube down your esophagus and get behind your heart to take a look at your heart from the inside. I had an ultrasound. I had a CAT scan. I had more than 20 vials of blood taken for bloodwork. Ultimately, what they determined was I had what's known as a TIA, which is basically a mild stroke.

Two years ago, when I turned 50, I had had my annual checkup, which honestly wasn't a great checkup. It was a new doctor. It wasn't a terribly thorough checkup. But I did check out for pre-hypertension, which at my age, African American males, it's a pretty common thing.



So this time around, I got, obviously, a lot more explicit directions to follow. Got to cut out sodium – not out, but way back sodium, cholesterol. Those are the two main things I’m monitoring. Got to get back into a regular exercise regimen and lose some weight. And over the next five weeks, each of the specialists kind of came back with their results. At the end of the day, there’s no determination for why it happened, only what happened. It was a TIA. It had nothing to do with my heart. And it could never happen again. It could happen tomorrow. They have no clue.

KENNEALLY: I love the detail – the practical detail of wanting to get some clothes on before the EMTs arrived, Guy. But you wrote about the mini-stroke on your blog, and we will link to that account from our own site. And you’ve come on the show today to share this experience. It’s important for people to be aware of the potential for this to happen to everyone, to anyone. How would say the TIA, this mini-stroke, has changed your life over the last two months?

GONZALEZ: I’ve always been what would be considered relatively healthy. I was a pretty regular runner. Never spent a night in the hospital. The worst I ever had was stitches. Never broken a bone. Had never been on any serious medication. So that in itself was a significant change to not take my health for granted and have to really be mindful about the things I eat.

I’m into data. I was already tracking my exercises. Tracking what I eat has become this fascinating look into – you don’t really think about the ingredients of your meals in any significant way, other than maybe calories.

So one of the things I’ve learned is everything has sodium in it. It’s really hard to avoid. Particularly culturally, African American and Puerto Rican background, a lot of my just staples are very high in sodium. But also just the food we eat, whether it’s fast food, fast casual, or even fine dining, salt and sodium are kind of a default in everything we do.

The other part that was weird, even including the invitation to come on the podcast to talk about this, where historically I’ve been a guest to talk about publishing issues – so at first, I was like, why would I go on a podcast to talk about this? But it also kind of leaned into the reason I wrote about it on my blog. It was partly a practical aspect.

For someone who lives very publicly in some ways on social media, there are lots of aspects of my life that I don’t share publicly. I’m not one of these people who posts pictures of my kids and all that stuff. There’s a significant private aspect to my life that I don’t tend to get into in social. So a lot of people had no idea.



Other than some coworkers and close family and friends, most people until I published that blog post had no idea what happened. And because I didn't publish it for clicks – I'm not continually reposting that link – the joy of the Twitter algorithm is there were still plenty of people who didn't realize I had the stroke even though I had published this public blog. So that's the other thing that's kind of been an interesting shift, is deciding where that line is to be comfortable to talk about an aspect of my life that has nothing to do with publishing.

**KENNEALLY:** Well, first, I have to say I really appreciate your taking the time and making the step to share the story with us and with our podcast audience. As you say, when you told me what happened, I was in shock, really, because you don't seem like a kind of a guy who would have a stroke. But that's the point, I think, of trying to share this information. There is no certain profile. It can happen to anybody.

I think the last point I want to ask you about is tied in a way to what a stroke is. It's when a clot blocks the blood supply to a part of your brain. With this TIA that you had, that blockage is transient, and like you've experienced, usually without any kind of permanent damage. But as you've started to tell us, this has played with your head.

**GONZALEZ:** I was actually going to go running that morning. So one thing that constantly plays with me is what if this had happened 20 minutes later, and I was out for a run by myself, rather than in the house when my daughter was there, able to get in touch with my wife?

For the first six weeks or so, my wife wouldn't let me out of her sight. Anything I had to do, we had to do together. Fortunately, I'm working from home, so that wasn't a big challenge. So walking has become a big part of my day, and we have a dog, which makes that convenient.

The lack of any clear explanation for why it happened kind of leaves you with this – well, if you don't know why it happened, and you were relatively healthy, it could happen again. So you got to be really careful about being mindful about not doing anything that could potentially cause it, which is weird, because you don't know what could potentially cause it.

I'm like, hey, I'm going to go about my business. I'm a lot more mindful about pushing myself too hard. On the long list of possible reasons, stress is one of them, and it definitely has been a stressful year and a half.

It's kind of like you're in a dark room, groping around, and you have the vague sense of the parameters of the room, but you can't quite remember where that table is, and you can't



quite remember if the dog is still in the room. So you're careful, but you're reasonably confident. That's kind of how I feel right now. I'm not trying to do anything too stupid, but I'm also trying to avoid blocking myself off from things that I probably can do out of fear that it might cause something.

KENNEALLY: Yeah, I really get that, Guy. That's a tough call to make. But let's close with some advice I always give my daughter when she's about to go do something. I just say, I love you, and stay out of trouble, OK? (laughter) That's what we'll say to you, Guy LeCharles Gonzalez. Stay out of trouble. Keep getting better. And the message we want to leave with everyone here is how important it is to learn the signs of having a stroke and what to do in the first few important minutes. We'll link to some important medical information on our own website about that. But again, Guy LeCharles Gonzalez with Comics Plus and LibraryPass, thanks so much for sharing your story with me and with listeners. Take care.

GONZALEZ: Thanks, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Our co-producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Today's recording engineer is Rob Simon. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please follow us on Twitter and Facebook. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening. Join us again soon for another Velocity of Content podcast from CCC.

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