

Antonio Iannella's Journey: Life After Stroke - Overcoming Challenges Abroad and Finding Purpose

In 2009, while on a family vacation in Vietnam, Antonio Iannella, author of *Saigon Siren: A Stroke Survivor's Life-Changing Moment Abroad*, experienced a life-threatening brain hemorrhage caused by an arteriovenous malformation (AVM). The experience was terrifying, as he struggled to communicate with foreign medical staff, faced language barriers, and navigated an unfamiliar healthcare system. But it was in these challenging conditions that Antonio's life after the stroke truly began, shaping both his journey and the powerful story he would later share in his memoir.

Overcoming Stroke: Challenges and Small Victories

Like many stroke survivors, Antonio's life after the initial crisis became focused on rehabilitation. The road to recovery was long and full of unique obstacles many face in stroke rehabilitation. The stroke left him with several physical limitations, including challenges with mobility, vision, and coordination. Each day brought new struggles, but it also revealed small victories that came with persistence. For Antonio, even learning to sit up or move his right hand again felt like huge milestones in his recovery after the brain hemorrhage. These small victories not only marked progress but served as reminders that life after stroke can still be meaningful, even if it looks different from before.

Finding Purpose in Life After Stroke

One of the hardest parts of stroke recovery is the emotional journey. For Antonio, rethinking his life purpose and adapting to his limitations became essential. His love for music faced a significant setback due to physical limitations, but he didn't give up. Antonio adapted, learning to compose and create music with one hand. This adaptation allowed him to find joy in his creative pursuits, a powerful

example of how finding purpose can redefine life after stroke. His experiences, captured in *Saigon Siren*, provide insight into the resilience that many stroke survivors find along the way.

Community Support and Emotional Recovery After Stroke

Emotional support is essential for stroke survivors, and Antonio's journey underscores the importance of community. He found comfort and strength in connecting with other stroke survivors who understood the ups and downs of recovery. This sense of community helped him cope with the unique emotional challenges of life after a brain hemorrhage, providing valuable insights and strategies for overcoming day-to-day struggles. Through his book, *Saigon Siren: Memoir of a Stroke Recovery*, Antonio offers readers an inspiring account of his journey, from the shock of the stroke to the long, slow climb of recovery. Writing became a therapeutic outlet for him—a way to process emotions, reflect on his growth, and reach out to others who might feel alone on their own paths to recovery.

Life After Stroke: Lessons in Resilience and Growth

Antonio's experience serves as a testament to the power of resilience. Life after a brain hemorrhage, like his, is often marked by a series of setbacks, adjustments, and personal growth. In learning to let go of old expectations and accept a new normal, Antonio gained a sense of peace by living in the moment and focusing on what brings him joy and purpose. His story in *Saigon Siren* is a powerful reminder to other survivors that life after stroke, while challenging, can also be rewarding. The journey of adapting and overcoming the hurdles of stroke recovery opens up new perspectives, strengths, and possibilities.

Embracing Life After Stroke: Antonio's Message to Other Survivors

Antonio's message to other stroke survivors is simple yet powerful: Don't let setbacks define you. Life after stroke might look different, but it's full of potential. Recovery after a stroke isn't about returning to who you once were but about

discovering who you can become. Finding purpose, whether through creativity, community involvement, or sharing your story, can bring new meaning to life after stroke. If you or a loved one is navigating the journey of life after stroke, remember that support is available. Connecting with other survivors, discovering local resources, and finding inspiration in stories like *Saigon Siren* can offer guidance and reassurance.

Conclusion

Antonio Iannella's journey in *Saigon Siren: A Stroke Survivor's Life-Changing Moment Abroad* highlights resilience, adaptability, and purpose. Despite the difficulties posed by his AVM and his journey back to health in a foreign country, he emerged with a new perspective on life. His experience serves as an inspiring example for stroke survivors everywhere, showing that life after a stroke can be a time of growth, creativity, and unexpected joy. For anyone on a similar path, Antonio's story stands as a beacon of hope—a reminder that, while recovery after a brain hemorrhage may take time, there is always room for possibility and growth in life after a stroke.

Life After Stroke - Overcoming Challenges Abroad and Finding Purpose

Discover Antonio Iannella's inspiring story of life after a stroke, overcoming adversity abroad, and finding new purpose.

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Highlights:

00:00 Introduction

02:57 Antonio's Journey with the Stroke Foundation

04:31 Antonio's Initial Stroke Experience

07:35 Adjusting to Life After Stroke

11:20 Family Dynamics and Personal Growth

17:51 Writing and Publishing the Book
28:28 The Stroke Experience and Recovery
37:28 Returning to Australia and Continuing Recovery
43:33 Finding Purpose and Joy in Life After Stroke
47:31 Advice for Other Stroke Survivors
54:00 Back To Driving After A Stroke
1:04:23 Life After Stroke And The Pseudobulbar Affect

Transcript:

Introduction - Life After Stroke



Bill Gasiamis 0:00

Hello everybody, and welcome to episode 326 of the recovery after stroke podcast today, I'm honored to bring you the inspiring story of Antonio Ianella, a survivor of a brain hemorrhage that struck while he was traveling in Vietnam. In this episode, Antonio shares the challenges he faced recovering in a foreign country, overcoming language barriers and adapting to his new physical limitations.

Bill Gasiamis 0:29

His story reveals the power of resilience, adaptability and finding purpose in life after stroke, before we jump into Antonio's journey, I'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who supports the podcast. If these episodes have helped you or a loved one in any way, please consider supporting the show through Patreon at patreon.com/recoveryafterstroke.

Bill Gasiamis 0:55

Your support keeps the podcast going and allows me to continue sharing these valuable stories for stroke survivors and their families, I'd like to make a special shout out to our newest Patreon supporters, JK, Jolene Oh and Cecilia, thank you

for joining our community. Your support means so much, and I'm truly grateful to have you with us.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20

Antonio Iannella, welcome back to the podcast.

Antonio Iannella 1:24

Thank you, Bill. How are you mate? Good to see you again.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27

I'm really good, man. Thank you. Is so good to have you back. The first time we met was the 15th of November 2017 sorry, that's not the first time we met, that's the first episode that we recorded.

Antonio Iannella 1:40

Yes, we met, maybe before then we met in, I reckon, about 2011 or something like that as well.

Bill Gasiamis 1:48

2013 we met at the Stroke Foundation, where we both decided to be speakers on behalf of the Stroke Foundation to raise awareness against stroke, right?

Antonio Iannella 2:02

Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 2:04

Let's talk a little bit about that briefly before I give people a bit of a rundown of the previous episode and what you've been through, what was behind you deciding to go and be an advocate for Stroke Awareness, for the Stroke Foundation back then.

Antonio Iannella 2:22

Yeah, I am. I met someone who was doing that role, they were a stroke survivor, and they suggested I get involved. So I applied and got the gig pretty straight forward, and she sort of thought I'd be a good candidate, and like you and I have both become our community, representing for our language, well, our heritage.

Bill Gasiamis 2:49

That's it, yeah, you, Italian, me and Greg.

Antonio Iannella 2:51

Yes, yeah.

Life After Stroke: Journey with the Stroke Foundation

Bill Gasiamis 2:57

And what was it like doing that for you, though you were in the thick of it then. So what was it like actually doing something like that? What was the benefit of it I suppose.

Antonio Iannella 3:06

At first it was the challenge and wanting to be involved in raising awareness, and then I just really enjoyed the people and meeting everyone and meeting you and everyone else, and there was this spirit about volunteering, that when we'd get together and have those meetings and discuss what we're doing, that would just the energy just was so lovely that I really enjoyed it, and then getting to do those presentations to the public was just felt so critical and so needed in society.

Antonio Iannella 3:40

So, I just locked it up and got a lot out of I'd walk away from a presentation exhausted, but just so fulfilled, and so and there's different types of exhaustion. There's those that you feel like you're so fatigued, especially with stroke, that comes from nothing, you can't work out, why do I feel so tired? And then there's fatigue from doing too much, but you're satisfied because you've you've accomplished something.

Bill Gasiamis 4:08

It's a completely different version.

Antonio Iannella 4:10

Yeah, absolutely. So that's the feeling I was getting from the presentations.

Bill Gasiamis 4:15

Yeah, that's the one that you go after, you go after that kind of fatigue, because there's a massive payoff, right? Whereas fatigue that just drives you to the bed or to the couch, that's the kind of fatigue you want to not have and you want to avoid.

Antonio's Initial Stroke Experience



Antonio Iannella 4:31

Absolutely, absolutely. I had one of those days yesterday, and it was just I didn't sleep so well the night before, and it was just a horrible fatigue that, you know that I don't want to feel like this, but you just plow through it and I've got a busy week coming up, and another by the end of next week, I'll be quite fatigued, but it'll be a nice feeling. So yeah, absolutely, mate I get it.

Bill Gasiamis 4:54

When we met in on the podcast, November 15, 2017, And by the way, for anyone watching and listening, I advise you guys to go back and get a bit of a sense of where Antonio was at back then, there'll be links in the show notes, so you'll be able to find the previous episode that we recorded. Your journey, you discussed your journey basically in 2009 you were 38 overseas on a family trip. You've experienced a stroke, you're in Saigon, right in hospital in Saigon.

Antonio Iannella 5:31

Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 5:32

No language, trying to navigate all of that kind of stuff. And then, as we kind of went through the episode, you spoke about the the mental and emotional struggles are very common, everything, absolutely yes, go through all the time, depression and anxiety and then, like somehow, sort of discovering resilience at the same time. After you guys got back, you you went through a divorce as well, you guys separated.

Antonio Iannella 6:03

We had we it was kind of what I after so many years, I've concluded that was the straw. It's cliché, but the straw that broke the camel's back, and there was just, there was a history of some trouble there and problems, and it just like it was just beyond repairable by that stage, and the best thing to do was just start again, I guess, and it was also part of that journey of rebuilding a new life.

Bill Gasiamis 6:33

It seemed to be like a line in the sand moment for you.

Antonio Iannella 6:36

Yeah and, you know, yes, line in the sand. We'll get to that.

Bill Gasiamis 6:40

And if I remember correctly, there was this other weird benefit that you didn't expect, which was because you had shared custody of your children, sometimes, when the children with their mum and your ex wife, that would give you that recuperation time and rest time to recharge so that you could see them again down the road?

Antonio Iannella 7:01

Yes absolutely, that was critical, and also gave me an opportunity to explore the things I wanted to do without having to think about, you know, get my kids to school or doing those tasks that quite as a parent, I could just solely be about myself, and it was a good healing process that I had to go through.

Bill Gasiamis 7:23

Yeah, and what are your deficits that you've had to live with, that you're kind of overcoming, or that you've adjusted to having tell me about the deficits?

Adjusting to Life After Stroke



Antonio Iannella 7:35

Yeah, adjust. I think adjusting is the right word or healing, because you, for most stroke survivors, you're left with some kind of deficit, and I think through a process of time, you you're able to work at how you can manage those and how you can make your life work. For me, you know, I was in a pretty bad way, lost complete function of my body. Had problems speaking and vision, hearing loss, so and once I got back to walking, what was left was mainly weakness on my left side, so I don't have a great little control of this hand.

Antonio Iannella 8:12

I still have problems with this, I definitely see my speeches come back, which is pretty good, walking and balance, they already, they are an issue, but fatigue is also a massive issue. So yeah, I'm left with those, and it's really, it's all about managing and just finding ways to do things, get back to doing things that I enjoy, and finding a way to do that that works in with my, I guess, limitations, and a

great word, but I can't run anymore, and I can't ride a bike, and there's so many things in I can't go hiking and but, you know, I can do other things.

Antonio Iannella 8:52

I do go walk in and I work out, and so, yeah, it's really about replacing a lot of things that you once did with new things that you can do, and I think, I don't think you can learn this. I mean, you can't be taught this during your early days of recovery. It's something you just physically and emotionally have to go through, and you get to this point eventually where you discover, I'm going to let go of what was there and rather focus in on what I lost.

Antonio Iannella 9:21

You begin to sort of focus on what you still have and develop that into something that works for you, I don't know, I don't want to, I don't want to ever say that, it's never going to be the same, because some people make really, really good recoveries, but you know, there's going to be always something left behind, and you just got to apply that to your life and go, and like I said, it's a very long bridge to cross.

Bill Gasiamis 9:46

You've been doing it for 15 years.

Antonio Iannella 9:48

15 years, yep.

Bill Gasiamis 9:50

Is this 15th year kind of the best year yet, I know that you've had a lot to overcome, like most drugs vibes, you know, there's been plenty of water under the bridge. But is this the best year yet? As far as your mental health, your emotional health, your physical health, where are you at with the whole journey?

Bill Gasiamis 10:11

Let's take a quick break here, but we'll be right back with more of Antonio's inspiring journey in a moment. While you're here, I'd like to remind you about my book 'The unexpected way that a stroke became the best thing that happened. This book isn't just a memoir, it's a practical guide for achieving post traumatic growth after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 10:32

You'll find stories from other stroke survivors who, like Antonio, found ways to grow and adapt after their trauma. You can find it on Amazon or at recoveryafterstroke.com/book.

Antonio Iannella 10:46

I do feel this is the best year, because it's something that gets overshadowed a lot is the emotional recovery, and we don't spend a lot of time in rehab working on that, if you think about it, when you're in for me, when I was in rehab, it was physio, hydro, OT, OT Assistant, psych. Only one session is psych a week, psychology and so and you're not really prepared for the emotional struggles you have once you're out of the hospital system.

Life After Stroke: Family Dynamics and Personal Growth

Antonio Iannella 11:20

So you go through that process of learning and really connecting with other stroke survivors who kind of advise you that this is normal, where your feeling is normal, and then you start to go, okay, so yeah, there's been a lot of learning, a lot of growing, and finally arriving at that place where I feel like, like your book says about this, it feels like it's the best thing that's ever happened to me, but it's taken a long time to get there, and I'm not going to say that there are days where I wish that I just hate this thing, because there are, you can't.

Antonio Iannella 11:51

I'm not going to pretend and say it's all great and running around giving people high fives, because it's not the way it is. It's really just there are days I want to give up. Honestly, there are days where I'm just like, I'm human. I want to give up, but I just try and make sure there's only minimal amount of those days, and they're more positive days, and I guess that outweighs it, and I've been able to get back to doing some of the things I just love to do, and I look at it like, if I didn't have my stroke.

Antonio Iannella 12:20

I wouldn't have had that opportunity to do these things, and you know, I call it, there's Spanish word, it's two words, jerky or complete though, which means 'Full Circle. And I feel like I've come full circle back to who that person I was before my stroke, well before my stroke. So that put me on that path of what I want to do

with my life and pursue the things I'm interested in.

Bill Gasiamis 12:46

Do you feel like you've found your essence?

Antonio Iannella 12:50

Yeah, I feel like I've found that person I've worked to want to be. When you're younger, like in your 20s and 30s, you just haven't fully matured to that, I'm in my 50s now. So you get to that point where you just go 'Hey. You know, you realize what's so important, and, you know, and I had to let go of all those things that most of us are doing, like pursuing a career.

Antonio Iannella 13:15

Doing really well at work and then just letting all that go and just reinventing myself and getting back to the things I love, like making music and being creative and enjoying the sunshine and nature and, just simple things that you know bring me joy. And you know, a lot of times, in my previous life, I didn't, not that I didn't have those things, but they were just minimal because you're busy, busy, busy, busy.

Bill Gasiamis 13:44

Stopping to smell the roses, like really, and then you just do it, and it's easy to get distracted, right? It's absolutely tons of things to distract. So everyone does that and I think it's very standard and normal.

Antonio Iannella 13:57

It's normal, it's not there's nothing wrong. It's life, and I love to sort of be able to do so, especially when you know, I'll give you a little example. About a week ago, I saw a friend, he posted some video of himself hiking through somewhere Kangaroo flats or somewhere just outside of Melbourne, and it looked it was the sun was shining, and he had a massive smile in his face.

Antonio Iannella 14:24

And I just had that moment, my heart just went 'Oh, I just love to do that, but, you know, and you know, and I hated where I was at, but then I just let it go and move forward and then focus on those things that make me happy. So, yeah, it's normal. It's a normal lifestyle where everyone does there's nothing wrong with it, just finding time to be able to enjoy those small things is really important.

Antonio Iannella 14:24

Yeah when all this happened to you, the family was young, wasn't it like?

Antonio Iannella 14:50

Yeah, they're all young.

Bill Gasiamis 14:59

How young were the kids?

Antonio Iannella 15:02

Three daughters are all under 10. So there was a 10 month old, a five year old and an eight year old. And yeah, we're in Vietnam at the time.

Bill Gasiamis 15:13

Yeah. So now they're all sort of approaching the end of high school, and some of them are probably already finished, and there's a whole different responsibility for you, with regards to the kids, that relationship has shifted. Tell me what it's like now with the kids.

Antonio Iannella 15:30

Yeah absolutely, it's it has shifted greatly, because they're two of them adults and in the workforce and living on their own and moved out at home. So they're doing really well. My youngest daughter, 16, she lives with me, and so there's still that level of parenting responsibility, but yeah, it has shifted where there's not so much onus on me just having to clean up and look after them and care for them, and they're a lot more responsible for what they do and, yeah, so it's given me a bit a bit more space a bit more room.

Bill Gasiamis 16:09

And allocate time to yourself more.

Antonio Iannella 16:11

Yeah, well, if I had hadn't had this time, I wouldn't have been able to achieve some of the things I've achieved.

Bill Gasiamis 16:18

Is it a bit of a relief when they move out? I mean, it was for me, and it's sad, you know, it was like bittersweet when my boys moved out in the 20s, I was not even 50, and they had moved out and empty nester and all that kind of stuff, but the

space that they created was a relief like it was. When you have a relationship with your kids in the house, it's always the parental relationship.

Bill Gasiamis 16:48

Doesn't matter how old they are, but when they move out, it shifts. You have a different adult relationship with them, and it's not about parenting them or making them pick up after themselves, or any of that stuff. Did you find that?

Antonio Iannella 17:02

As you were saying that I was just resonated with me, because that's what happened with especially with my daughter, Molly, who moved out only a year ago or so, and she and I'm just watching her from a distance, just into that world of, you know, being responsible paint her own bells. She started a little business where she makes film and doing that, and watching her just grow and picking up clients, and it's just and like you said, it's more of a it changes.

Antonio Iannella 17:32

The dynamics change because you're no longer overseeing them as a parent, under your household. They've got their own household, and you just witness it from a distance and then provide support, maybe in the in the sense of just some guidance, and it's a nice it's a nice connection.

Writing and Publishing the Book Saigon Siren



Bill Gasiamis 17:51

You know the kids moving out. Do you think that's what created the space for

you? We're going to talk about your book right now for you to kind of finally wrap up this project of your book, or tell us a little bit about that journey, about the book. Firstly, before you start telling us anything, do you have a copy of it there? Show us.

Antonio Iannella 18:09

Sure thing.

Bill Gasiamis 18:10

Saigon Siren, memoir of a stroke recovery, Antonio Iannella, fantastic man. I love the cover. I mean, the whole thing is amazing.

Antonio Iannella 18:10

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 18:10

But you've been on this writing journey for quite a lot of time. I thought it four years for me, took a while. But how long have you been on this writing journey?

Antonio Iannella 18:32

It began, I reckon it began around the time I met you back in 2012 and it just the idea was just bubbling in the back of my head for a while, and and then I got into about 2012 with no idea of what I was doing. Just thought I'd just write, and I wrote, wrote, wrote, and then I had some guidance, had some involvement with other writers through a writing group that was really helpful, because they kind of gave me an idea on how to get a story out and how to tell a story.

Antonio Iannella 19:05

Because, you hear so often, you know that saying that everyone's got a book in them, it's true, they probably do, but telling the book or writing the book is just a whole nother thing completely. So that's what I had to learn, I knew how to story of Vietnam thing and recovery, and then after about a year of 2012, 2013 maybe up to 2014 it kind of stopped, come to a bit of a stop, and I got involved with doing other projects, music and and then it wasn't till COVID, and that reignited it, I thought, you know, I'm going to get back into writing.

Antonio Iannella 19:42

One of the first things I did, I had about 80,000 words. One of the first things I did was I extracted a chapter bang in the middle, and turn that into a short story, and

I sent that into just the local writing competition through the library, and I received the third prize award, and I thought 'Wow, there's something in this. And then I started sharing the story with a few friends, and they loved it, and it just gave me that confidence too.

Antonio Iannella 20:10

And I must say, there was one other person who was reading my chapters at that time as I was writing them, and she, although she was quite brutal in terms of the feedback, but it helped my writing so much, because I'd send the chapters in, she just like a school teacher, she just highlights sections and go, I love this bit, but you lose me here. That's cliché, you can do better.

Antonio Iannella 20:34

I'd be so angry, and I wanted to yell at her, but then I'd just get in there and fix all that and rewrite it, and it just gave me strength, and it gave me confidence, and I just kept writing, and yeah, just little key things I did was like this laptop that I'm talking to you on, I bought that and I dedicated it to writing, and I just, although I couldn't live plenty room in my home to write. I actually went to the library each day and just sat in a corner and just wrote.

Antonio Iannella 21:07

I'd be going through scenes of my recovery, or when it happened, tears streaming down my face I'm in the library. Just imagine all these things and writing and writing and just getting right into the story, and I did that purposely to just have that feeling of 'Okay, I'm at the library for four hours and I'm going to write, no distractions. You know, there were times I didn't even bring my phone, my computer wasn't connected to the to the internet at that time.

Bill Gasiamis 21:38

Wow, it's really going into it, I love them, and going into the time to write was really difficult for me as well. Like I started writing in lockdown as well, the whole purpose of it was, we were in Melbourne, so we had the biggest lockdown in the world. So there was a lot of downtime, a lot of time to do nothing or something constructive, and that's what it was for me, and the hardest thing for me was writing, reliving the whole thing wasn't so hard for me. I wasn't that emotional reliving it, but I was emotional telling the story in public when I was launching.

Antonio Iannella 22:16

Yeah, did you? Did you find once you when you told the story, like verbally or wrote it, it kind of helped you heal in a way where, I guess it was cathartic for you.

Bill Gasiamis 22:29

Indeed, man is extremely cathartic. I mean, I didn't expect that, part of I didn't think that that was what was going to happen, I wanted to tell a story too. I didn't know what story to tell, either, and that feedback that you were getting that was difficult to hear that chapter, you know, starts off great 'Oh, this paragraph is terrible, and I was going through that as well, and that's interesting. How did you find that was difficult? What was difficult about it? Was it that did you initially have that untrained mind of thinking 'Oh, they're attacking me.

Bill Gasiamis 23:05

Or was it they're they're hurting my feelings? What was it? Because it's not, it's constructive feedback, because you want to, they wanted you to have a good book. But I felt that too, that whole weird people are going to give why are people giving me a hard time about it, like that was strange. What was that all that about do you think it?

Speaker 1 23:25

It was strange, it happened also, when I was in the writing group the first time around with the first draft, they also would point out things, and I was but it's really hard to be objective when you're writing your own story. So it's when you're in the in the storyline, and you're writing things, you can visualize it in your head, and you know what you're trying to say, and sometimes you miss critical components that shrink a sentence or a paragraph together because you can see it.

Antonio Iannella 23:56

It's someone else who does not know nothing about you, they can't, so it's really important to get their feedback, and I think it's about ego, feeling like you get a bit hurt, because all you really want is to be I write about in the book is, you know, all you want is, like, I remember the first chapter I submitted to the writing group when I was part of that group, and I was so you would submit chapters every week, and people, everyone would read it in the group. And then you get together once a week and you talk about the chapters.

Antonio Iannella 24:26

Each person submitted a chapter. And I was, you know, I have submitted my first chapter, I was so excited, I was gonna, I felt like I was gonna go into that meeting library and everyone's gonna be 'Oh, you're a champion, you know, in all these high flames. And there's the complete opposite, you know? They just, they just taught me to not tore it to shreds, but just everything.

Bill Gasiamis 24:50

Literally, critically, observing it, right? They were observing it critically from a literary perspective.

Antonio Iannella 24:58

Absolutely, yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 24:59

And you are a legend, I think you're great, everyone thinks you're great, but yeah, it's just weird. This ego, like, it's like little kid emotions, like, it's some weird stuff that comes up, but it's, do you feel better for what? Obviously you feel better for it, but in your mind, you might not write another book, I don't know, but in your mind, does it make you feel like I know how to write another book now, like I could do that better and easier next time?

Antonio Iannella 25:30

Yes, absolutely I do feel that, but I also have been writing a few stories recently, and I'm finding them a lot more critical of my own writing, and I find something as well. Like the other day, I dug out an old story I wrote about a year ago, and I was going through it again, thinking to just, it was just a short story, and I thought I might spruce it up and and I read it to myself, and I was like 'Oh my God, this is horrible.

Antonio Iannella 25:58

So it was just, I just had to find a way to make it more me and I think learning to write through your own voice and getting the confidence to let your voice speak is part of the journey, and that's what you need to, I felt I needed to learn.

Bill Gasiamis 26:20

I love that whole idea of getting somebody else to look at your work and and kind of criticize it, so to speak, because, I mean, you don't want to go through the whole process self publish, which we can do these days, and then put out a book

that nobody can read because it's all over the place.

Antonio Iannella 26:39

Absolutely.

Bill Gasiamis 26:40

Put out a book that's boring to read or goes into too much detail in the wrong thing that's not relevant to stroke recovery.

Antonio Iannella 26:48

Absolutely, yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 26:49

So it's good that you've got that, a learning now, that learning is really what it is. It's another level of learning about, how you have to structure things to deliver a compelling story.

Antonio Iannella 27:04

Yeah, it is important to have those components, because you got to remember, at the end of the day, whoever's reading the book, the bottom line is, it's about them being entertained, and you have to, you have to separate almost how you feel about the story, and just look at it from a one of the things I did was I wrote as if I was speaking to someone like you and I are having this conversation, like I'm telling them the story, and always keep in mind, keeping them in mind that this is what I'm doing.

Antonio Iannella 27:33

I'm pitching this story to one person and just trying to make them feel connected and and entertained as well. So what those, all those factors.

Bill Gasiamis 27:44

It's about the reader.

Antonio Iannella 27:45

Yeah it's about the reader, absolutely. So that's what I was I really focused on. That was making it about and trying to be vulnerability is something that we, all, you know, sort of naturally shy away and disclose and keep to ourselves, but I just felt that had to be key component in the story in order to carry the reader through and make them feel connected to the story.

Bill Gasiamis 28:12

Awesome, my copy hasn't arrived yet because it's literally just become available, hasn't it?

Antonio Iannella 28:17

Yes, just yesterday.

Bill Gasiamis 28:19

Yeah, alright so this is being recorded on Saturday, the 19th of October.

Antonio Iannella 28:28

Yes.

The Stroke Experience and Recovery

Bill Gasiamis 28:28

The interview is going to go out in about six days from now, so anyone who's listening to it, it's already gone out, and that means that the book has been out for about a week, and everybody can get a copy online.

Antonio Iannella 28:42

Okay.

Bill Gasiamis 28:43

I've received the PDF draft of it, and I've skimmed through and had a bit of a look again. I didn't have time to read the whole thing, but I've made some notes that I want to sort of go through and talk about.

Antonio Iannella 28:54

Happy to do that, mate.

Bill Gasiamis 28:56

So, I we'll go back a little bit. We'll go back to Vietnam, what's going through your mind when you're experiencing these weird symptoms you've never ever experienced before that are kind of leading your body to stop working?

Speaker 1 29:13

Yeah, that was quite frightening, but to it, it's kind of like the first sign I got was the rumbling in the hands, in the ears and the tingle in my palm, that was the first sign, but you know how we often as people, get these little twitches, like you

might go in the back in there go 'What was that? And you kind of, and you don't question, like 'Oh, I don't know. And just carry on, it was kind of like that. That was the first sign, and then as it was, as I was beginning to as the stroke was taking hold and sort of, I guess, swiping watching through me.

Antonio Iannella 29:48

It just felt like I was, I didn't know my own self. I just was losing control of my whole body, it just become like jelly in minutes. So and, but of it for a lot, not a long time, but for the first few days, I just thought something was just going to be okay, I don't know, I had this kind of naive sensation that I'll be right, I'll be fine, it's probably just a bug.

Antonio Iannella 30:15

You know, the first thing I thought was I'd been bitten by something because I had the day before, we had been cruising through the the Mekong River, through some of the little villages, and something bit me on the foot, and I just thought it was probably just that a really a reaction to that number, okay, but turned out it wasn't. So it's quite, it was really frightening, you just losing control of yourself is just well.

Bill Gasiamis 30:45

And it was an AVM, wasn't it?

Antonio Iannella 30:46

Yeah, AVM like you have had, which we discovered when we met, that we both had AVMS. And prior to that, people don't know what an AVM is basically, it's a weak vein in part of your brain that ruptures and bleeds. Generally, it's just from a malformation you're born with it, and apparently, statistically, so heard between the ages of 30 and 40 is when they're most prone to bleed.

Bill Gasiamis 31:16

Yeah, that's so many people I've interviewed with AVMS in that age bracket, which is so weird that they all kind of have this shitty timer that they're all set to kind of go off at around that time, like, it's so strange.

Antonio Iannella 31:32

And there's no scientific I guess, statistics to show why or explain why this happens at that age and like when, when it happened to me, and that first thing they did were checking out is they check your vitals and check your blood

pressure and your blood sugar and your heart rate and all that, and everything was fine. I had no pre previous health condition, and it wasn't until they discovered after MRI that had this.

Bill Gasiamis 32:05

Was the MRI in Vietnam? Or did you have to get to Melbourne to get that?

Antonio Iannella 32:10

No, the first one, I had many, but the first one was in literally within an hour of getting or not even my memory is quite vague, but when we arrived at the hospital. I think we're straight into the hospital, and next thing I know, I was in having a navy I don't even remember the MRI, but I just remember, like, being wheeled through parts of the hospital, and I remember the two orderlies who were pushing my my bed.

Antonio Iannella 32:38

They were speaking in Vietnamese, and I couldn't work out where I was, I couldn't understand them, I couldn't work out it was because I was speaking in Vietnamese, or was it because I couldn't understand it? That's all I remember.

Bill Gasiamis 32:57

You're in a foreign country, we know what Australia's medical systems like.

Antonio Iannella 33:03

Its world class.

Bill Gasiamis 33:05

It has its limitations, but it's world class, right?

Antonio Iannella 33:08

Absolutely, it is really, really good.

Bill Gasiamis 33:09

Yeah, and if you live in a city, you're really confident that you're going to get amazing health care, but when you're in Vietnam, that's not so certain. Was that a concern? Something that was on your mind as well, or how do you manage that whole idea?

Antonio Iannella 33:26

I can't say it was on the forefront of my mind, there wasn't much in my mind,

apart from a panic, fear and distress and just what I was, I kind of felt like I was just holding on, holding on to life, so just some wasn't slipping away. There was, there were a few things like they couldn't the nurse couldn't get the this is one of the first days in ICU. The nurse couldn't get the intravenous line into my vein, and I remember they were just trying to get it in, they just couldn't get in, they ended up putting it in my neck.

Antonio Iannella 34:01

So there were things like that and, and if I'd asked for something, well, I could just speak, but if I'd asked for this, they'd bring me something else, or if I'd asked for a drink, they would fix my bed sheets or, you know, so there was a bit of that going on, but what they may be lacked in medical practices, they made up in care. They really cared for me, they were kind and sweet, and even the doctors, all the doctors were French, because during the French invaded Vietnam hundreds of years ago, so they have a big hold on France.

Antonio Iannella 34:42

It's a lot of Bill on Vietnam. There's a lot of buildings that were built during that era of their reigning in Vietnam. So there's a there's a heavy French influence. So the hospital was called the Franco Vasco Hospital, which is a French name, and the doctors were French, in the ICU ward. So they, not only that, we had Vietnamese nurses and staff, but French doctors who didn't speak English.

Antonio Iannella 35:16

So there was just another layer on top of that, and they just barely could, they few words here and there, but they really looked after us. Under those circumstances, we're in a foreign country, three young children, their mother myself and they looked after us, they did.

Bill Gasiamis 35:36

How far into your trip were you when it happened, and how long did it take you to get home?

Antonio Iannella 35:42

Well, the day before the ninth day we're coming home on the 10th day happened the last the day before departure, and it was on our last trip, which was to visit the underground war tunnels that were built during you know more. So yeah, we got to have the whole holiday, and did everything, and went on some amazing

cruises and villages in the Mekong and, yeah, some beautiful little towns. So we had an amazing time, which kind of was wiped out after having a stroke. So that all just slips away, and you forget about it's not two months later, you start to 'Oh yeah, we're in Vietnam.

Antonio Iannella 36:22

Remember that Bucha? Wow, that was amazing. So it was a bit like that, you know, but, yeah, so it was literally at the end of the trip, and there was no sign at all that I was, you know, not no headaches. Oh yeah, there was a headache. I wrote about that in the book a few days prior, I had this headache, or the day before the stroke, I had a headache, and I thought maybe that was it, but you know, as you learn AVMs, they don't leave much of a trail.

Bill Gasiamis 36:53

I had one massive headache about it was November 2010 it was about a week long, ridiculous headache, I went to hospital, they did a lumbar puncture, they checked everything, they were looking for a bleed in the brain, and they couldn't find it because they weren't expecting an AVM. They weren't looking for an AVM, and even when they scanned my head, they missed the AVM that was there and then.

Antonio Iannella 37:25

Hadn't bled it yet.

Returning to Australia and Continuing Recovery

Bill Gasiamis 37:28

I reckon it was just playing up and just causing a little bit of irritation to the neurons and to the brain around there, it was terrible headache. Anyway, I went and we went home after, like, being in hospital for a day or so, for a day, and they checked it out, and then I was out cold on the bed for and on the couch for the next three or four days, and then started to finally, kind of settle down, and it took about more than seven seven or eight days to settle down, and that was the first sign for me, I think.

Bill Gasiamis 38:04

That was November 2010 and then the bleed happened in February 2012 It was about 16 months later that it happened.

Antonio Iannella 38:19

Although it might, it may be impossible, but did they connected to that? Were they able to say that could have been or I just don't know, I asked and they didn't connect it. Yeah, that they can't, it's too hard to work these things out.

Bill Gasiamis 38:31

Yeah, which makes sense.

Antonio Iannella 38:36

Did they say the bleed happened at the time you went to hospital, like the day before, or did they say the bleed that's been there for, you know, like that little bleed has been there for a while.

Bill Gasiamis 38:46

When they found the bleed in Feb 2012 it was happening for seven days, because I didn't go to hospital for seven days, like I knew that it was, you know, the thing you mentioned, you felt weird somewhere. I was feeling weird in my my big left toe, okay, and that was it just my little toe, my big toe, and then it spread to the left the rest of my foot, and thenafter, seven days it had slowly spread all the way up to my entire left side.

Bill Gasiamis 39:19

But I knew it was when they said you've had a bleed. Well, then I realized it started seven days earlier, but that was the first sign for me, other than that massive headache, how did they resolve your bleed, your AVM? What did they do to rectify that?

Antonio Iannella 39:37

Nothing, it just healed on its own, I did. They did look into treatment, but they first, the first thing was they couldn't work out was an AVM for probably about a month because it was bleed, I had mine in my brain stem. Brain stems only about this wide, so and it wasn't a massive bleed, but because it was a the brainstem and cause a lot of damage, but they needed, basically, I had two, I think it was a third MRI.

Antonio Iannella 40:10

They still weren't able to work out why I had the hemorrhage the AVM. And it was an angiogram that was, they worked that out, but they basically said, because of the brain to them, I did go and see surgeons, they're on few to surgeons and had

some radiation treatment done, but it didn't go well. So it was just, he just healed itself and it's still there.

Bill Gasiamis 40:37

Okay, alright.

Antonio Iannella 40:38

And I remember we were talking about this, because you did end up having to treat yours.

Bill Gasiamis 40:43

Yeah, I had brain surgery. They took it out, and that's the reason I have deficits today, is because of the brain surgery. So that, up until I went into the brain surgery, I would have said that my deficits were all kind of superficial, because the blood was in there and it was messing things up, right? But as the blood started to subside and go away, between bullied two and bleed three, which were quite a long, a long way away from each other, the all my neurological deficits went away because the blood started to subside the third one.

Bill Gasiamis 41:21

The neurological deficits came back, and then the surgery, because the AVM was deep in my brain, kind of to the center near the cerebellum. The to get there, I imagine they're gonna move a lot of stuff around and touch stuff and whatever. So hard to imagine that, plus cutting, actually dissecting and removing the blood vessel, you know, there's no doubt that they're going to have to cause a little bit of damage somewhere.

Antonio Iannella 41:53

Because they said that, they said this may cause some damage.

Bill Gasiamis 41:58

They did say that, they also said the whole you might not wake up from this, and the whole lot, right? And then when I did, and then couldn't walk, and at all, my left side was completely gone, my arm and my leg and and all that, they were just matter of fact, I can't get him into rehab, that was it, that's what they said. So I did as much rehab as I needed to be able to get to the toilet independently, and maybe make a cup of tea and have breakfast, because my wife was at work and my boys were at school.

Bill Gasiamis 42:35

So the one I'm what they were keen on was when I was at home, that I was going to be able to get around the house without being a risk of falling. Which almost worked, I fell a few times, but most of the time get it okay, I was okay. So, they removed it, and they're the deficits I live with today, and it's on my left side, it's still numb. I can walk, and I can use my arm some.

Bill Gasiamis 43:03

Sometimes I get, like, spasticity in the muscles, you can't see it in my hand, I don't have like, visual signs of spasticity, but I have tone, like 'Okay, yeah, and it really hurts. And then sometimes that throws out the rest of my body, It's a big mess, you know, and then massages, and then there's a rehabilitation process to get me feeling well, not balanced, because I've never felt balanced since, but somewhere on the verge of it

Antonio Iannella 43:31

So close to it, yeah.

Finding Purpose and Joy in Life After Stroke



Bill Gasiamis 43:33

Yeah, and then, like, if I have bad days, then I sleep rough one night, then the next night, the next day, is a bit of a challenge, and it's definitely harder to get through, but these patterns I've recognized so like you, I know how to navigate them, and they impact me less, they make it, it's not as hard as it used to be.

Antonio Iannella 43:55

Yeah, that's what happens. It's kind of it's it's forever unfolding, I find as well, because I find it really difficult to separate fatigue, or am I just feeling tired because I didn't sleep well? Or is that the stroke? Is that headache related to this? Or is it now I just, I just ride all those feelings, and at the beginning I'd panic 'What was that? And, you know, there's, there were times I'd be rushed in the hospital, and it just turned out I was having a panic attack.

Antonio Iannella 44:27

And so as the years go on, you start to recognize and realize 'Okay, to that, and it's just that, it's probably this, so I'm okay, but just the other thing I was going to

say, you can't separate the mind and the body and the spirit, and it's like you didn't sleep well, and affects you, and you see your hand cramps up, and then it affects other parts of your body, that happens to me too, like, it's just whole experience.

Bill Gasiamis 44:54

It is the whole system. You were a musician too, right? And you still are, I know, but initially you've had the stroke, you've come back, there's time in rehabilitation. You come back to some kind of home life, and you're not able to participate the way that you did before, in your band and in music, and your identity is impacted massively. What's it? What was that like?

Antonio Iannella 45:24

It was heartbreaking at the beginning, really heartbreaking because I've been a guitar player for on time since I was a teenager, and that really hurt. It still does sometimes, but I managed to find ways to make music one handed on the piano, and it was really because I wanted to compose, and so I transferred what I knew about music onto the piano one handed, and was able to make music, and then once I discovered that process, it was just like someone opened the flood gates with ideas.

Antonio Iannella 45:59

Because it just really, just went, wham, I produced so much music that I never thought I'd be able to do that in, you know, in my late 30s. So, yeah, it was just matter of finding a new way, and that's just for me, it was that, but I think for most stroke survivors, it's just finding a new approach. We saw we first, one of the first things we spoke about was adjusting, a lot of the recovery is about adjusting, finding new ways, not necessarily getting back to how you did it before, but now going.

Antonio Iannella 46:35

Okay, I've got these skills, and I can, like for me, I can make music, and I've written lots of music and played in bands as a guitar player, and used to gig and do all that stuff. I can't do that anymore, bro, I could, I still know music, I can still hear music, I can still compose. So I just started turning all that into and finding new ways to sit at a piano and make up melodies, and then built a studio and got into music production. So, yeah, I just found a new way to make music, and now just keep doing it.

Bill Gasiamis 47:09

Yours are transferable, right?

Antonio Iannella 47:11

Exactly, yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 47:12

Properly transferable.

Antonio Iannella 47:13

Yeah, and that just music is just that example for me, but it could be something else for you. You know, maybe you love to knit, and all of a sudden you can't do anymore, but you could, somehow invent a system where you do it with one hand and, yeah, so it's really about thinking outside the box.

Advice for Other Stroke Survivors

Bill Gasiamis 47:31

Yeah, you know, in those really difficult times, what was it for you that helps you kind of keep pushing on and pushing through, I know there was those days where, you know it's like you wanted to give up. You mentioned it earlier, but you didn't what was behind not giving up, other than just clinging to life and wanting to be alive and all the usual stuff. Was there something more deeper that helped you kind of keep going?

Antonio Iannella 47:58

Yeah, I think it's part of my spirit to be a person who does that. Is just to keep trying and having resilience and discipline. It's part of who I am. But also, I've had young children and seeing them, having to go through that, having to see that, I would often think about, I remember in when I was in ICU, I would think about how they wouldn't be feeling, you know not only me, because they're just, I can remember them, just beside my bed, and their little heads would pop up.

Antonio Iannella 48:32

And their mother had to lift them over the rail to give me a little kiss ahead, or whatever. So those that was, just holding on to that, and I need to be there for him. So that was one of the keys, and another thing that really, I guess, kind of gave me, I guess, motivation and inspiration was people just the way that they showed how they cared and stepped up and did things for us. Little, little might

be little things.

Antonio Iannella 49:03

But one of the examples was the head doctor in ICU, his wife, French wife, took my daughters out with her for a day, and her own daughter just for a day out swimming. So just little things like that. And, you know, come as in ICU, and I'm being told this stuff, and I was, I could still remember feeling completely humbled by that. So those gesture, those kind of things kept me going.

Bill Gasiamis 49:33

Yeah, you if somebody met you today, they would definitely know that you've had some kind of an injury somewhere, right? But they wouldn't know that it's been a 15 year journey, and they might kind of gloss over, especially if they're not stroke survivors. They might gloss over some of the hard times, and in amongst there, there was small victories, right? Tell me about the the small victories. What were they for you? Which ones, the were, the ones that were significant? That were small, perhaps in in somebody else's mind, but were a big deal to you.

Antonio Iannella 50:09

One of the most, the high there was, there was a lot of little milestones, I speak about them in the book, and that I'd seen that big, but for me, though massive wear because I couldn't sit up. For example, if I was in I was at the beginning through my recovery, I didn't have much control over my body, and I didn't have enough core strength to help me to sit up, so my body would just crumble and roll to the side, and then once I was able to sit up, and I started getting a little bit of function, I got function back to my right hand, and they were like, once I did that.

Antonio Iannella 50:45

I kind of, it was like, it was such a revelation, because I'm like 'Oh, I can do this. They were the first tiny little glimpses of hope, because suddenly I went from only being able to lay flat in my bed to being able to sit in the arm chair by the window, and it's not a big deal, but to me, it was like 'Wow, look what I've done. I was so proud of myself. And then it was just, just continued on and went from that, and then I was able to get out of bed, from the bed to the wheelchair, and you have to be airlifted out of the bed anymore.

Antonio Iannella 51:24

So there was those things, but the one of the biggest things was the first time I

walked, and it's I write up quite a lot better in the book, because it was on my birthday. In fact, on my 39th birthday, and I was just in the ballet, in those gymnasium rails, and we'd been doing physio, and I don't know if my physio, she was marvelous. She was she was so great at her work, and she just gave me that opening to let go and walk, and I let go of the rail, and I walked for about 10 steps, and I did it.

Antonio Iannella 51:55

So it was one of those moments like I couldn't believe and I grabbed hold of rail, I turned around and she was smiling. So yeah, that those things like that, and that those two, but that's quite a big milestone, and when I tell others that story, it's quite anyone can connect today. Another one was getting back to driving, that was such a mission, and I was, and I was able to do within about 10 months, and it was just because I was just so determined, and I remember my physio like, I'd be like 'Alright, I want to drive. Like she's gone.

Antonio Iannella 52:30

'No, no, no, and you can't drive too early. Go, okay, no, I want to drive. Christmas isn't coming up. I want to drive. She's going, but maybe next year, you're not ready, like she got and plus, it takes about two months to get, there's a two month waiting list to go on the driving program, and I'm like 'Put my name down, put my name down, If I fail, then I know I'm not ready. And so she put my name down, and somehow I got to the top of the list.

Antonio Iannella 53:00

As they say, it's not what you know to, got to the top of the list, and I had to go my license, had a crack at it, had a couple lessons, failed, then went again, and I got it. Just like a week before Christmas, I got it. That was my dream, I wanted to get it for Christmas, and I saw 'Wow. And it was just such a, such a great moment, you know, especially when I just did the driving test and get back to the hospital, and I turned around and the driving instructor, and the person does, the examiner, just seated it back.

Antonio Iannella 53:30

She didn't say anything. I just turned around and, look, don't you just smile at night, and I just didn't have to say your past. I just knew, so such a great moment. I felt like I was, you know, when you get, remember, when you got your license for the first time? I felt like that, but I had my car already bought myself a little

car, so I didn't have a car at the time, and driving.

Bill Gasiamis 53:52

You've had that. Just got my license moment twice dinner.

Antonio Iannella 1 53:55

Yeah I had it because it's a rebirth, isn't it?

Back To Driving After A Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 54:00

Yeah. It's ridiculous. how important that is, and makes complete sense. Were you? Did you lose your license when you were examined in Melbourne and went through all the stuff? Did they take it from you? Or was it just that you can't drive?

Antonio Iannella 54:16

It was not suspended. But when you have a medical episode that's related to the brain, like a neurological disorder, you have to either be tested or you're suspended until Doctor report stuff like that, because there was quite a few hurdles. I had to get a doctor to report medical report, vision report, driving test. So it was quite, quite a process to go through.

Bill Gasiamis 54:39

I don't know what happened with me, but they missed all of that stuff with me, I didn't ever have mine suspended or lost or anything, and I remember not being being kind of under doctor's orders not to drive, but I drove anyway. It wasn't official, and I never got the 'You can now drive conversation. It was just like, I suppose I can drive now. Like, yeah, I don't know what the deal is. So I just did, and it was really hard, it was so fatiguing and it was so challenging. What was it like for you, even though you drove? What was it like neurologically?

Antonio Iannella 55:19

Yeah, everything you just said absolutely, because by it, what a lot of people don't understand about people with stroke who have had strokes, stroke survivors, is that the cognitive function to process information is just so exhausting. So when you're put in a position where you're driving a vehicle and you've got a lot to think about, it's not like you know the subconscious mind normally, when you drive, the sub subconscious mind takes over, you notice that, once upon a time,

used to drive somewhere and you don't remember getting there.

Antonio Iannella 55:49

You just all you remember is you've gotten there, you don't remember you went through anything. Did I go through those? You can't remember when I found for the first few years, the conscious mind was driving, I was thinking, always thinking about it, the conscious about the traffic, about and it's so exhausting. Because when, when that part of the brain is working over time, all the time, it's really draining. So yeah, I found it quite and now I still find it, you know, anything over a few hours is a bit difficult for me.

Antonio Iannella 56:22

My time driving, yeah, I struggle with, I try and avoid it, but it's, it's not too bad, mainly because I've got vision. My vision isn't the best due to my stroke. So that's having a lot of problems with this eye and the reflective light. So for about five years, I could do a medical and vision report every year after my license, and then five years later, I get a letter to say you don't, you need to do any more medical reports.

Bill Gasiamis 56:53

They're probably tracking the condition, whether it was stable or yes, changing something like that. You know, when you left Vietnam and came back, what was that trip like? Actually, were you with your family? Was that a medical evacuation? How did you get home?

Antonio Iannella 57:10

It was a rescue flight. It was a coordinated rescue flight that my daughter's mother arranged without my knowledge, with a service that provides those kind of things, she was able to source that information through the hospital, and then it was a massive fee to get us, to get us home, no insurance, COVID, and it was a first what happened was they appointed a doctor who for the few days leading up to the flight, or a week, and they just monitored me and check if I was healthy enough for the flight, and at that stage, I contracted pneumonia.

Antonio Iannella 57:49

So I was not only dealing with stroke, also had pneumonia, and they were just a bit nervous about the whole the pneumonia, and the thing I don't know why, but their process was, once the flight is booked and the service is scheduled, there's

no turning back. You can't you basically, if you cancel the the the arrangement you don't use your money.

Antonio Iannella 58:15

Get billed for it anyway. So we had to go, and so I was flown back with a doctor sitting beside me and a nurse, and the nurse, the doctor, literally slept through the whole flight, and the nurse just looked after me, he was a champion, he'd cool my body temperature when I was born, because my body temperature would escalate and then drop, and then I'd be freezing cold and again, you've got no complete control of it, and this person's is basically your life saver.

Antonio Iannella 58:45

It's like they're looking after you, make sure you don't die, that was his job. So, yeah, I don't know if I've told you this, they had to get me off the airplane, they had to wait for all the passengers to get off board, and then they the airport had, Melbourne Airport had to get a cherry picker, kind of like a cherry picker, to escalate me down from the from the airplane or to the tarmac, and then there was an ambulance there waiting for me and into the back of the ambulance and straight over to the hospital, big process.

Bill Gasiamis 59:19

They've got that system in place for all medical emergencies. I imagine when people pass away on an airplane as well.

Antonio Iannella 59:26

Yeah, yes. So that's what it was.

Bill Gasiamis 59:32

So the kids were on the flight, your wife was on the fly at the time, everybody was on the flight together.

Antonio Iannella 59:37

Yes, they were on the flight, but they were sitting at the back, I was in business class, and I see it up back, and they just, but they had like, they would come up and visit and drop, coming up and say hello, give me kiss and stuff, and then once we got to Melbourne Airport, they went through departure, returns and all that as per normal, and then I met them at the hospital.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:02

It's pretty shit way to get into business class.

Antonio Iannella 1:00:04

Yeah no, that was my first business class experience, and yeah, didn't get to sip champagne or anything like that, I was just clicking on to life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:19

So then from there, from the airport straight to hospital.

Antonio Iannella 1:00:22

Yep, by that stage, I was starting to like, my awareness was beginning to realign itself, I was beginning to understand things. my speech was slowly starting to come back, but I had no control of my body like I did have some function to my right hand, I hadn't tried to stand up or anything like that, but yeah, so I could, I've become aware of what was happening.

Antonio Iannella 1:00:48

So things become quite vivid by that stage where I knew, like, I can remember that, been in the ambulance, that the doctor talking to the paramedics. I can remember, being in the waiting room, or not in the waiting room, but in one of the rooms at the hospital, the first few doctors I saw. So I remember all those bits.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:09

My books about post traumatic growth, basically, right? That the topic, the the heading, doesn't suggest that specifically, but that's exactly what it's about post traumatic growth, which is the idea that we can find meaning and growth from trauma, right? I know the stroke changed you in many ways, right? Can you reflect a little bit on how it's changed you, emotionally and spiritually for the better?

Antonio Iannella 1:01:42

Yeah, spiritually, I feel like I'm a little bit more at peace with who I am, and I think that's come with having the break released in terms of trying to keep up with society stepping outside, and I use this reference where I was no longer on this speeding train, I'm on the platform and watching everyone just flash by. And at the beginning, that was horrifying, but then I began to appreciate it that I could I had time. Time so valuable, everyone's so busy and no one has time. Everyone says 'I'm sorry.

Antonio Iannella 1:02:22

I'm so busy I didn't have the time to do that, and I didn't have the time to do this, and next thing, you know, five years have passed and you've not done anything because you didn't have the time. So I began to see that as a bit of a reward. The analogy I use is it was like the golden ticket behind the adversity, the silver lining, and that's where it changed me spiritually. I began to enjoy that free space, that free, conscious space where I could just think and create and write and make music.

Antonio Iannella 1:03:03

Line the sun and spend, you know, two hours of my morning sitting on outside and the grass and just things like that. I began to see that so much value in that. So that's where that changed for me, that spiritual, emotional level, but I also found it as well. I've always been a quite emotional person, but I also have found that sometimes my emotions can get away from me, like I see things that are painful, especially when others are going through difficult times, and then I find that hard to process.

Antonio Iannella 1:03:37

Because, you know, I think it reflects on having been through that hardship that resonates so that empathy, empathy. I try these techniques on 'Okay, don't cry, don't cry, don't and I try and squeeze it up and suck it in and then, like I had this friend, and she's the sono. I told her about it, she'd say 'Just cry if you want to cry, don't why hold it back for and I guess you know society, many boys don't cry, and we have that. So yeah, that that's changed me a lot. Yeah, so the emotional stance and spiritual sense, and obviously, also the physical sense.

Life After Stroke And The Pseudobulbar Affect

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:23

You've earned, the ability to cry at a drop of a hat for no reason if you feel like it, I am, I do, and I get teased like my wife tears me, and it's all part of the whole thing, right? Oh, are you crying because your team won a game or lost a game, or what the hell like. You know, she's like and and it's what it is, I think for me, a lot of the time, it's like joy expressed outwardly in every way, right? It's like, it's not sadness. When I cry, everyone asks me. Presenting my book in the book launch, I wasn't crying. I was trying to present it to 40 people, right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:09

I was trying to have this 20 minute speech and talk about my book and all that kind of stuff. I wasn't crying out of any anything other than like, pure, unadulterated joy.

Antonio Iannella 1:05:18

Yeah, elated.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:20

Yeah, and there was so much of it that I cried four times during the during the presentation in 20 minutes, that's like 'Oh my god. It gets in the way, it's getting in the way, but it's also part of it. Like, you can't, I can't. I couldn't have done that without the crying experience, it's just gonna have to what do you do?

Antonio Iannella 1:05:43

I bet you is self critical more than anyone else judged you by that everyone else.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:49

Correct, and I've stopped being anyhow, right, like I'm no longer self critical about it, but I am still all right, you get over it now, because you got to finish your presentation like it's business. You know, move on. So there's a bit of that, it sounds like you'll had a completely new perspective on life, right? Things are you see things totally different from Antonio at 38.

Antonio Iannella 1:06:15

Yeah, I do. What I have really enjoyed is the pre-Antonio, the person, not so much the years leading up to the stroke, but maybe when I was in my 20s, and I was working in as a musician, and living that, having that perspective of, you know, just everything was about creativity and and and just in the moment of enjoying the craft. And it's a kind of a form of yoga, it's kind of like meditation, because you It's what it's those moments where you just completely filled in the moment.

Antonio Iannella 1:06:51

And it's like when sportsmen, you know, you some of the great sportsmen, you watch them play in the you know, they're just in the moment, they're not thinking about something else, and that's sometimes when they get into that flow state, that's when they can play that their greatest and that's the same with music. It's just all creativity and having gone through a stroke and enabling me to get back to that, that's been a massive growth period for me.

Antonio Iannella 1:07:18

So I feel like I'm back on track to who I was, for a little while, I went off track, and now I'm back, and that's why they're still saying that full circle, that's what I mean by that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:30

In the previous interview that we did, I never used to ask these questions, but now I ask probably, in the last six months or so, I've started asking these three questions from everybody who I interview, who's a stroke survivor. So I'd love to know what was the hardest thing about stroke for you.

Antonio Iannella 1:07:50

There were a few episodes. I think one of the most scariest was the radiation treatment. The whole process of having my brain fried by radiation was quite frightening, that it made me feel quite alone. Because you're going through this experience, or while I was going through it on my own, and you rely on doctors and to advise you, and they don't, do you know? And there was always that cloud of we don't know, they couldn't just give you a straight answer.

Antonio Iannella 1:08:21

This is what's going to happen. To say you're going to say you're going to feel so there was that that was quite scary moments, difficult moments, if you asked there was that. There was the that time in ICU, not knowing whether I was going to survive, and then learn, as you go through those early stages, and learning about stroke, and you're hearing, you're reading some stuff about statistics and how many people survive and how many don't, and that's frightening.

Antonio Iannella 1:08:47

And then there's and then, yeah, those few episodes are having an angiogram. Have you had an angiogram? That was really horrible.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:59

That came out really emotional out of my one, really emotional.

Antonio Iannella 1:09:05

I ended up having three, and I really didn't enjoy them. But sometimes you know what you're in for, like, you know, especially after my first one, and then I had a second, a third, I knew what I was in for, but I kind of went in with that mindset of for it, right? Just bite down and just get through it.

Antonio Iannella 1:09:25

You'll get out the other side, and you just go in there, like, holding on for dear life, and all right 'This hurts like hell, and, oh yeah, I'm gonna vomit. And then you're okay, and now later you're okay, you're coming too. So that's kind of how I dealt with those experiences.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:42

Now I remember the angiogram going and getting prepared for it. So they were preparing me for an angiogram for about five days. So what would happen is morning of day one, no eating, etc, from the night before you're going in for an angiogram. Okay, cool. So I'm waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. So one emergency after the other, after the other meant that I get kept putting, kept getting pushed back, and I didn't have the angiogram. So I'd go from the night before dinner, the night before to any time that the next day, you know, almost 24 hours with no food.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:22

And I'd be starving and thirsty, and I'd be losing my mind, and they'd be going to me now, you'll be going in soon, you'll be going in soon, and then I'd be going what we missed the window. You're not going in today, go and get something. And then I'd be gorging, and then the next day, and then the next day, they did it for about three days or four days in a row, and then eventually I had the angiogram, and they come in, they tell you, it's going to go in through one of your main veins.

Antonio Iannella 1:10:51

Aorta, goes in through your aorta from your groin, through the main the aorta is the main vein that feeds blood to your heart and your brain.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:03

And then it's like 'Okay. And then they squeeze the dye, or whatever it's called, the contrast.

Antonio Iannella 1:11:13

Oh my God, that's horrible, did you feel dizzy?

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:15

Yeah I felt dizzy. I saw actually, like, sparkles, like, fireworks going off in my head, like it was intense.

Antonio Iannella 1:11:24

Yeah I remember that feeling.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:25

I could actually see it in my eyes, I could see it in my eyes that fireworks were in my eyes. In the room while my eyes were open, there was just my whole vision field got overtaken by sparkles or fireworks.

Antonio Iannella 1:11:39

You just, it's like you just lose complete sense of self. I remember that just feeling like you're in this dark hole and you don't know what's going on, and you spit in, yes, really quite a horrible feeling.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:52

And then the nurse later in recovery, holding your artery for what felt like an eternity, because they once they take it out, they gotta hold it and close it up, make sure that it seals, right? Yeah, so that you don't bleed out. Because they tell you 'Sorry, we've gotta do this now for the next x time. I don't, I can't remember what it was like a long time, and the story going, if we don't do it, you could bleed out and die. And I'm like 'Okay, I didn't say, don't do it, go for it, you guys do whatever you have to do.

Antonio Iannella 1:12:32

Well, that's a quite a big build up three days to the mine was only one night, only one day, 90 for a day and then, that's quite 12 hours or something I had to fast for.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:45

So they got me, I'm all wound up over it every day. But anyhow, what's something that stroke has taught you?

Antonio Iannella 1:12:56

I think I'm still learning, and that is to kill the effing out, because, like, they were talking about this briefly, about publishing a book, the amount of work involved, and all the boxes you got to tick and make sure you got this right. And they got so stressful, and I've got it, it's done now, and it's published and I kind of woke up today, and I was talking to a friend who lives overseas, and she's going through some hard times, and I just went that stress was just, why do why do I do that for? Why do I stress myself like that for.

Antonio Iannella 1:13:34

Because, you know, you're going to get to the other side. So I think I'm still learning that, but that's a massive learning curve in in generally, in life, is just the children chill out and, you know, try not to let those things that you know, because I think it's been a psychologist have said something like 92% of our fears and thoughts and worries don't even come true surface. So, you know, that's what I found.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:03

I've been learning, that's a good one. What do you want to tell other people who are listening all stroke survivors listen to this podcast, like, what do you want to tell them about your journey, about your experience, about anything that you just feel is going to be valuable.

Antonio Iannella 1:14:24

I think what I would say is, you know, through my own experience, and everything I talk about is through my own experience, and for everyone, it's different, but through my own experience, what has helped immensely is finding some kind of purpose, and another thing that helped was because all the recoveries built up around trying to get back to who you were trying to recover, recover, recover. And I really think that I until I let go, that I really. Start living so that's really but I'm not saying that you should not try and get back to who you were in terms of with your recovery.

Antonio Iannella 1:15:09

Statistically, something 88% of people who have strokes lived with lifelong disabilities. So there's that 12% whoever, whatever happens to them that I don't know, but the 88% we are solely focusing on trying to get them back to who they were. So that's an awful amount of people who are not achieving that. So I think maybe just trying to find something for yourself that brings you joy and wakes you up in the morning, and it enables you to not feel like you're a victim.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:43

Yeah, that's cool. And purpose is not head-based, right? It's not, you're not going to work out what your purpose is in your head. It's something that you gotta do. It's about what you love to do, or what connects you to other people, etc. For you, your purpose, what is it?

Antonio Iannella 1:15:58

It was really just creativity, spreading, spreading joy. I think, through my own story and my own creative advantage, because a lot of the things I create, music, writing, it's all related to, I guess, making people feel like I've been able to do it, and I have a disability and I have limitations, but I'm have still been able to do it. So the general message, that's takeaway from that is, there are you can still do things. It's just a hard stock to try and work out what that is and how to do it, but it's possible.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:37

And then purpose kind of gives you meaning, right? Meaning in life.

Antonio Iannella 1:16:40

Yeah, and it doesn't have to be like, all of a sudden you're going to go on Mount Everest. It could be such the smallest little thing you might like scrapbooking, or you might like, you may have been a complete football nut, and now you can collect statistics and create some kind of information. I know you just, you need to really just find something to do, and because, you know, everyone needs purpose, it's the thing that drives us as humans and beings.

Antonio Iannella 1:17:08

Why do we go to work? Because ultimately, we have a purpose, and that is to bring money home and able to maintain lifestyle and pay our bills and raise our family. But that's the purpose, if you remove the purpose problem done, we would go to work. What would be the purpose? So we need to remove that, I feel, remove that, and just do it solely because it's something that brings you pleasure, joy.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:34

Yeah, beautiful. Show me the book again, and while you're doing that, where can people get a copy.

Antonio Iannella 1:17:42

This is the book. It's the easiest way to find it is on Amazon. If you go straight to Amazon and just typed in Saigon Siren, it would just bring the book straight up. That's the easiest way to find it, but yeah, there I have also built a website, so that's another way you get and through the website, you'll be able to listen to music and see some photographs and video of the trip in Vietnam and some of the

journey, the writing and stuff like that.

Antonio Iannella 1:18:15

There's a couple of sample chapters on my website, so if you know, want to sort of get a feel about what the book is, how it's written, the voice, the tone, you'll get that through those chapters. They're the best ways to connect with it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:30

Awesome and what is the website?

Antonio Iannella 1:18:35

It's just my name, so it's antonioiannella.com.au, yeah, like said, If you Google just recently, the website's only gone up about a month ago, and I've been learning about SEOs and all that, and I discovered if you type in Saigon siren in Google, it'll bring up my website in that search, it's like in the listing. So therefore you'll be able to and I spent a lot of time with a good mate of mine building a website.

Antonio Iannella 1:19:06

It's very immersive, there's a lot of pages, you'll see my recording studio, lots of the music that I've created over the years past, pre stroke, post stroke, been quite a few projects. Some of the the writing and it's been a lot of fun putting it all together, a lot of stress, a lot of hard work, and my me and my best mate, Rick, we're going to kill each other on one point, but we got through that. Let's come together.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:31

That's awesome, man. The links will be in the show notes anyway, for people who can't remember that or have access to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes, that's where you'll find Antonio's episode, and then from there, they can reach out to you directly, and they can have a conversation if they need to mate. It is my absolute pleasure to have you back on the podcast to be helping you launch the board is something that is a great honor for me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:03

I am so excited that you've got there, and I witnessed the majority of your recovery from a distance, but you know, through regular updates and conversations and that. So I really want to just say congratulations on well done. It has been a massive undertaking to get to release date, because I know what came before the book. So thank you. It's an absolutely amazing thing, and it's the

whole purpose this podcast exists because what I want to show other stroke survivors is the fact that the journey might be long, but things can get better.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:43

Things can improve, great things can come of it. You can overcome so much more than you think that you can overcome. You're a perfect example of that, you're leading by example, you're such a great example of that. Thank you, and just congratulations.

Antonio Iannella 1:21:01

Thanks, man. I'd also like to say, you, people like yourself that are doing what you do and making us strokes have always feel connected and introducing us to a world of we know such a such a minefield when you have your stroke. And I remember my early days and and how difficult it was, and now with some of the stroke community groups that I'm involved with and some of the posts that I read about people who are just entering into stroke.

Antonio Iannella 1:21:30

And I just I read them with such a heartache, you know? And so I know what that's like, but people like you bring all of that together and just make you know that accessibility for all of us to just connect and go 'Hey, you know there's, there's a way, there's a way that we can make it work. So good on to you. Good to you, mate, good for you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:21:49

That brings us to the end of another episode, and Antonio's journey of resilience, recovery and self discovery in life after stroke is a powerful reminder that even in the toughest times, there is hope and the way forward. His courage in adapting to life after stroke and his insights into emotional growth are truly inspiring. If you've found this episode valuable, or if the podcast has been a source of support in your own recovery journey, please consider supporting us on Patreon, at patreon.com/recoveryafterstroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:27

Your support enables us to keep bringing stories like Antonios to stroke survivors and caregivers around the world. Every contribution makes a difference, and I'm deeply grateful for each one a special thank you once again to our newest supporters. JK, Jolene Oh and Cecilia, your support truly helps make this podcast

possible. Thank you to everyone who has left a review on iTunes or Spotify Your feedback helps others find the show and creates a community of encouragement and resilience.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:00

If you haven't yet, please consider leaving a five-star rating or sharing your thoughts, it means so much. Thank you for joining me today, and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

Intro 1:23:13

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Intro 1:23:43

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Intro 1:24:07

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Intro 1:24:34

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