

101. Beyond Trauma - Deborah Stathis

Deborah is the author of the book Beyond Trauma and although she is not a stroke survivor she knows a thing or two about recovering from a brain injury. Her message is definitely going to resonate with stroke survivors.

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Transcription:

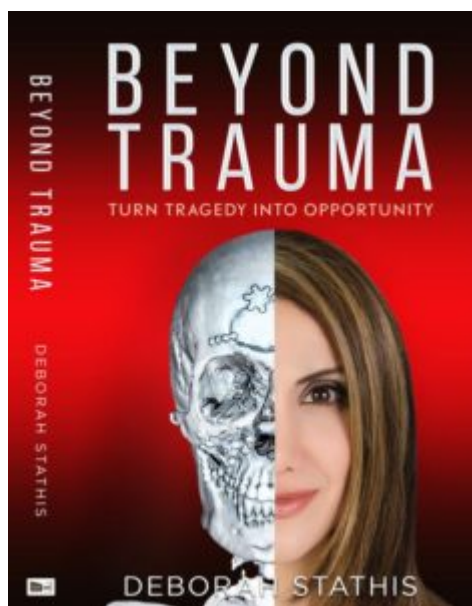
Deborah 0:00

Something that you were saying before, I think it's actually really important here, which is that always been about facing the painful, ugly truth is somewhat cliché saying, but the only way out is through, you know. So that is, feel the pain. Go through it. That's how you're going to learn. That's how it's not going to hurt anymore. The only way to not experience the trauma is to experience the trauma so to speak, get through it. Otherwise, it's still there.

Intro 0:32

This is recovery after stroke with Bill Gasiamis. Helping you go from where you are to where you'd rather be.

Introduction



Bill 0:40

Bill from recoveryafterstroke.com. This is Episode 101 and my guest today is Deborah Stathis. Although Deborah is not a stroke survivor, she knows a thing or two about brain injuries after recovering from a motor vehicle collision when she was just 19 years old.

Bill 0:57

Amongst other great milestones and achievements. Deborah has written a book called *Beyond Trauma: Turn Tragedy Into Opportunity*. And that is why she's a guest on the show today. Now with this episode, you might notice some static or noises that interfere with the interview. But I've done my best to remove this interference as much as possible.

Bill 1:18

Unfortunately, the stability of the internet varies in every location. And sometimes it's better to persevere with the interview, because the message my guest has is far more important, and therefore rescheduling does not become a consideration. Because of these issues from time to time, I have arranged it so you can now download every episode of this podcast as a PDF.

Bill 1:43

It's perfect if you are like me and like to take notes or highlight parts of the interview for future reference. Or if you prefer to read rather than listen. Just go to recoveryafterstroke.com click the image of the episode you just listened to,

scroll down until you see the orange download transcript button.

Bill 2:03

Click the button and follow the prompts and the download will begin. You should also know that recently I put everything that I learned about what is important in stroke recovery into a course called 10 steps to brain health for stroke survivors, and module one is now available at recoveryafterstroke.com.

Bill 2:24

This is a course that is included as part of my recovery after stroke coaching program that will help you overcome fatigue, reduce anxiety and support your memory amongst other things. This 10 step program has been created to complement any medical interventions and works in conjunction with any other physical therapies that you are undergoing.

Bill 2:47

So if you're a stroke survivor that wants to know how to heal your brain, overcome fatigue and reduce anxiety. This course is for you. If you feel like there is not enough support after you leave the hospital and you're afraid for your recovery we'll go backward, then this is where I can help.

Bill 3:04

While you are participating in the course, I'll coach you and help you gain clarity on where you currently are in your recovery journey. I'll help you create a picture of where you would like to be in your recovery 12 months from now, and I will coach you to overcome what's stopping you from getting to your goal. Right now for everyone that is interested in learning what recovery after stroke coaching is all about, you will get a seven-day free trial to decide if it's the right fit for you.

Bill 3:32

So take advantage of the seven-day free trial now by clicking the link below if you're watching on YouTube, or by going to recoveryafterstroke.com/coaching. If you are listening online, and now it's on with the show. Deborah Stathis. Welcome to the podcast.

Deborah 3:49

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Bill 3:52

I've been kind of following your work for a little while and every time I saw one of your posts on social media, I thought wow this, I'll be honest, I thought this chick has a similar point of view to me has a similar kind of idea.

Bill 4:09

And I don't think you're a stroke survivor, but I was really intrigued by the stuff that you do. And then, at one point, I saw you post your book and talk about this concept of yours beyond trauma. And it really started to resonate with me because I always talk about stroke, for me as being one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Bill 4:32

And I talked about post-traumatic growth as a concept and in the context of growth and learning I've never done so much growth and learning in my life until after my 37th birthday, you're going to want to experience the first of three brain bleeds and then brain surgery. So can I take you back on the journey that got you to writing the book what happened to you that created the beyond trauma process that you went through that allowed you to get to that point to write the book?

The highway incident

Deborah 5:12

Well, I was involved in a severe car accident. The short version of the actual accident itself is that I was driving home from work a week to the day after my 19th birthday, so I was quite young. And the short sort of version is that it hadn't rained my birthday day was in January. It hadn't rained for a long time it was hot in Melbourne and it started raining so it was pretty oily all part of the road up and highway.

Deborah 5:49

And I went around a bit of a bend on old part of the road and I hit an oil slick my old car, my first car and I probably I don't remember anything of that really. I took a long time to even remember that day. However, following the police report and the witness accounts, It seems that when I hit the oil slick, I lost control.

Deborah 6:17

I hit the gravel on the side of the road and did a 180 and I've been on and around. Hit the driver's side in a 1985 Toyota Corolla, which had no airbags. So of course,

the steering wheel was in the middle of the car with me trapped there, no airbags so ouch. So I sustained what was a severe head injury. So that was multiple facial fractures breaks.

Deborah 6:50

Basically the skull base, you know, skull base, had multiple breaks within it and through the sinuses. CSF leak so a brain leak basically brain fluid leak, spinal brain fluid leak as well. So acquired brain injury as part of that. Yeah, so that's the shorter, short version of it. So straight airlifted into the off road and multiple surgeries, facial reconstruction, brain surgery to prevent bacterial meningitis and patch up the puncture, basically. So the break throughout the skull base in my forehead, basically punctured the first layer of membrane around the brain on times and, that required patching up to prevent secondary infection. So having bacterial meningitis which ofcourse if it got that in the brain, well, see you later.

Deborah 7:59

Yeah, so I've had my face reconstructed, I've had multiple surgeries and implants and all sorts of things they put in my face, metal, there's pins there's all sorts of things in my face, and lots of surgeries to help assist with the movement of my eye. And of course the brain surgery to ensure that I don't get back to a meningitis, which are the time frames passed now, so I won't get that.

Deborah 8:27

And yeah, so that's that's the short version of the of what happened to me. The part we're focusing in on what we said, the journey to be on trauma started straightaway. And when I came to enough, I tried to escape the hospital. See my hands and my butt hanging out with my gown too Deborah where are you going?

Deborah 8:58

Where am I going? I'm going home. Now, of course, I was out of it, head injury medicine having brain injury, you name it right and face is out here, bruises, you name it. However, in my mind, maybe it's a core instinct of mine or something that I was not going to be a victim. That's not me. So that all the talk around me that I could hear around she'll never be able to do this never be able to do that.

Deborah 9:26

Doctors coming in and asking me what my name is, who is the person next to me was, of course, my mother what time is it what, who am I? You know, that was I

had enough recognition to understand that these people around me didn't think I knew what was going on. And I suppose part of me didn't because I was drugged off my face, and of course, a head injury. That said though, straightaway, I was like, no, this isn't me. I'm not going to be this person. I'm not going to be this person here that gets poked and prodded at and whos gonna live like this not happening.

Bill 10:03

Very cool. I like that defiant, 19-year-old, you know, think they know everything about the planet and the world and all that kind of stuff and I like that. I like that because that's what's really good about being a teenager, you think that even though you're half your heads missing, you're still bulletproof, and you're going to continue this fight and you're going to go down this path.

Bill 10:25

So when you woke up from surgery, what was it that you couldn't do?

Intro 10:30

If you've had a stroke, and you're recovery, you'll know what is the scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. Like, how long will it take to recover? Will I actually recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things, but obviously because you've never had a stroke before.

Intro 10:52

You probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you. It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 11:14

These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke. They'll not only help you better understand your condition, they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. head to the website now, recoveryafterstroke.com, and download the guide. It's free.

Deborah 11:43

Okay, so initially, my first waking moment was my first clear moment. Clearish

moment was sort of looking around and thinking where on earth am I and I saw these brown curtain things and I was thinking wow, I mean hospital. I know that sinking feeling now could move everything. Thankfully, I remember thinking I can move that's good. And then I think it was my mom that somebody asked me, you know, Deb do you know where you are?

Deborah 12:17

And I said, I think I'm in a hospital she said yeah, you know what happened? I get hurt I knew I was hurt because ow and I was told you know you had a really bad car accident and my first the first thing I said was, did I hurt anyone? Thankfully, I didn't but you're really hurt kind of figured that.

Deborah 12:42

I kind of figured that. I was very forgetful initially. So most of my injuries was my head. So most of the injuries in my head so I broke to be blunt I smashed in my face and punched in the first layer of membrane around my brain and had got an acquired brain injury. That was the impact was like mostly on this side impact there so I've got metal pins and plates throughout my face.

Deborah 13:14

So initially this eye was closed, fixed and dilated so I couldn't move it and I couldn't control my eyelid and my jaw was broken so we had minimize movement speaking, and I was quite confused. I was very drugged and I had a brain injury and swelling in the brain so of course, I was a little bit delirious, I hallucinate a little bit as well I was seeing war scenes and all sorts of things.

Deborah 13:42

I remember some of it was quite bizarre physical movement, though I couldn't move. I had panic, kind of like panic attacks where I was. I thought I was still trapped in the car. So I would thrash about they ended up having to put me on the floor because I was a danger to myself. So yeah, so physically wise initially I was, it was more cognitive than anything else. So I was, you know, a bit confused, very, very tired and not being able to speak as clearly because my jaw was broken and my eye so initially they thought I couldn't see at all.

Bill 14:22

How long were you in the hospital?

Deborah 14:24

I was in hospital for about five weeks. And then I went to rehabilitation center

Bill 14:30

And at rehab. What did you do what were the things they were trying to get you back on track with?

Deborah 14:36

Well, initially I was really, really skinny because I basically ate liquid and you know, purified mashed food because of my jaw because it was sort of wired to like it was screws in my jaw. I think it's right now. Sorry so yeah, I was very thin post-operative, anemic as well. So skinny, tired, very, very low energy, very dizzy as well.

Deborah 15:09

So it's about getting my physical strength back, and also concentration. So working with my memory. So initially there was a bit of post-traumatic amnesia, especially around that time of the accident. So I couldn't initially remember the first couple of weeks I didn't remember my birthday, which was just, you know, a week prior. It was blank. There's nothing there. But over time, it came back. So there was a bit of physical movement there was, I suppose at the OT side of things. So a number of things like juggling commitment, the sorts of exercises to help the brain start to work again.

Bill 15:52

Wow, were you just out of school and near uni or going to uni or any of that stuff?

Deborah 15:58

Yeah, yeah. I was working in real estate, and I was studying fashion.

Bill 16:05

So no more back to school for you for a little while.

Outsourcing rehabilitation



Deborah 16:09

Ah, not for a little while. I'm very proud to say that I pursued rehabilitation outside of the rehab center. So whilst I got the peaks you know from a number of the experts, that stuff and that wasn't enough for me. So I pursued external advice and support and I researched to the end of the earth to find different ways to help my brain work better.

Deborah 16:45

I realized that things were different my brain work differently, which it does at that young age, it rewired itself which is very good. However, it does (inaudible) and going above and beyond. Find those strategies to and create them in a lot of instances as well, to recreate my life and build a future beyond trauma, as I put it, because I didn't want to be categorized as a victim, and forever living in that bubble of victim. So now you're limited because you had a brain injury. So it's like, Well, okay, hang on, what can I do now? What have I learned? How can I be better? What more can I do?

Bill 17:31

Was there any underlying fears, though, that interfered with that process of recovery? So imagine at 19 and then at 28, and at 21. At the moment, you know, for a little while your life was on hold. And you started to get back into life was it kind of this was there any underlying concerns about getting back into life before you started to really feel like you're really back into it?

Deborah 18:00

Absolutely, there was a I remember the confidence issues. Can I do this? And I

challenged it. Alright, let's see if I can do it nothing to lose better than sitting here thinking I can't not doing anything about it. So I'm very proud to say that I actually went back to work at the end of that same year. So, and I started, I went back to study a little bit early the following year now I completely remember decided that wasn't for me in the end both industries decided it wasn't for me.

Deborah 18:36

However, it was a goal. I set myself a goal because I'm thinking, well, best place to start is to see whether the life I had suits me now. made a few changes. I mean, I was 19. And he was pretty young. So however, it was, for me it was about challenging the limitations, making the decision to challenge limitations and see what I could do and what I was happy with. Confidence was definitely something that was a challenge.

Deborah 19:05

Because a lot of the focus in rehabilitation is what you can't do and then trying to improve on that. Whereas I needed to shift my focus on to Well, what can I do? What do I want to do? And how can I as opposed to I used to do this like this, but maybe I can do it a different way now. So, really looking at changing that and competence. I will be honest physically, too. I mean, you're talking about a 19 year old girl who smashed her face in.

Deborah 19:38

I had quite a bit of surgeries since then too.

Bill 19:43

So was there a little bit of scarring and bruising and swelling and all that kind of thing that you had to sort of give time to settle down?

Deborah 19:50

Yeah, well, initially, even when I left rehabilitation, my right eye was closed so I lost the nerve movement to control it. Opening and my eye is dilated so it didn't move that partial third nerve palsy and paralysis and over time it started to open. See there's some vision doesn't completely move or go all the way up so I have partial paralysis however it opened and again pushing the limits as I do I remember you know going out with my friends.

Deborah 20:36

I had half shaved head put a hat on put a bit of makeup on my one eye at the time

and I went out because I didn't want to be sad. I didn't want to be sit there feeling sorry for myself. I can't do this because I've got one eye close and I don't look like I used to Okay, well that's just gonna make it even worse. So I got stared at a little bit but that's okay. But I grew from that. I grew from that. It, I challenged the lack of confidence. Because I'm more than that.

Bill 21:14

Did you grow up quicker than you may have at the age of 19, then, you know, life kind of tends to get in the way sometimes of us being adolescent for as long as we can, and being teenagers as long as we can, and being all these things as long as we can. So I know that for me becoming a dad at 22 bloody made me grow up quick.

Growing up too soon after the trauma



Bill 21:40

You know? I reflect back on what that would have been like, what I would have been like if I hadn't had kids and my son who's 23 now, but I look at him and I go, that's the same kind of idiot that I would have been, you know, which is perfectly fine he's a good kid. But just doesn't need to have any more responsibility because he's 23. And he's, and he's smart. He's not a dad at 23. So how did it make you grow up quicker? Like, what happened in the way that you approached just life generally after the accident?

Deborah 22:21

That's it. That's a huge question and a really important one, I think, too. And one

of the main things was that mortality lesson we gain as we get older.

Bill 22:31

Wow, yeah.

Deborah 22:33

I got hit with that. Like poof, oh my god, I'm not invincible, you know, that reality of life and death. I as we get older, we gain that kind of acceptance around that, I suppose. At 19. I don't know that many of us are ready for that, especially when it hit me that so quickly and the fragility of life so, I found what was important to me changed very quickly.

Deborah 23:09

So, listening, for example, some of my peers complain about 19 year old 20 year old things, which is relevant at the time seemed like kind of, you know, not important to me because like oh yeah, you worrying about what so and so said, my brain fluid came out my nose. Really? Yeah, you're worried about having the lightest, whatever jacket or whatever.

Deborah 23:38

Like, I'm glad my face is still on my head. Yeah. So to bring into context, so that was a massive lesson to realize that not everybody had that insight and to be able to say, Okay, that's still important it's just important in a different way and for me to understand that, you know, not everybody's gonna have that same perception as I have. I was different you know, my my behavior was different some medical reasons as well for a while, but also because of my perspective changed my interest in things changed.

Deborah 24:27

And I had to adjust to that. So that was that was a yeah, definitely a challenge. However, my increased empathy helped to balance that because I hadn't increased empathy. (inaudible) trauma. So that allowed me to go okay, well, that's important to you. So alright. But relating that was that could be quite difficult.

Bill 24:57

Yeah, that could be at night. You mean because it wasn't traumatic for me to become a dad at 22, it just became really a lot of responsibility. And then relating to how the kids at 23 at 22. And all those ages is like, shit, man, like you guys have got a completely different view of the world. And I appreciate and

understand it because I was there not that long ago, but I can't be like that anymore.

Bill 25:23

I've got to be different because I have a different thing that's going on in my life. Is this bundle of joy that came into my life that is going to become not joyous very quickly if I remain. The 21 year old version of myself with a child won't work. So I know what you mean about not being able to relate to people and they couldn't relate to me. So what that meant was that I lost a lot of those people, they kind of fizzled away and moved into different directions and I totally get it.

Bill 25:55

Maybe I was the one that moved into the direction that was different than they kind of stayed their trajectory, their path to whatever the changes were that they were going to experience in their life later on, you know, marriage or responsibility and all that kind of stuff. Were you traumatized? So we're going to eventually get to the book but It sounds like from the story that you've written. And I imagine reflecting back that there was underlying trauma, both physical and then I imagine emotional and the rest of it.

Deborah 26:34

Absolutely there's a lot of trauma. My choice to focus on beyond trauma and focus on moving forward was because of that trauma and that pain. So, if I talk about if I reflect back on the physical trauma. So both the absolute physical agony of having my face smashed in and the worst part of the break things skull based I mentioned skull base, multiple fractures and break through there through the sinuses and my face, like lower jaw, upper jaw cheekbone, around the eye or my cheek bone, upper jaw and my nose, you know, all being smashed in basically.

Deborah 27:33

And the surgeries after that, he said that his incredible amount of pain and that's difficult. The, from my perspective, you know, I've had my face cut open from the inside to reconstruct my face. My face cut off in my head kind of cut open for brain surgery. I've had tubes put into my brain I input into my through my skull, I've had tubes down my throat, I've had thousands of scans and whatever done these things are frightening because you don't know what the answer is going to be the environment itself is frightening.

Deborah 28:12

Am I going to be alright? Can I know what's going to happen? Am I going to get sick? Get meningitis in the brain and Die 10 years later. And then my life will be the same, you know, 19 I'm never gonna look normal. No, I'm first time and I put this in my book as well and written about this before, you know, in other instances where real pivotal moment for me was in the rehab center, and there's a foggy a clear from all the drugs and I went up to the mirror for the first time because they cover the mirrors in the hospital.

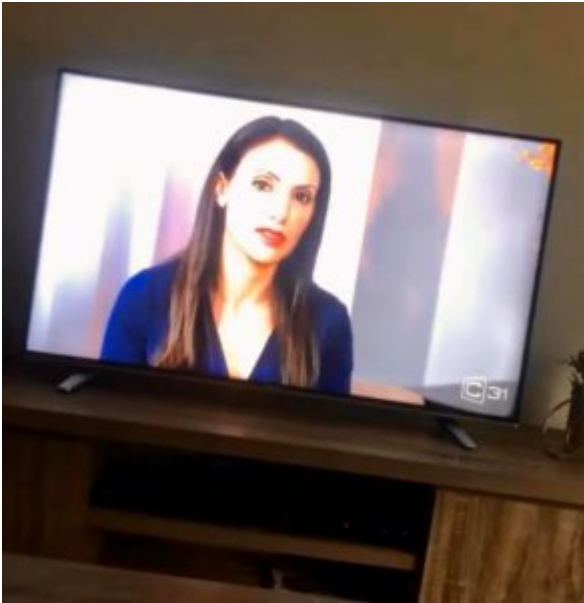
Deborah 28:50

Yeah, because I had, I have a dreamlike memory of it because I was out of it. swelling and stuff in the brain and all the medicine I apparently I have a dreamlike memory of it I did see my reflection and that was when, you know, I freaked out understandably so doctors and nurses cover all the mirrors in hospital. So one of the first time I looked at my reflection was in the rehab Central's on my own for the first time. There was a little basin in my room and I looked in a mirror. And I went up and and I looked and really looked.

Deborah 29:38

I cried. You know, my half my head was shaved and I had long hair like I do now. My head was shaved. And this side of my face was sunken, lower, my eyes was closed. Just embarrassing things. And I thought, whoa, okay. What are you gonna do now? This isn't you what are you going to do now? And that was pivotal because I made that decision and now I'm not giving up on things, either. My instinct was never to give up on my life that was instinctual. That was like I'm gonna fight. That was a dream. I'm escaping. I'm not a victim. That part though that Oh, god, my Yeah, I'm not giving up on that either. That's not what I look like. And well, that's not what I look like now either.

Managing Post-traumatic stress disorder



Bill 30:36

Trauma would have been from the accident and then it would have been reflecting from the accident and then it would have been as a result of multiple surgeries and looking at yourself for the first time and coming to terms with all the differences and what you're noticing it would have been because of the way that other people saw you reacted to you. Spoke to you treated you.

Bill 31:03

Some of these traumas may have been building one on top of the other on the onto the other way you seeking psychological counseling or some other kind of support in those early days to help you through, or did you miss out on that stuff?

Deborah 31:17

That's a good question. And I found that there's a lot of was a lot of initial sort of support and then you sort of go off to your own like she's right now tick, you know, and, and again, because I'm very focused, it was very, you know, getting all the things.

Deborah 31:38

Things raise their ugly head, so to speak. A little later. So, so busy trying to steam train, getting my life back again, you know, reviewing this and reviewing that and what working in surgeries and all sorts of things and then it's sort of so I started to realize changes in my behavior, panic attacks, flashback type things post traumatic stress disorder symptoms so to speak.

Deborah 32:15

So which, you know, It definitely started to, to interfere with my life so I sought some professional help. Absolutely. And I had a in different times, done lots of research. I've sought some more conventional and unconventional methods as well. So things like an etiology, acupuncture, meditation, exercise these sorts of things as well.

Deborah 32:44

For me, a big part of it was getting my own research into how the brain works and how human behavior and how that works and consequently led to further study and now my professional career as well. However, that was something that It was important to me to understand it understand the trauma, I had an awareness that I was different This was affecting my life. So I sought out ways to work with that and understand it.

Deborah 33:11

So as I could improve myself and and work with that, and you know, the trauma, there's so many layers to trauma, so many layers. Emerging after surgery, for example, is fun, and you know, it goes on. It's not just the accident and recovery itself. It's what happens after it's adjusting to my brain working differently. It's adjusting to my new lifestyle, it's getting strong again, it's it's dealing with that anxiety and flashbacks and dreams and yet, there's a lot of elements to the actual trauma part.

Bill 33:55

A lot of strokes of ours are going to relate to what you're saying, because I know you didn't have a stroke, but You had experienced the massive trauma came out of nowhere, everything was okay one day, it wasn't okay the next day, and then it continued to not necessarily be okay for many, many days after that years even.

Bill 34:12

And in that scenario, that process, in that scenario, that process creates a situation where, there's so many things that you haven't experienced or learned about in life, and they're all coming at you at one time, and it can be overwhelming.

Bill 34:33

So when I was a young kid, at 25, you know, four years into being a dad. And having all these dad experiences, mortgage work, all the stuff that comes with it

so young, I was lacking resources and when I would go back to refer to the people that were in my life for support and advice. They couldn't really give me any support and advice. Sure, my dad would say just work more and make more money and do all that kind of stuff.

Bill 35:05

And that worked for him. But it wasn't what I was looking for was looking for something else, you know, more emotional, something deeper. So I went to counseling as well. And I've never really stopped going to counseling I'm 46 this year. And I can say that I've been consistently seeing somebody about something all the time.

Bill 35:23

But early on in those days, I did what you did, I became curious to understand. And the more I understood, the better I felt about things. And one of the things I wanted to understand was, Why I had such an inability to communicate with people, and feel comfortable with the way that they spoke back to me and communicated to me and why they would use certain words and act up a certain way.

Bill 35:50

And think it was okay to treat me a certain way. And I used to go to counseling and ask my counselor, why do people behave in that way? She didn't know any of the people that I knew. But she was able to give me a psychologists approach to why behavior occurs. And then she was able to give me the layers of underneath that what's underneath that, you know what, what happened before they walked into the room that I'm not aware of, that may have made them trigger a conversation that made them speak to me like that.

Bill 36:23

And when I understood that, it made it better and then I went out and sought out the same kind of approach to understanding what happened, the stroke, my brain bled. What does that area that bleed? What does that impact? What does that mean for this, that in the other, and the more I understood, the more I'm able to adjust my life, find ways to get around the problem and then implement a strategy that's going to support me in this new way. It just sounds exactly like you did. You know, I like the fact that we are similar in that way. It just it's fascinating.

Deborah 36:58

It is and I mean, you're spot on I'm nodding and smiling at you while you're saying this. Because it makes me think of specifically with myself very much like what you just said there. In that my brain injury it was frontal lobe. So that's the, you know, behavioral part having the ability to have insight.

Deborah 36:59

So a lot of the time with brain injuries. Individuals lose that ability of insight and part of the rehabilitation processes to help them regain that where they can. I'm very fortunate in that. I was so pretty young. So the brain rewired quite well. So I am I still have the (inaudible) which is fantastic. In terms of personality change, because people talk a lot about personality change when it comes to brain injuries and sort of brain injury that I had.

Deborah 38:00

And a lot of the time it's a perspective based as well as the experience itself that changes someone's perspective and the way they behave. Sometimes it is the frontal lobe with the insight. A lot of the time and this applies to me a little bit is that certain primal traits, your instinctual traits, I suppose, if you think about it that way are exaggerated.

Deborah 38:25

So personality traits are exaggerated. So with me I've always been an extroverted personality that became stronger than it was before. So I'm aware of it, though. So I can turn myself down too easily. Perhaps in those first couple years, or perhaps behavior a little bit like

Deborah 38:51

people out there in the face, because my brain is still healing as well. And then having that ability of insight and going I suppose the extra mile you know, kind of hang on some something off here I get overly upset or I get you know, I can be alluded to whatever it is having the ability, thankfully to look at that and then do the research, you know, sought out experts and read and research everything I possibly could to then understand why.

Deborah 39:26

And put in the strategies to deal with that and understand what the problem was, I've always understood what's appropriate and what's not where I can now. Not

be ruled perhaps by certain emotional things in terms of behavior.

Bill 39:47

How are they you know?

Deborah 39:49

Never to ask a lady her age, I'm just kidding. Okay. I just turned 40 January.

Bill 39:57

Alright, so you just turned 40 in January. This happened to you 21 years ago. And at what point did you think you're going to reflect on it in this way by making a book and put it in writing? When did you get to that stage?

The decision to write a book



Deborah 40:21

It was something that was developing over time. So I found sort of becoming the go-to person for advice from a lot of people. And the increased empathy and wanting to help others just kept, kept growing and when I'd seen you know, people in hospital waiting rooms because you can imagine I've had lots of follow up comments as to through appointments, not brain-wise, thankfully, which is good. Now, however, in terms of my own face and stuff, so that you know, especially few years, especially the first 10 years, following numerous follow up appointments and making sure that I was okay and everything's working.

Deborah 41:09

Just seeing some of the people in the waiting room and rehabilitation center just

felt like how can I help? And then people struggling in their lives with other stresses and traumas, and just really thinking, How can I help? You know, with what I've been through and looking at? Finding that when I shared my story with people saying, oh, my goodness, you've helped me so much.

Deborah 41:37

If you can get through that, you know, then I can get through whatever it is, and thinking, well hang on. I've got strategies I can help you with. So you know that started to evolve over the years and then I started working in professional education, training.

Deborah 41:57

And the more personal and professional development I did on my own accord, you know, led me to thinking well, I've got to get it out of my head and into something. So that was probably I started thinking about it probably 10 years ago. We started thinking about it 10 years ago, and it evolved. I had grand plans of writing my book while pregnant with my first child.

Deborah 42:38

I was I had my first child 35 I have little ones. That wasn't I suppose there's more trauma there and then I had a horrendous pregnancy. hospitalized, hyperemesis low blood pressure couldn't drive I was throwing up blood. It was really not fun. Another trauma with the birth of my first child who ended up I won't go into but that was another Yes.

Deborah 43:12

Very painful thing to go through. She's, fine by the way, thankfully she's excellent. I picked up a few things afterwards, but of course, I had my second child here. So once 1513 in my late 30s and that was another horrendous pregnancy where I couldn't walk and hospitals and all sorts of things. I could barely walk and barely get off the couch.

Deborah 43:36

Again, that was fun. So that of course, you know, slow down me better kept going. And yet I eventually got it out. You know, like, like, like last year was finalized and I just kept chipping away at things and kept chipping away and I sort of went what the core of my coaching and mission Just suppose his wishes that you're finding the lesson within your trauma.

Deborah 44:06

And that's focused on that. And I took what I learned in those other challenges and only added to my insight for my book and my workshops and only added to my understanding of even myself, and how I I operate and how my brain works as well and how the trauma has affected me and where it flares up again, what triggers I've got that I didn't know I had even some additional ones. So that just added to my purpose, my my passion, this is what I'm supposed to do.

Bill 44:43

Yeah, I love that. I love that it took you this far of nine years from the idea to the end concept, the end product, and why I love that is because that's a beautiful thing. It's a great story, and it's a great thing to tell people who are recovering. Don't put a timeline on something, have the idea and let it just let it evolve and let it emerge.

Bill 45:06

And if it's something that you're meant to do, it'll happen whether it takes five years, two years, one year, seven years, it doesn't matter. What matters is that it's a goal. And if you put a timeline on it, and you don't achieve it, you're going to be disappointed at that timeline. And recovery from trauma, stroke, anything dramatic, I don't believe should have timelines that just should have a goal that one day I want to achieve this. I don't know when.

Bill 45:33

And the reason we don't want to know when is because we don't want to feel disappointed when we get there. And if you're the kind of person who allows yourself to get down about that kind of stuff. Just don't put a timeline on it. Just say that you will get better and just make it happen whenever it happens. Same with the book, you know, was it therapeutic to write the book did it do more than just allow you to get all your thoughts into pages.

Deborah 46:01

Oh, yeah, it was therapeutic in a very painful way. Because I got the all the medical records from the Alfred hospital. And when I read when I read through them, it was worse than I understood prior my injuries were worse and brought back all sorts of things. So looking at all of that, and reading all of that was was confronting.

Deborah 46:37

However, I grew from that and I gained more insight as well, my injuries and also suppose I gained the insight about myself where I saw just what I achieved. It was worse when I realized. When I read the actual injury to the brain as well, and perhaps I had never really given myself any credit for what I achieved, because I just kept focusing on building up a lot of victim I'm going to rebuild my life and I'm going to learn and I'm going to grow which helped me in a very good you know, very good place.

Deborah 47:22

However, I wasn't stopping to Well, I'll say smell the roses, but I'm actually a nice mix after the surgery and brain injury. However, as the saying goes, stop to smell the roses, and really subsided, you know, survived a lot. So, that that was Yeah, it was painfully healing process, which is again at the core of my message and Beyond Trauma and Turning Tragedy Into Opportunity.

Bill 48:02

So what is there beyond trauma? What is there?

What is there beyond trauma?

Deborah 48:09

That's a good question that varies for everybody specific. The way I look at it is this and term that I use, which is also the name of my business, which is tragic opportunities. So that is creating opportunities from trauma. So the tragedy is the injury, the pain, the suffering, the stress, whatever that is. The opportunity is what we can learn from that.

Deborah 48:37

What insight we can gain from that and how we choose to use that knowledge to make better decisions, improve ourselves, improve our life, relationships etc, how we use that information. So that's what is beyond trauma.

Deborah 48:54

Recognizing what what you have achieved what I have achieved recognizing that looking at the lesson learned, taking that information, making informed decisions. So I'm not who I was not necessarily who I was going to be the direction and I'm still me I'm Deb, Deb is more than, you know, the label that I had on myself, I'm

not big on labels now.

Deborah 49:18

You know, I'm more than a fashion student or real estate agent wasn't really an agent then I was too young but at the time, I was doing bits and pieces, thousand things that I'm not I'm not what I do I'm me. And as me, I can choose to do what I want. I can choose to be the best version of me. And that's what's beyond trauma. Freedom, the trauma was (inaudible) labels have chosen who you are being what you do and things, you know what that doesn't matter, so I can, I could authentically reinvent myself and just go for it.

Bill 50:11

Yeah, I like that. It reminds me of a process that I go through with people at coaching, you know, who are really afraid to delve into what's scary and uncomfortable with because they're in pain. But they have this idea that it's more painful to worry about they're going to go and I get it, it is more painful, but it's only more painful for a short amount of time.

Bill 50:36

Whereas before you go there, it's painful all the time. So going there gets you an idea to kind of face the beast and then after that, it's nothing and that's where this relief exists. And if you get a taste of that, if you allow me to support you so that you can go there once and get a taste for it. Then you're not to stop, you're going to continue seeking the relief from every traumatic experience that you've had in your life and you're going to be less afraid to go into that place where it's you know, scary where it's dark and where it's not comfortable.

Bill 51:18

I love your answer to what is beyond trauma, you know, relief and this new opportunity to start, anything you want and no labels. That is the most amazing part like that's really what's there no labels because I came from trauma and in trauma, I was traumatized. I was afraid I was this I was that. And now there's no labels and now I can create a new, more empowering set of labels that I can use to benefit me and that I'm going to make the most of now that I don't have this trauma hanging around. Do me a favor, can you grab the book and bring it to your camera so that we can see it close up, because it's a great cover.

Deborah 51:22

Is it lying? Okay like that.

Bill 52:13

That's perfect. I love it. Is that a little bit Terminator? Or is it a little bit \$6 million woman like what's going on there?

Deborah 52:21

That is it's an image I had in my mind for a long time. Because for me it's symbolic so that's my skull, obviously with all the I don't know how much you can see on that with all the metal pins in that 4x10 centimeter hole in my heart, the brain surgery. So that is, you know, that is me. So that's showing what's underneath. This is who I choose to be. It's a lot of assumptions that could be made about the life of someone with these injuries. And this is me going, this is me. I'm just like, everybody else, so to speak.

Deborah 53:08

You know what I mean?

Bill 53:10

In an evolved kind of way.

Experience and recovery from trauma



Deborah 53:12

Exactly. Yeah, that's exactly right. So it's something that you were saying before, I think it's actually really important here, which is that always been about facing the painful, ugly truth. Because it's somewhat a cliché saying but the only way out

is through. So that is, feel the pain. Go through it. That's how you're going to learn. That's how it's not going to hurt anymore.

Deborah 53:47

The only way to not experience the trauma is to experience the trauma, so to speak. get through it. Otherwise, it's still there. And that's the same that triggers. So with PTSD, when I have certain things that trigger me, I need to have worked on what it is sometimes it's not. So it's not obvious. And I've done some additional work on that more recently as well.

Deborah 54:11

And some very, very painful things came up. However, the only way to get past that was to sit with it, to sit with the actual memory that was dormant, I suppose, sit with that and remember it and curl up in a ball on my floor and cry my eyes out. Now, when I think about it, it doesn't hurt anymore and I don't get triggered like that anymore in certain instances or sounds or visual things.

Deborah 54:39

So that's an example of that, as well. So and the cover for me was important. Because for many years, I sort of so much focus on hiding, so to speak, but what happened you know, fix my face was like I used to, I noticed sorts of things and not wanting people to notice.

Deborah 54:46

However, by putting that on the cover, I hope to almost well, I suppose, inspire and show others that it's okay to own your pain, own the ugly truth. And scars actually make us beautiful. Because that's where we grow as well. And it's not something that I need to hide.

Bill 55:30

Yeah, Deborah that's a beautiful way to end the podcast. Thank you so much for being on the podcast and sharing your story and giving us the insights into what happens after a traumatic experience and how to get beyond it. Tell me if somebody wanted to connect with you. where's the best place for them to go?

Deborah 55:53

Oh, absolutely. So my website which is obviously is one place but certainly via emails are great way of doing it. But certainly I have a Facebook page, which is Tragic Opportunities by Deborah Stathis. I'm on Instagram as well same title. My

website is tragicopportunities.com and of course, email, which is we call it tragicopportunities.com

Bill 56:22

Thank you so much.

Deborah 56:24

Great. Thank you so much as well. Yeah, absolutely fantastic.

Intro 56:30

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