

Cavernous Angioma Recovery - Heather L. Rendulic

Cavernous Angioma Recovery - Heather L. Rendulic was 22 when she experienced a series of 5 bleeds in the brain in 11 months before her surgical team decided that brain surgery was required to resolve the matter once and for all.

Socials:

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/faithnotfearllc>

Website:

<https://heatherheadstrong.com/>

Andrew Jobling:

<https://andrewjobling.com.au/>

Angioma Alliance:

<https://www.angioma.org/>

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Heather L. Rendulic 0:00

Well, I mean, when I got divorced from my first marriage, I was disabled. And that was my first thought who's going to accept me for who I am? And you know, I need a little extra help around the house sometimes like opening jars, which I think a lot of women do.

Bill Gasiamis 0:17

Even I do, let's be honest Yeah, I mean the jar won't open sometimes like just doesn't want to open.

Heather L. Rendulic 0:28

I know, I swear they do that. And then he comes in, it's like, really easy. And I say, well I loosened it for you. But it is tricky to do. But that was my first thought. And my encouragement to those people wondering that is, I eventually had to just tell myself, you know what, there's not one perfect person out there on this planet right now. And we all have our things.

Intro 1:01

This is the recovery after stroke podcast, with Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Recovery after Stroke podcast. Recently, Spotify released a new feature that allows people to rate their favorite shows similarly to how the Apple podcast app allows it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28

If you think the show deserves it, I'd love it. If you left us a five-star review. This will help the show rank better on search engines and help newly diagnosed stroke survivors to find the show and you could make a massive difference in their recovery.

Introduction

Bill Gasiamis 1:44

So go to your favorite podcast app and share what the podcast means for you. It really will make a huge difference. Now this is episode 181. And my guest today is Heather Rendulic.

Bill Gasiamis 1:59

Like many of us stroke survivors experienced a vast range of emotional lows and highs and had to overcome many challenges when at the age of 22, a previously undiagnosed cavernous angioma bled five times within 11 months.

Bill Gasiamis 2:16

Heather has written a book about her experience called Through Life Love and Brain Surgery. I hope you enjoy this episode. Heather Rendulic, welcome to the podcast.

Heather L. Rendulic 2:27

Oh, thank you for having me, Bill.

Bill Gasiamis 2:29

My pleasure. Thanks for being here. You're quite the achiever when it comes to hemorrhagic strokes. You've had a few. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Heather L. Rendulic - Cavernous Angioma



Heather L. Rendulic 2:43

I agree. So yeah, back then I was in my early 20s. And I was a healthy person who never had any problems and randomly had a brain hemorrhage. They then diagnosed me with a rare brain condition called cavernous angioma, which in layman's terms is a cluster of really weak blood vessels.

Heather L. Rendulic 3:06

And I had one on top of my brain stem. And the only cure is brain surgery. And right now they're researching treatments. But at the time of my diagnosis, there were no treatments other than avoiding blood thinners and living your life.

Heather L. Rendulic 3:23

So I was told mine was inoperable. It was too deep in my brain, they wouldn't touch it. So I went on, I was a full-time college student, and over the next year, it bled five times over 11 months, and I had five hemorrhagic strokes.

Heather L. Rendulic 3:39

The fifth and final one was massive, I was paralyzed half my body, the left side of my body. And at that point, my neurosurgeon said, we have to get this thing out of you, or else it's going to kill you.

Heather L. Rendulic 3:54

So I had a nine-hour craniotomy and they successfully removed the lesion. And I am here talking to you and it'll be 10 years in December that this all happened.

Bill Gasiamis 4:06

We have a few things in common. My bleed was three times it was an AVM, but it wasn't a Cavernoma. The first time it bled was in February 2012. So I'm coming into my 10 years today this week or something like that. And then my surgeon said the same thing after three bleeds.

Bill Gasiamis 4:26

They said, well, you know, we've had enough, it's time to get this thing out. And it was really deep in the cerebellum near the cerebellum, not actually in the cerebellum. And the initial people who I consulted with thought it was a little bit too dangerous to get to and they wanted to leave it alone and didn't want to touch it.

Bill Gasiamis 4:46

But this particular neurosurgeon said we need to go there and get it out. So that's what they did. What was it like going through each bleed? Did you have the thought in your mind, oh my god, what if I have another one? What if I have another? Did that enter your mind? For me, it didn't.

Heather L. Rendulic 5:09

Oh, it was terrifying, to say the least. I also had a ton of false alarms, like where,

you know, sure you know, every headache or weird feeling you get, you know, you're going to the emergency room thinking it's bleeding again, just to find out oh, no, it's just all in your head, and we'll send you home.

Heather L. Rendulic 5:32

And then you start feeling crazy, because I was a frequent in the emergency room, and they kept sending me home telling me it was nothing. But the ones I had, four out of the five were very mild symptoms and I recovered rather quickly.

Heather L. Rendulic 5:51

You know, I had some vision changes, or I did have some like, tingling on my left side, or just some weakness. But you know, that fifth and final, and I did try after the second bleed, I met with a neurosurgeon in Chicago, who specializes in angiomas.

Heather L. Rendulic 6:11

And he recommended I get gamma knife surgery, which I did have. However, it was not successful, unfortunately. But it was also it was a controversial treatment. But at that point, I was willing to try anything.

Heather L. Rendulic 6:27

So you know, and then it did bleed, you know, three more times after that. But, um, it's gone, which I'm happy about, but it was just a crazy time, and to feel like your body is betraying you, your body is failing, your body is letting you down.

Heather L. Rendulic 6:44

You know, like I mentioned before, I was a healthy person. I never had any problems, I used to compete in horseback riding, and I was a runner, and just healthy and living a really good life. And this kind of turned it all upside down. It completely changed the trajectory of my life as well. But it was really hard to go through that.

Bill Gasiamis 7:08

Let's have a philosophical discussion. You were 22 so you were young? And I get that. Do you think that the idea that your body was letting you down was just something that comes from ignorance because realistically, there isn't such a thing as your body letting you down?

Bill Gasiamis 7:28

Because your body's just doing what your body does. And we don't have a say in what it does, except if we're living a lifestyle that's contributing to its deterioration, and its early deterioration, for example.

Bill Gasiamis 7:43

So did you find a way to sort of deal with the idea that your buddy was letting you down? Because it's quite it's quite a statement, and it feels like a takes you out of control of your environment and what you can and how you can change the trajectory of your recovery. From a mindset perspective. Does that make sense? And just tell me your thoughts on what I just said.

Invincible

Heather L. Rendulic 8:16

Yes. So mindset is everything I talk about in my book, I talk about it when I give talks around the world, but it was an ignorance thing, I think, because when we're that young, we think we're invincible you know.

Heather L. Rendulic 8:32

There's no thought of illness or disability or anything, because, you know, I'm young, I'm healthy, like, nothing's gonna happen to me. And, you know, so it was a wake-up call, I had to grow up a lot during that period.

Heather L. Rendulic 8:51

And you know, I remember being in the hospital, I'm trying to relearn how to walk and my friends are out at like fraternity parties, and, you know, doing stuff like that. And it was just it. I'm in the stroke recovery ward with like, people over twice my age, and sometimes three times my age, but, you know, it is a mindset.

Heather L. Rendulic 9:14

So what I had to do when I felt like my life was out of control, which it was, you know, I couldn't control my brain or what it was doing. So I've tried to focus every day on what I could control.

Heather L. Rendulic 9:29

And it could be as simple as you know, making a plan of the things I was going to get done that day. I you know, or taking control of other parts of my house like making sure I was exercising and eating healthy.

Heather L. Rendulic 9:43

Or, you know, for me, I'm also strong Christian, so it was praying and reading my Bible, stuff like that, like those were things that I could grasp that were in my control, and in some way that habit of doing that every day helps me He's that feeling of absolute chaos.

Bill Gasiamis 10:03

Yeah. What is it about religion specifically that makes it better that makes things better? Is it a familiarity is it kind of an idea that there's a higher purpose? What specifically is about religion, I know that people go to religion, whether they're Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or any other religion it doesn't matter.

Bill Gasiamis 10:27

You hear a lot about stroke survivors who found God, who discovered their religion again, or rediscovered it. I didn't particularly go down that path for me. What stroke taught me was that it's random, because next to me was a guy who had the same thing that I experienced, but was more severely injured from it.

Bill Gasiamis 10:53

And on the other side was another person who had a similar thing and was very slightly injured by it. And I had to have brain surgery and all those things. So I kind of took the approach of stroke as just random, but how did your religion or being able to have religion support you in your recovery?

Heather L. Rendulic 11:15

Well, I think you talked about it already touched on this point, it was that there is a higher power, who is in complete control. And, you know, this has all been pre-written, you know, this has all been worked out.

Heather L. Rendulic 11:31

And he knows he's going to use this for my good and his glory, and that he has it in control, like, so again, that control factor that it felt uncontrollable to me, but there was somebody who was in complete control that I could rely on and find comfort in.

Heather L. Rendulic 11:51

And that I don't, you know, I don't agree with the randomized, you know, because I believe everything is planned, and everything happens, and I don't believe in coincidences.

Heather L. Rendulic 12:02

And, you know, it's not about oh, if you're a good person, or you're a bad person, it's just about, it's who you were created to be. And this was part of my story before I even knew it was.

Bill Gasiamis 12:18

Yeah, that's fair enough. And, then is it kind of an adjustment period, it's like, I thought I was meant to be a 22-year-old at frat parties, doing all the college stuff. And then I was gonna go down this next path, which is going to perhaps be a job in my field so and so.

Bill Gasiamis 12:40

But now, you've been thrust into this different version of life at 22. The frat party wasn't what it was meant to be your idea wasn't wrong. Until that point in time, it was right, for example. And now is just about you learning that you need to adjust, your mindset and your approach to what else is coming that you're not aware of.

Heather L. Rendulic 13:05

Oh, yeah. So I talk about it a lot, that we all have a plan for our lives, you know, growing up, you think I thought I was going to be an accountant. And I mentioned I used to ride horses, and like, I was gonna have all these nice horses and a farm, maybe, you know, and I had this plan.

Heather L. Rendulic 13:24

And this completely derailed my plan. And I can't even ride horses now. But I can still love them. But I, you know, I talked about accepting your new reality. You know, I also still to this day, have no functional use of my left hand. So I joke that I'm living one hand in a two-handed world because there are so many things you need two hands to do.

Cavernous Angioma Recovery



Heather L. Rendulic 13:48

But I am so blessed. I mean, I live a great life. I you know, I graduated from college, I work full time I'm married, and I'm hoping to start a family. I you know, I don't let it hold me back. I've accepted one of the hardest parts of my recovery was accepting that this was my new plan, that this was my new reality.

Heather L. Rendulic 14:10

And I think we have to do that. Because if you don't, then you're just gonna be constantly disappointed and let down then you're gonna be depressed and we just have to accept that this is it. So what am I gonna do with it? And am I going to be depressed? Or am I going to make the best of it?

Heather L. Rendulic 14:27

What I talked about in my book, as well as kind of an analogy is to adapt, improvise, and overcome. So you have your plan and I equated to when you're driving to work, you have the route you take every day, you know it by heart, and you can do it with your eyes closed. I did not recommend that.

Heather L. Rendulic 14:47

But you could do it. And you know exactly what turns to make and you know, what traffic's gonna be like usually. And then there's road construction and they close one of the roads on your routes.

Heather L. Rendulic 15:03

And at first, you're like, oh, my gosh, this is horrible. Like I wasn't expecting this, I wasn't planning on this. And you're freaking out because you're going to be late

for work. This is just like ruining your whole day.

Heather L. Rendulic 15:16

But you take the detour route, which usually has outlines, and you if you still get there, you might be a couple of minutes late. But so you adapt by taking this new route that might not have been in your plan, but you have no other choice. So you're adapting to it, then you might have it might be a little bit of a longer route.

Heather L. Rendulic 15:37

So you have to improvise in your life, you have to maybe get up a little earlier, or have an extra cup of coffee, so you can leave the house early and get to work on time. And so you're doing this for months and months and months.

Heather L. Rendulic 15:50

And if anybody lives in southwestern Pennsylvania like I do, it can take years, it seems for roads to be opened back up, but, you improvise, and then it comes to the point that you get so used to your new route and your new routine, that you have overcome that.

Heather L. Rendulic 16:10

Because now you can do that in your sleep. And you again, I don't recommend and you you're used to it, and you've adapted and you've improvised so then you overcame the situation, and then your old road opens back up and you have to make that decision, do I even want it maybe this route is prettier, or I get to drive by, you know, a coffee shop on the way to work now.

Heather L. Rendulic 16:34

So I can grab a coffee on my way to work. So it might end up being better. We don't know, it's just that first, that initial reaction is always down and disappointment and frustration. But we don't know what this new route is going to do. It might end up being more beautiful.

Intro 16:50

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. How long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid in case I'll make matters worse?

Intro 17:07

And doctors will explain things that, you've never had a stroke before, 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're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you.

Intro 17:30

It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke. 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, [recovery after stroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide. It's free.

Bill Gasiamis 17:53

So basically, what you're saying is that it's a time for adjustment. And just seeing what's possible in this new approach this new route, this new way of life, it's not necessarily worth it's just different.

Bill Gasiamis 18:10

We just have to come to terms with the understanding that we are the ones who have to make the change to adapt and overcome the new challenges or the new obstacles that are in front of us. And I completely agree with that. That's exactly what I did. And isn't it great? I mean, if religion can get you to that. I think it's amazing, that's fantastic.

Bill Gasiamis 18:34

And it's not that I'm completely not religious, we've grown up in a religious household. And I suppose I may have drawn on my upbringing to kind of start to guide my path forward for my recovery. And then I was a bit a little bit older than you. So at 37, I was able to bring in other life experiences and other lessons learned from elsewhere so that I could make a solid, new trajectory that I could follow and that I could be comfortable with.

Bill Gasiamis 19:13

And then I did a lot of checking back with other people about how I was going what I was doing, what can I change? I went and got re-educated in areas of, you know, mindset coaching emotional intelligence, doing things that I loved, and stopped doing things that I didn't like.

Bill Gasiamis 19:33

And I haven't let it stop me either. But I can see how it might stop some people. Did you come across any other stroke survivors in the time that you were in your early stages of recovery? Because 22 I imagine there would not have been many, and therefore did you have many examples of people at a similar age to you that you were able to draw on?

Heather L. Rendulic 20:00

Yes, so I did meet several people. I mean, again, not maybe the similar age, but I, you know, made friends with people, I'm just a people person, I love to talk to people. And, you know, in my life recovery, like in the rehab centers when I was like learning how to walk again, you know, I'm spending a lot of time day in and day out with these people.

Heather L. Rendulic 20:24

So we ended up talking and we did feed off of each other on just, you know, how to cope with this new normal, and I think life is a series of that, like, it might not be to this severity.

Heather L. Rendulic 20:43

But you know, it is I, you know, you maybe even your job, for example, like, you dream of having this dream job, and you're making all this money or CEO or something. And it's like, okay, my job is not that I am not a CEO, but you know, I am content with where I am, because that is where I'm supposed to be right now.

Heather L. Rendulic 21:09

But people especially in recovery, I think having that support system to talk to, you know, I have a great family that surrounded me. And actually, my parents write a couple paragraphs at the end of each chapter in my book, because they wanted to give their perspective as a caregiver.

Having A Support System - Heather L. Rendulic



Heather L. Rendulic 21:27

Because it's not just the patient or the victim, the whole family goes through it. And it just adds a unique perspective to help families get through trials and tribulations. But you know, having I had them, which obviously, they were a great support. However, they had never gone through something like I had gone through.

Heather L. Rendulic 21:50

So when I would get frustrated with my disability or not being able to do things I used to be able to do. They, couldn't fully understand what they were trying to understand, but you know, that they don't, and you want to talk to somebody who like actually understands us.

Heather L. Rendulic 22:08

So I did this through Angioma Alliance, which is a nonprofit for people with cavernous angioma, their international now. I've connected with so many people through there, I just got off the phone with somebody today who's about to have brain surgery. She is around my age, and she wanted to talk to somebody about my experience. So having that is key.

Bill Gasiamis 22:35

That's amazing. That's exactly what I needed. So I came across somebody who I'm pretty sure had an aneurysm rupture in the back of their neck when they were in their early 30s. The guy was driving a truck at the time, and had the episode in the back of his neck, drove into a poll, and smashed the car.

Bill Gasiamis 23:02

The police attended in the ambulance, and they all thought that he had taken drugs and as a result, smashed the car. And it was a work truck, so it had the phone number of the business on the side.

Bill Gasiamis 23:20

And it was his dad's business and they rang his dad and they said to him, listen, your son's been involved in an accident, you know, what drugs has he been on? And Andrew had never been on drugs. And his dad said he's not on drugs. He was just at the factory now he just left you know? What's happened?

Bill Gasiamis 23:39

They eventually got to the bottom of it. They found that he had blood on the back of his head. And they got him to surgery. They managed to keep him alive and he survived. And he went through a whole bunch of rehabilitation and I'm pretty sure it was many years later he was back on his feet.

Bill Gasiamis 23:58

Now I didn't know the guy yet. He and I intersected when I met his sister and explained to her what I'd been going through and then a week from the day that I met her I was going to be going into surgery. And then she just said to me well, my brother has had a similar experience.

Bill Gasiamis 24:18

And he was in surgery and he's doing well now. I had never met anybody who had a stroke and had surgery and I said to her, I need to meet him can you please put us in touch he lived near me. So sure enough, she put me in touch with him.

Bill Gasiamis 24:35

And I met Andrew and went through this conversation and after meeting him it was like, whatever happens in surgery, things are gonna turn out fine. No matter what I wake up with that I have to overcome I'm gonna be it's gonna be fine. It's doable. Brain surgery is a doable thing for people you know.

Bill Gasiamis 24:53

And I met Andrew in 2014 in November of 2014. We're still great friends now. Now we have a lot in common, obviously, and he understands me completely, and I him. And it's just a positive thing that happened to have this conversation with somebody who had been through what I'd been through all the hard times, and then all the recovery, and then had gone back to life.

Bill Gasiamis 25:19

And I think Andrew had been less than 10 years. But I saw the full spectrum of the stroke, then the really serious part of the surgery, and then life after the stroke, and then recovery. And luckily for Andrew, he didn't end up with any deficits on his left or right side.

Bill Gasiamis 25:39

But, you know, he had to overcome a lot to get back to a full life, and his perspective on how much work he needs to do these days and how much stress he needs to put himself through and whether he does things that he hates or loves.

Bill Gasiamis 25:52

And one of the hardest persons to get in touch with and catch up with for a coffee is Andrew because of course, what he's doing is he's making sure that he's spending time with his wife, his children, being around as a dad, he doesn't work on Saturdays, if he can avoid it with a passion, of course, it doesn't work on Sundays.

Bill Gasiamis 26:13

And he goes out of his way to just be a family man and a dad. And as a result, I miss out on catching up with him now, not that I miss out and I'm concerned or it's a problem for us. We speak over the final lot. But that's kind of, he's brought it down to all these basics of life, all these let's do the bare minimum, and let's focus on being present alive.

Bill Gasiamis 26:43

Hanging out with the people we love. Supporting them, teaching them his dad who's in his 80s Still works at the business and he spends quality time with his dad, they go away for a minimum of six weeks, every summer.

Bill Gasiamis 27:01

You know, so he's done that whole thing. He's still leading by example for me. He's a younger guy than me, but he's still leading by example. And he has led me through this path in such amazing ways. And it's the thing the gift that you gave to somebody by just talking to them.

Bill Gasiamis 27:23

I think that one of the best things you can do is show the person on the other side. I love that you did that. And what a relief it would be for that person going into

surgery knowing there's one less thing that they have to worry about.

Heather L. Rendulic 27:42

Well, I think a story that jumped out while you were talking about Andrew was that before my brain surgery, I got not much notice I only had a couple of days because after the fifth hemorrhage was so big, I was in ICU like fighting for my life. And they were like, we have to do this in like two days.

Mind And Body Connection - Heather L. Rendulic

Heather L. Rendulic 28:03

So I didn't have much time to sit and worry, oh my gosh, what about brain surgery? But we were talking about mindset earlier. And I strongly believe that the mind and body are connected. And I always tell people to set their minds to success before any big trial.

Heather L. Rendulic 28:26

Just like and I think what Andrew did for you is he let you see that there is life on the other side of this and you're going to be okay like when he said you're gonna be okay, no matter what happens in surgery. So you went into that surgery feeling more confident.

Heather L. Rendulic 28:44

You went in saying I'm going to be okay. That plays a huge role because I so before my surgery, I decided my surgery was a year before my sister's wedding. And I was at her wedding, well supposed to be at our wedding. I was hoping to still be at her wedding.

Heather L. Rendulic 29:03

But the neurosurgeon came into my room to give me the lowdown of the risks, and you know, you might not be able to walk ever again. You might, you know, not survive the surgery, you might be a vegetable, you know, we don't know what's gonna happen.

Heather L. Rendulic 29:19

You might be in a coma for a while it was the odds were against me in a lot of areas, but I just had this sense. And I kept telling myself that I kept picturing myself at her wedding a year from then dancing. And I don't know why but that's just what was in my head.

Heather L. Rendulic 29:41

And I kept resonating with that because it gave me the confidence to go into this and that I was going to be okay. And I went into that surgery. I came out I was in recovery and I was hooked up to all the machines in the hospital I swear, and my family was surrounding my bed and there, I was slowly waking up for anesthesia.

Heather L. Rendulic 30:03

And there sobbing, my sister is sobbing at the foot of my bed. And I remember waking up, I'm groggy, but I looked at her and I said, Oh, quit, you're crying, I will be dancing at your wedding. And sure enough, I was. And so I just want people to know that you know, set your mindset on that success, like set it and know that you're going to achieve it, and then the rest will follow soon.

Bill Gasiamis 30:32

So question, that is hypothetical, what if you weren't dancing at the wedding? You were at the wedding, but what if you didn't get the opportunity to dance because your recovery hadn't come that far yet? What then?

Heather L. Rendulic 30:46

It would have just been another change in plan. You know, like I said, life is a series of those. Yes, I would have been disappointed. But if anything, I think it would have motivated me more to keep moving because I was there, which was a huge miracle in itself.

Heather L. Rendulic 31:05

And what else is on the horizon? And what other possibilities are out there? And I worked hard every day in my recovery, I would, you know, once I got home from the hospital from inpatient rehab, I every day said it, you know, I was gonna do a little bit each day towards my recovery.

Heather L. Rendulic 31:27

And that way, like, I mean, there's a chance that a couple years from now, I'm still in a wheelchair, and I'm not walking, and all this hard work would have been wasted. But I knew that I'd rather find out that way, than not try at all, and then wonder what if, you know, looking back.

Heather L. Rendulic 31:47

And so it did take me a year to learn, like to be able to walk without a cane. And then I did have like an AFO like a brace, I work on my leg to help. I had that for

another year or two. And then now, you know, I walk completely, unassisted.

Bill Gasiamis 32:06

You sound like a positive, upbeat kind of person, glass, half full, all that type of stuff. But there would have been real tough times and dark times were there? And did you take them badly?

Bill Gasiamis 32:20

Did you have to go through the bad mental states and all that kind of stuff? How was the lead up to this other side of you, which we're all seeing now we're seeing the positive, upbeat, reframing everything I imagined it wasn't always like that?

Heather L. Rendulic 32:40

It was not it still isn't I you know, it's not all sunshine and rainbows. And I still have my days. And there were, I mean, during with before my surgery, when I was having the bleeds, and I didn't know what was gonna happen. You know, there was a time I contemplated suicide, I was in a dark place.

Heather L. Rendulic 33:01

I was questioning my faith, I was questioning everything I'd ever believed in. And I, I, I talk that, you know, we're human. So these are natural emotions. And I think everybody needs to allow themselves to feel those. But, you know, we can't say there. So what I do now, is, I still have days, like I said earlier, I still don't have functional use of my left hand.

Heather L. Rendulic 33:30

So every day is a struggle. You know, I, there are things multiple times in my day that remind me of my disability and things I can't do. But that's okay. And I have my moments, you know, where I get down, and I think like, this isn't fair, and I'm frustrated.

Heather L. Rendulic 33:47

And, you know, I see other people who have two functioning hands, and I'm like, you know, I missed that, or I wish I could do that. And I allow myself those moments. And, but I don't say they're long. Because then I feel like that becomes a habit. I feel like happiness is a choice.

Heather L. Rendulic 34:08

And so every day I try and choose to be happy and grateful. And I think what I

went through has changed my perspective, like Andrew, I, I see life in a different light now, you know, it's more precious. It's, you know, now I know I'm not invincible. So I know that, you know, life is short, and it could change at any given moment.

Heather L. Rendulic 34:32

And without warning, so I appreciate the little stuff. And I try to live each day like it's my last because I might be I have no idea but no, I think it is not all sunshine and rainbows and it can be really hard. And that's normal. And I think people need an outlet for that.

Heather L. Rendulic 34:52

So whether it's journaling or venting to a friend, I always recommend healthy outlets not like drugs or alcohol. But because that's just gonna cause more problems in your life.

Heather L. Rendulic 35:05

But, you know, you have to find what works for you. Because everybody is different. For me, it's, you know, praying and worshiping and taking my crazy dog on a walk and just having quiet time. That to me is therapeutic.

Bill Gasiamis 35:23

Your dog wouldn't appreciate you revealing that it's crazy on the podcast, would it?

Heather L. Rendulic 35:29

Yeah, though, I think he knows. Because he's cute. And he knows that he's cute. So he can get away with some stuff that other dogs would not but he did just look at me, so he is laying on the couch right now. But there is a high possibility during our time talking, he will start barking at something. So just warning me.

Bill Gasiamis 35:50

Okay. All right, well, we can allow for that problem. So you can be happy. As a mindset, you can choose happiness, but you can have a shitty day. And you can feel bad. And it sounds like as long as the negative times that you allow to come up are fleeting.

Bill Gasiamis 36:15

As in, they're there, they reveal themselves, they let you know. And then you just

kind of let it ease and pass and go away, and then come back in another form when it wants to later if it wants to etcetera.

Bill Gasiamis 36:29

And I do often think back and because it's my 10 years, this week, I'm constantly trying to go back to remembering what it was like for me before the stroke. And it wasn't that much different. But things felt different, you know, the body was different, supposedly perfect, or, you know, normal, or whatever it was.

Bill Gasiamis 36:56

And it's never really been like that for 10 years. So now I do have also what you say this constant reminder. Not that I remember my left side in a way that ah yeah, I had a stroke, it's it's not that I remember the stroke. It's what I experienced that it was doing to me on that day.

Bill Gasiamis 37:19

And it's like, you have to rest because your left side is tired now. So it's kind of more a reminder like that. It's telling me things that I need to be aware of, that I need to take action on, or that I need to stop doing.

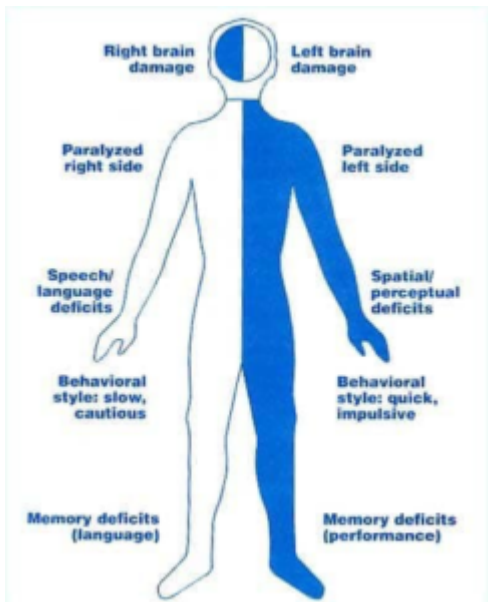
Bill Gasiamis 37:33

And sometimes when I want to keep going, it's when I get frustrated and go, crap, I wish I could keep going now, instead of not being able to keep going. I noticed that when I'm being physically active, and I'm tired, so when I'm physically active, but the tightness hasn't kicked in yet.

Bill Gasiamis 37:56

It's like it never existed. Like it's like I haven't got those deficits, but then later, as the physical activity tires me out, it's like, okay, you're tired now, pay attention. Stop. So that's kind of my daily reminder, it's a reminder of what I have to avoid doing or stop doing. Rather than, by the way, remember when you were different 10 years ago? Do you relate to that?

Body Awareness



Heather L. Rendulic 38:24

Oh, yes, I mean, I don't anymore, I used to earlier on and like remember what it was like, using my left hand. And now not so much. I was a part of a clinical trial over this past summer for spinal cord stimulation. And I was the first person in the world to get it.

Heather L. Rendulic 38:47

But they're testing it. They've been using spinal cord stimulation for people with chronic pain for years, but they're now trying it on people who've had strokes and have arm and hand weakness or deficits. So I had great success.

Heather L. Rendulic 39:03

I just got my permanent one I had my surgery back in November. And when I have it on it does give me like probably 10% improvement in function which doesn't sound like much to some people but to me, that's like a lot but like I've accepted the fact that I'm never going to be what I was before.

Heather L. Rendulic 39:26

Like my left arm like it's just not and but back to your question about you know, I get you to know, the neuro fatigue still and I get my body tells me you know times like you said it's not so much as a reminder but an alert to like you need to take it easy and it can be frustrating at times because sometimes it happens but like not the greatest moments and you're like on vacation or you're like out with your friends.

Heather L. Rendulic 40:00

It's like, okay, this isn't the time and, but you know, our bodies, they are on their clocks. And you know, we have to listen to them. And I'd say my biggest thing is, throughout my day, the reminders of what, like, I can't do.

Heather L. Rendulic 40:19

And I always again, try to reshape my focus to what I can do like I am with the amount of brain hemorrhages I had, and especially the last one, how severe it was, I am so lucky to be able to be doing what I do.

Heather L. Rendulic 40:34

Like the fact I could walk the fact that I could talk I wasn't cognitively affected, you know, I'm able to drive I'm able to work full time, like, I try to reshape that when I'm getting down on what my left hand isn't doing is to what the rest of my body can do that, you know, medically speaking, probably shouldn't.

Bill Gasiamis 40:59

Yeah, yeah. Tell me about your husband.

Heather L. Rendulic 41:04

My husband has a disability himself, he is hard of hearing. It's actually kind of how we met and connected as we were just talking about disabilities in living in a world of, you know, people who can be kind of ignorant sometimes. He works in IT, and I work in HR, as I mentioned already, and he is a godsend.

Heather L. Rendulic 41:34

I mean, I was married once before, early on in my recovery, and it turned out to be a toxic relationship, unfortunately. And so we, you know, divorce, and I met my now husband, who has been like the answer to all my prayers. And he's a funny, amazing guy.

Heather L. Rendulic 41:56

And I told you about the crazy dog. But we hope to start a family sometime soon, within the next year, hopefully. And yes, I do freak out about my disability and how I'm going to be able to do that.

Heather L. Rendulic 42:08

And I'm sure you know, my neuro fatigue, I've thought like, okay, how am I going to function on like, two hours of sleep, but I just know, I'm going to figure it out, you know, like I talked about earlier, you just, sometimes you just gotta say I have

no other choice. Like you got to figure this out.

Bill Gasiamis 42:26

There are lots of first-time mums and dads who have had children after the stroke, or just before the stroke. And yet people adapt, right, we're adapting amazingly different ways all the time to get through whatever we have to get through. And it might be a little bit harder for some people.

Struggling With Acceptance

Bill Gasiamis 42:49

But in the end, you find your way like there's no right way to raise a family, there's no correct path. Everyone does it their way. So you'll find your way, and you'll be able to manage it well. On the one hand, there are so many people on the planet who are doing that, especially stroke survivors, I'm sure you'll be able to reach out and find somebody to share stories with.

Bill Gasiamis 42:49

I know I've interviewed a few people who have been through stroke, just after childbirth, and just before childbirth. So I think you'll be fine. You'll you'll work it out. The reason I asked about your husband, amongst other things was to get an understanding of what it's like dating because a lot of people who go through what you've been through,

Bill Gasiamis 42:49

And those who have obvious disabilities or deficits, struggle with a mindset about how can somebody date me, you know, I'm not perfect, or I'm not right, or this, you know, why would somebody want to date me? Did you have those types of thoughts going through your mind? And how did you overcome them? If you did?

Heather L. Rendulic 43:58

Well, absolutely. I mean, when I got divorced, from my first marriage, I was disabled. And that was my first thought who's going to accept me for who I am? And you know, I need a little extra help around the house sometimes, like opening jars, which I think a lot of women do.

Bill Gasiamis 44:17

Even I do that let's be honest, I mean, the jar wide open sometimes, like, just doesn't want to open.

Heather L. Rendulic 44:26

I know, I swear they do that. And then he comes in, it's like really easy. And I say, well, I loosened it for you. But it is tricky to do. But that was my first thought and my encouragement to those people wondering that I eventually had to just tell myself, you know what, there's not one perfect person out there on this planet right now.

Heather L. Rendulic 44:52

And we all have our things and, you know, I got lucky to meet my husband who has also a physical So, he doesn't even see my disability. Like, I'll say, I have a disability. And he's like, No, you don't.

Heather L. Rendulic 45:08

And you know it. When you find the right person, they don't see that stuff. Yeah. And they see you for what's inside. And, you know, I can be even a little crazy sometimes.

Heather L. Rendulic 45:20

And he loves that. So, nobody is perfect. And, you know, it's so special to find that person who sees you for what's inside and sees your heart and your soul. And it's just, you know, don't be afraid, because there is somebody out there that is gonna think you're the most perfect person on this planet.

Bill Gasiamis 45:45

Yeah. Is it about self-love? Is it about accepting yourself? I know that I've come to accept the way I look how I am and how I behave. Not that I behave like a crazy or idiotic person or anything like that. I'm not rude or obnoxious or anything. But just my personality, I know, rubs some people up the wrong way.

Bill Gasiamis 46:11

And it's just because I'm, well, I'm outgoing and outspoken. And I am an extrovert. So is it about self-love? Because the more that I accept myself, the more I seem, it seems to be that other people just sort of accept me or don't. And if they don't, they don't take it the wrong way.

Bill Gasiamis 46:37

They just go oh I couldn't hang out with Bill is too full on or is too in my face, or he's too outspoken, or he wants to know too many answers to many questions. Does that resonate with you?

Bill Gasiamis 46:51

Is that how you move from being somebody who was concerned about whether people would love them? To them becoming somebody who was like, Yeah, sure, I'll find somebody, it's a matter of time.

Heather L. Rendulic 47:03

It's 100% self-love. I mean, you just hit the nail on the head that I had to, you know, love myself for me, except to I am. And I just said, this is, this is me, like, I can't change my disability. Unfortunately, if I could snap my fingers, I would, but I can't. And I'm just going out there.

Heather L. Rendulic 47:27

And you know, somebody is either gonna take it or leave it. And you know what, that's okay. Like, if they want to leave it, because this is me, I can't change it. And this is who I am. And I think people wholeheartedly have to love themselves before they're able to allow others to love them. And to have that identity and to be your authentic self. You know, I think it's really important before going out and dating.

Bill Gasiamis 47:56

This is gonna be an interesting question for you, then you said you would if you could snap your fingers, you would change it so that you don't have your disability anymore. But the question is, would you do that? Would you really snap your fingers and change it and go back to the non-supposedly disabled person?

Heather L. Rendulic 48:19

That's a great question. Would I? No, I wouldn't because I don't want to take away what I went through. Because it has shaped me into who I am today. And I'm proud of that person. I am so proud of myself. Like, I, I mean, I have a long way to go in a lot of areas.

Heather L. Rendulic 48:47

But overcoming what I overcame is one of the things I'm proud of. And now would I make it maybe a little less disabled, but not fully yes? But I like to still have that reminder that you know, it was real and what I went through, it was tough. But, no, that's a great question.

Heather L. Rendulic 49:09

And it's funny, my husband is the same way with his hearing, he lost his hearing,

like as a baby, we think he's had it all he can remember and he wears hearing aids. But he's still you know, has a lot of trouble and it's, it's hard for him every day is hard in certain situations.

Heather L. Rendulic 49:27

But I've asked that question. Like, if you could snap your fingers and he's like, No, I wouldn't like to change it and this is just, you know, who I am well, he jokes that he likes to sleep too much. He likes to take his hearing aids out at night and he doesn't have to hear anything.

Heather L. Rendulic 49:43

He just sleeps like a baby so, no, I That's a great question. Because like, I am like, this doesn't define me but what I went through is just something such a part of who I am as my personality, my strength, you know, I don't think I would ever want to erase that.

Life Lessons In Cavernous Angioma Recovery

Bill Gasiamis 50:05

Yeah, think about it. I mean, if it wasn't? Well, let's not think about all the other possibilities of what things might have happened between the age of 22 for you and now, but say you hadn't had the stroke, you wouldn't have had that deep understanding of the dark times, the good times.

Bill Gasiamis 50:23

How to allow the dark times to present themselves and how to overcome them, and what lessons you need to learn from them, and all that kind of stuff, that all those lessons would have been yours to still learn at 32.

Bill Gasiamis 50:37

And it's like, oh, wow, like, I picked up a lot of these lessons when I was 22 when most of the time at 22 were ignorant to the majority of what life is about. And we think that the worst things that have happened to us, you know, happened to us when we were in high school or whatever, but we don't understand what else is to come in life, I was a data 21.

Bill Gasiamis 51:01

So at 21, I learned all the lessons that you have to about being frugal about working a little harder, you know, tightening your belt about the children about

keeping the food on the table, I had to learn that early. And it's kind of saved me from learning it in my 30s, or 40s, or whatever it was, that a lot of other people do.

Bill Gasiamis 51:26

And for me, what that taught me was that is better to learn the hard lessons early so that you have the wisdom of them later on in life when you're gonna need the wisdom. Like when you have a time stroke, you know, you need to draw on some previous life experiences to help you get through the challenges of a stroke and overcome the stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 51:54

So, I love throwing that question out there. But would you really because I've asked so many people that question, and very few of them say 110%? Yeah, I would get rid of it. And I wouldn't want to have the experience because most people even after a few years, or even months, but definitely after a decade can look back and go.

Bill Gasiamis 52:25

It shaped me I've grown, I've learned to lesson I've overcome I now know how to guide and advise other people who are going through something similar. So I love that that question made you think and hopefully it's making people listening and watching think as well about that, about what they can take out of it.

Bill Gasiamis 52:47

And sure if we can wind down with dialing down the disability part and the the tough days and make them a bit less tough. Yeah, I reckon I would do that too. But most of what I've learned has been useful. And even learning how to deal with that constant reminder of your left side doesn't do what it used to do differently.

Bill Gasiamis 53:12

Even learning how to deal with that and overcome that is a great thing to overcome, that's change that's been thrust upon me that I've got a manage because I didn't choose it. So I've got to learn how to just get on with it and still do my podcast and still do all the things that I want to do regardless and not let it get in my way.

Headstrong Through Life Love and Brain Surgery

By Heather L. Rendulic



Bill Gasiamis 53:33

So I imagine that those 10 years of lessons that you've learned have made for a very rich book, you've referred to a couple of times, and I want to ask you about the book. It's called Headstrong Through Life, Love, and Brain Surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 53:53

How did it come about? How did you get to the point where you decided you were going to write a book? It's a very common theme in the stroke survivor community, which I love.

Heather L. Rendulic 54:04

Yeah, I think it was within the first year after my show. My parents and I were talking and just we kind of it was I don't want to say it was a joke, but it was like a very, like light kind of statement.

Heather L. Rendulic 54:19

Oh, we should write a book. And, you know, but I couldn't do it at that time. I was so focused on my recovery. And I don't think, you know, mentally I could have handled the stress of writing a book.

Heather L. Rendulic 54:33

So it went on and you know, every year we would kind of just say in the background, maybe at a family dinner or something. And then I met a gentleman who's in Australia who helps people write books and Andrew Jobling, okay, he's he's written like eight or nine books now by himself he's a best-selling author

Heather L. Rendulic 54:59

He helps people write books. He's a speaker, a great guy. And we got connected through a mutual connection. And I was like, This is my sign that you know, I just need to do this because I learned so much about mindset about overcoming challenges that I wanted to help other people.

Heather L. Rendulic 55:25

Because, I mean, the truth is, we all go through challenges. You know, life sucks sometimes. But, you know, I talk about that my real motto is we can't control what happens to us, but what we can control is how we react to those situations. And I just wanted to get that out there.

Heather L. Rendulic 55:46

And then I started writing I mentioned earlier that my parents co-authored, they have a couple paragraphs at the end of each chapter giving their perspective, and I talked about not just my show I talked about how it's a true memoir, I talked about the beginning of my life, you know, to I talk about I went through severe depression and middle school. I even went through some self-mutilation.

Heather L. Rendulic 56:13

I talked about some relationships I had that I feel shaped me as a person early on. I you know, I mentioned my divorce, I talked about that. And obviously, the bulk of it is my strokes and the brain surgery, and then my recovery from that. And I just wanted to help people, you know, and that's where it was birthed out of.

Bill Gasiamis 56:40

Lovely place for it to come from. So Andrew Jobling is probably well known in Australia, not by me, but he was a team member of a football club in Victoria, which is football-mad, in the state of Victoria. And so Australia, really, the St Kilda Football Club.

Bill Gasiamis 57:03

And he's 57 years old now. So there'd be plenty of people that know of him. And he shifted from a football career to this interesting career, where he helps people with all sorts of things he says empowering you to live a life of joyful longevity.

Bill Gasiamis 57:26

He is an author, who has published eight books and is on a mission to inspire people to live a purposeful life of joyful longevity. He's also been a cafe owner and

a public speaker. Wow, what a guy.

Heather L. Rendulic 57:44

he's a busy guy, but he is the most down-to-earth person. So sweet. I, he's my mentor, I still talk to him. Even though my book was published, I did start writing my second book now. And I, you know, talk to him frequently. And he's, uh, he's part of my family. He did come over to the States to visit right before COVID head. We got to spend a week with him here and just all around great guy, anybody who's looking for a mentor in any way in their life, he's the person I would recommend.

Bill Gasiamis 58:21

Wow, that's pretty cool. So was it a long time? Did it take a long time to get the book complete and published, I'm talking about the writing and the creative part of the book.

Heather L. Rendulic 58:35

The writing took probably a year and a half, but I made it and something Andrew had taught me was to do a little bit each day. And some days, that was two words, some days, that was 1000 words, you know, it varied you know, based on where I was at.

Heather L. Rendulic 58:57

But I also kept like a notepad with me anywhere I went, because like, I would be at work or, I don't know, in a car and like something like an idea would hit me and I would have to jot it down so I didn't forget.

Heather L. Rendulic 59:12

It took some time, but it wasn't, it wasn't as long as I thought I thought working full time was gonna take forever. But doing a little bit each day helped. I got it done in about a year and a half. And then it took me about half a year to get a publisher. I didn't do a traditional publishing.

Heather L. Rendulic 59:31

So I did find a publisher. And that took some time and that was hard. Because, you know, I sent my book to my manuscript to a lot of different publishers and I got a lot of nos at first and you know, it, it was kind of deflating and you get worried like, Okay, well maybe, this isn't gonna get published and I just put all this work into it. And then you know, the right one comes along and It just worked

out beautifully.

There Are Many Ways To Succeed

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:03

Fantastic. Well, it just goes to show you, that it's about really putting your mind to something and just going for it. And then finding solutions as the problems come up. And you are just giving yourself another way to get to a successful outcome. I mean, if you haven't got in mind only one way to succeed, then you're most likely going to succeed.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:26

Because that's I think what lets me down, is if I choose that I've got one only way to succeed, then there are more chances that I'll fail at succeeding. But if I've got many ways to succeed, then that's fine as well, then, if one doesn't work out another one self-publishing is one of those ways to succeed in a book writing world where a publisher doesn't take up the book.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:48

Yes, it's a slightly different challenge. And it's a bit longer and it's harder, perhaps, and it's more expensive. I don't know what, but in the end, you can still publish a book, if that's the most important thing to you if you need to get it done.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:02

I love that. And, interestingly, you find all the people from all around the world, somebody so far away, on the other side of the planet in Australia. That's strange when you would thought there were plenty of people to support you just near where you are.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:01:21

Yes, it was, you know, nothing I would have expected. And like I said, I don't believe in coincidences, I believe God sent him to me. And he tells everybody and I want all your listeners to know that there is a book inside everyone.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:01:36

I mean, even if you haven't had a stroke, or, you know, it was your family member, there's always a story. And, you know, he helps all types of people. It's just amazing. And, I had no idea where to start. I think that what held me back for so many years, was I didn't know.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:01:58

I like to write People told me I'm good at writing emails. But I, you know, I don't sit and write for fun. But I've always liked writing like when I was in college. But you know, I never dreamed of being an author. It's not something I grew up saying, Oh, I'm going to be an author.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:02:18

But it was something that came from what I went through again, why would not erase it because then I wouldn't be sitting here as an author? But it's everybody has a story. And sometimes you have a story that somebody needs to hear.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:33

Yeah, I love that. If any of the aspiring authors out there don't know where to start, start by writing a lovely email to somebody and practice your emails, making them the most fantastic emails that ever existed.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:50

I love it. Well, thank you so much for being on the podcast Heather I appreciate it. We had a lovely chat, it was great to get to know you. I hope the book does well. I'll have links to your book your website and your Instagram for people who want to reach out or connect or find the book.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:08

They'll be able to do that. But if people are listening, and they haven't got a chance to check out the show notes, where is the best place for them to find you and your book?

Heather L. Rendulic 1:03:20

Well, my website is heatherheadstrong.com. And there is a link to my book on there, there's a contact form you can it'll get straight to my inbox so you can practice you're really good email.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:03:33

And I'd love to hear from anybody, my book is on Amazon and anywhere books are sold. There's an audio version as well if someone prefers to listen, rather than read, if somebody wants to reach out to me and get a signed copy of my book, I'd be happy to do that as well. So reach out. And Bill, I thank you so much for having me on. It's been a pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:58

And thank you for being on the podcast. I appreciate it and all the best with all your future projects.

Heather L. Rendulic 1:04:05

Oh, thank you very much.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:07

Well, thanks for listening to another episode of the Recovery after Stroke podcast, please like, share, give the episode a thumbs up if you're on YouTube comments, and leave some kind of interaction with the podcast, it'll help it rank better, and therefore be found easier by stroke survivors from all around the world.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:26

And hopefully, that'll make them have a slightly better stroke recovery than if they didn't find the podcast. Also, I love hearing from people so if you'd leave a comment, I will respond.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:38

I like getting feedback from people telling me what the podcast meant to you what the particular episode was that made a difference for you anything that you like, just feel free to reach out and let me know. Thanks so much for listening and I look forward to bringing you the next episode soon.

Intro 1:04:57

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Intro 1:05:14

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Intro 1:05:37

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Intro 1:05:51

Never delay seeking advice or disregard the advice of a medical professional, your doctor, or your rehabilitation program based on our content if you have any questions or concerns about your health or medical condition, please seek guidance from a doctor or other medical professional if you are experiencing a health emergency or think you might be, call triple zero if in Australia or your local emergency number immediately for emergency assistance or go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Intro 1:06:16

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