

# 126. Diabetes and Progressive stroke - Joe Cassaniti

Diabetes and progressive stroke - Joe Cassaniti sometimes didn't take his diabetes diagnosis seriously. The decision to stop taking his medication resulted in a brain stem, progressive pons stroke.

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Joe 0:00

This doctor called Dr. Charles. I called him over and I said, I feel like I'm going to pass out again. And he was looking at the machine I was wired to a machine there. And he said to me, Joe, your numbers look fine. And within a matter of seconds, I've crashed again.

Joe 0:21

So the doctors knew it was actually quite odd for them to have a conscious patient, telling them that I was going to pass out. So as the doctors did gather around, I remember Dr. Charles saying to all the other nurses and doctors if Joe tells you that he's gonna pass out, believe him because he'll tell you before the machines do.

Intro 0:49

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

## Introduction



Bill 1:02

Bill from [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) This is Episode 126. And my guest today is Joe Cassaniti. At the age of 48, Joe, a father of two and a husband, and a fresh pasta manufacturer experienced a progressive stroke in the pons area of his brainstem.

Bill 1:21

Now before we get started, if you have ever wondered what else I can do to help you with your stroke recovery, you should know that you can now get recovery after stroke coaching right from the comfort of your own home.

Bill 1:32

I too am a three-time stroke survivor and a brain surgery survivor. And I've built for you what I was missing when I was sent home from the hospital in the hope that you don't have to do stroke recovery as tough as I did.

Bill 1:43

Support packages give you access to a variety of tools 24 hours a day, seven days a week so that you can also work on other areas of stroke recovery, that you don't get the chance to at physical therapy or rehabilitation.

Bill 1:57

With tailored support available for less than \$8.50 per week, all recovery after stroke support packages will bring stroke recovery to you in the comfort of your own home to try out recovery after stroke support and see if it is right for you,



you will get the first seven days free, as well as a 30-day money-back guarantee no questions asked.

Bill 2:17

As a bonus, you will also get to face to face zoom support calls with myself to take your recovery to the next level. Go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/support](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/support) to sign up. It won't cost you anything for the first seven days and you will get a full refund. If you are not happy after 30 days. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. And now it's on with the show. Joe Cassaniti. Welcome to the podcast.

Joe 2:41

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Bill 2:43

My pleasure. Tell me a Joe a little bit about what happened to you?

Joe 2:48

And let's see, April 15 2019, my life changed forever, I was at home on a Sunday and I was with my wife doing some work if you do, and we were just sitting opposite of each other.

Joe 3:06

And she noticed that my speech wasn't the best. And I was struggling myself. And we kind of got to the point at the same time. But we didn't make anything of it. And I thought I was just tired because I was making some pasta the day before. So I went ahead and rest on the lounge and woke up again noticed that I lost my balance.

Joe 3:36

And i then said to Antoinette there is a problem, Antoinette is my wife by the way. I said let's go to the hospital because this is not right. And I'm not feeling at my best so my balance was a problem. My speech was a problem. So we went straight to RPA.

Bill 3:57

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney.

Joe 4:00

Yeah.

## Joe Cassaniti had no signs of stroke



Bill 4:02

And did you have up until that day that's Sunday did you have any signs now looking back? Obviously, this is the recovery after stroke podcast. So I know why you're here. I know that you had a stroke. Was there any signs leading up to that particular day? that something wasn't right? Did you feel off at all?

Joe 4:21

No. I felt okay. So as I mentioned Saturday I worked, Sunday morning, I'm at home and I was just doing some work on the computer on the dining table. And none, the other thing was that the stroke was incomplete. It was only just the start of the problem. There were several other complications which happened later on when I got in to hospital.

Bill 4:53

Okay, so how old were you?

Joe 4:58

48.

Bill 4:59

48 so you're in good health mostly. You're running your own business. It's a pasta business yeah?

Joe 5:10

Yeah, like fresh pasta.

Bill 5:11

What are your hours like? Before the April day in 2018, what were your hours like?

Joe 5:19

I was working Monday to Friday, I did do occasional Saturdays. And we were busy time. So I had to work Saturday to make some snocky and I went home that afternoon and got around the house. And the next day is yeah, but it's usually Monday to Friday. 7am to 5pm.

Bill 5:53

Yep. So what's going on with the rest of your life? Children, family, all that kind of stuff. What's that? Like?

Joe 5:59

I'm a dad of three boys. Matthew and Alex 22 years old. And little not so little is 18? And I work not far from home. So it's just a walk up the street for me to head to the pasta factory. And enjoy life.

Bill 6:25

Yeah, nice, man. So life is just a regular standard suburban life, a business kids around the place. Things are generally busy for people like us. Mostly there's things to do, there's people to keep happy, and there's deadlines to meet and all that kind of stuff. Are you the kind of guy that was looking after his health? Would you say that in your 48 years up until then, were you the type of guy that was paying attention to your health and well being?

Joe 6:58

That would be a bit negative. I didn't because time pressures, being complacent, I was diagnosed as a diabetic when I was 30. And I thought I was invincible. So I wasn't really proactive in looking after my diabetes. My diabetes is a little awkward. It's not exactly type two. And it's not type one, but I'm tablet and insulin dependent.

Joe 7:35

So I was being a cheeky boy and not taking my insulin when I'm supposed to. So I ran ridiculous sugar levels. And so the stroke is brought on by my carelessness with my health. For me, everything else was going on in my life, my family, my business. So I didn't get much of a chance to look after myself.

Bill 8:03

What is it with that Joe? Because you've got time to do all that other stuff. But put a tablet in your mouth and swallow it. You don't have time to do that. What do you think is going on in your head to say, I've got no time for that?

Joe 8:20

Well, I thought I was invincible truly. I thought I was invincible. I never ever thought that I would have a stroke. I didn't know you could get a stroke from out of control diabetes, we learned a little too late.

Bill 8:41

So that's interesting. So what did you know that could happen about your diabetes? So if left untreated and you weren't on top of it? What were the risks of diabetes? Did you have any idea?

Joe 8:52

Sight, neuropathy, obviously drinking a lot of water. I just wasn't aware that I could put myself at risk of having a stroke.

## **What is neuropathy - Joe Cassaniti**

Bill 9:10

So what's neuropathy?

Joe 9:13

Neuropathy means you start to lose sensation in your extremities, so your feet, your eyes, and your hands. So it's just losing sensation.

Bill 9:26

Did you ever find that you experienced any of that stuff while you were not taking your medication?

Joe 9:31

Look, I did. It was mostly my vision. But it fixed itself after I took insulin. So it wasn't that I wasn't taking my medication. I just wasn't taking it regularly.

Bill 9:46

How long would you say was the time when you're being slack on it? That you weren't taking it regularly?

Joe 9:53

Well, there was a time that I was really looking after my health. I go to a gym. I love lifting weights. I kind of kept my sugars at bay, I was being active physically, and that helps with lowering sugars.

Joe 10:10

But look, it would get between two and three months that I've been on and off, and then I'll be religious back on. And you can't have highs and lows, because that's even more dangerous.

Bill 10:27

Yeah. Did you find that time when you were religious, was it less business going on in your life? Was there less deadlines, less things to achieve? Or did somehow your mindset changed that allowed you to be more on your game?

Joe 10:44

Look, the business was always there. And I was constantly thinking about work. Even at home, I'd be going home wondering what items we need to make next day, customers placing large orders.

Joe 11:04

So you would have busy days, you would have not so busy days, so on not so busy days, or probably pay more attention to my health. You know what, getting up at six o'clock in the morning, sometimes I go down to the gym trying to beat and then hit back into work.

Bill 11:24

Yeah, I know that type two diabetes is very much responsive in a positive way to weight bearing exercises. So even if you're not trying to make muscle or, you know, become Arnold Schwarzenegger, you will get a really good result by converting that energy from sugar into energy to go into the muscles, so the muscles can actually lift the weight, right.

Bill 11:49

So I know that's really good for you. And usually with type two diabetics, they say, change your diet now the science around that is shifting because previously, it was just a what you're eating and just take your insulin shot. But now we know that diet is really important. So if you are on a lower carbohydrate diet, that supports, keeping blood sugar's low, now you're making pasta every day.

Bill 11:52

Actually, this is the point Bill, when I was first diagnosed as a diabetic, the doctor said to me, you gotta watch your carb intakes, your bread, your pastas, I think he forgot that A I'm Italian. B I'm a pasta maker. And C, my parents are bread makers.

Bill 12:44

Oh my gosh.

Joe 12:45

For me, it was an impossible task from the start.

Bill 12:49

Now, I know what you're saying. Like you don't say that lightly. When you say it was an impossible task. You don't say it lightly. Because I remember when I was told by an awesome naturopath here in Melbourne, I was taught to go gluten free. It was kind of like you're testing my history, my lineage, my life for every single day of my life until the age of 37.

Bill 13:18

You're questioning my identity, like, What do you mean? Go gluten free? Does that mean I don't get to a bread? What am I going to eat instead? Yeah. And there was this idea in my mind that if I'm not eating bread, that there's some weird part of my life missing because when I go to my mom's house, or any relative's house.

Bill 13:41

There's a pile of bread on the table all the time, and you're supposed to slap everything on it, you know, whether it's whether you're making a little tomato, beautiful thing, you know, with oregano and olive oil or putting butter on there, or whether you're putting cheese on there, it doesn't matter.

Bill 13:59

It goes with everything, whether you're wiping up the source from the pasta, it doesn't matter. Bread goes with every single thing, right? And it was a really difficult thing for me to comprehend, not only to actually take action on what she said, but to actually comprehend what that meant. What do you mean I've got to stop it? What does that actually mean for my life?

Bill 14:20



And then I would go to my parents house. And Dad would say why aren't you eating bread here have some bread. The nutritionist taught me not to, what do you mean the nutritionist taught you not? What the hell does that mean? And that was really difficult. So I imagine for you it was at least 300 or 400 or 100 times harder.

Joe 14:44

It was. Being in business, and also the fact that I eat pasta every day. You know, I've been making pasta for 26 years, and I am not sick of it. I enjoy eating pasta. Got my favorites, and I'll stick to those. But we don't go a day at the table without eating pasta, whether it's made with a bolognese source, or a ravioli or tortellini.

Joe 15:17

So there's always pasta on my dinner table. But what I've learned is to match the portions. So I'm not a big pasta eater. Like you know, when I was single, I lived at home with my mom, the plates would be so cool that that'd be overflying.

Joe 15:38

And you'd have to be careful with the floor because the pasta on the outside of the plate, but at home I'll probably have four or five ravioli and Antoinette usually cooks the protein. So some awesome chicken, even some fish. So I balance it out now.

Bill 15:59

Yeah, I know, I remember those. Going home to my mom's place, and just having a bowl of spaghetti with a beautiful sauce. And then half a loaf of bread to wipe up the sauce. Man, and it was delicious. It was everything that you could ever wish for, you know. And then you associate that deliciousness that love that connection with your mom and your family.

Bill 16:29

All that gets associated to this bowl of food. And it's more than a conversation about we need to stop eating carbs. We need to find a new way to relate to our family and our friends and our loved ones when we're told to stop eating bread or stopping pasta, it's a real complex situation.

Bill 16:53

So you're the stereotypical Italian guy. When people from a Greek background like me teased an Italian guy in the schoolyard. You know, when we were growing

up, I used to say, go eat a bowl of pasta mate. And then the Italian guys would say to me go eat a souvlaki.

Bill 17:13

And we were supposed to be doing that to give people a hard time. But the truth is, eating a souvlaki is amazing. eating a bowl of pasta was amazing. It was hardly a way to give somebody a hard time.

## **Complacency led to Progressive stroke**



Joe 17:25

Yeah, it is. I mean, it's part of our diet. And I mean, going back to diabetes. Look, it is one of the most manageable disease. And you don't know how many people get it wrong, myself included. I think it has a lot to do with complacency, you know, day to day life.

Joe 17:51

But the great thing about the disease is there are a lot of technological advances these days. So they make measuring sugar a lot easier. So I've got a device that is on my arm, that a waveline on phone, and you tell me what my sugar is at any one time. So I can give myself the amount of insulin that I need. \

Joe 18:18

And the great thing is it keeps the history. So if my doctor needs to see what my sugars are like, he or she can log into my account and observe the results. So there are advancements, you know, delivery of insulin these days, especially for

type one diabetics.

Joe 18:42

Diabetes, New South Wales keep devices to automatically deliver insulin into your body. When you need it, you just total the amount and you don't have to check. So management of diabetes has come a long way.

Bill 18:59

Tell me about the device that's on your hand because I have seen them before. And I know you attach it for a little bit of time. So it's there for quite a time and then you replace it every so often. Tell me about the whole process to that.

Joe 19:12

Well the device isn't cheap. For starters, it's a \$99 sensor, and it only lasts for two weeks. There is a fine wire that sits under the skin that's in contact with blood 24 seven, it only keeps results for two weeks, it expires after two weeks.

Joe 19:36

So you do need to have another one replaced. The great thing about our country is that we have the NDIS now because I have a disability and I can't use my right hand to measure my sugar properly. I get this device as I thought was cool, but it comes to me in a second. But it's an aid to assist people that have disability and the NDIS pays for it.

Bill 20:10

Yeah, the National Disability Insurance Scheme. That's a pretty cool thing. And when you wave your phone over it, it's connected to an app?

Joe 20:20

It is on my phone, I've got the app that comes with the sensor. And it gives me a graph of how my sugars are going, little lights will turn red, if my sugars are too high or too low, and yeah, just keeps the history so that the doctors can see how I'm going.

Bill 20:43

Seeing that data, real time for you, is that really helpful for you to know okay, swallow the pill, take the insulin is that better than what it was way back whenever you're being slack?

Joe 20:57

It's funny how things change poststroke. Because you do pay more attention to your health. As I mentioned, there was some complacency there. But after my stroke, I was told that, you know, I could have another stroke, if I continue with the course of action that I'm taking at the moment without looking after my sugar. So I measure my sugar three to four times a day. I take my insulin I take my tablets. So I plan to live for a very long time.

Bill 21:32

Good to hear man. And doing that now doesn't really interfere into your life, because you can measure your sugar anywhere. You can give yourself insulin anywhere you can, there's no place where you can't do it, for example, is there?

Joe 21:48

Anywhere I want, and that was part of the reasoning behind the National Disability Insurance Scheme, giving the device to me because I can't measure my sugar, say standing up because of balance problems. I'm not able to use my hand properly, so all these reasons was for this device for me to wear it.

Bill 22:17

Yeah, to make it easy. Awesome. Now tell me a little bit about gonna take you into that place a little bit about the day that it happened. And then after that, because I want to get a feeling for what you guys were going through.

Bill 22:29

And whether you were cognitively affected, or whether you were completely aware of what was happening to you. How did the day play out? You started to feel unwell then you went to hospital? And then what happened after that?

Joe 22:48

I didn't know I was having a stroke. So all the usual stuff like facial droop. It wasn't happening. So I walked into hospital. It was only when I sat down that everybody was rushing. The nurses knew what was going on. But I wasn't aware I started to lose movement in my right arm just felt heavy, not that I've lost control of it just started to feel real heavy.

# Joe Cassaniti had a progressive stroke

Joe 23:24

I have what you call a progressive stroke. So it didn't happen all at once. It happened between three and four days. The third day was the worst. So after I was taken into emergency, they didn't make it a stroke or my stroke was in the brainstem. So it wasn't able to be picked up on a CT scan.

Joe 23:55

So for days, they didn't know where but they had an idea that it wasn't on the CT scan and perhaps it might be on the brainstem. So they did a an MRI scan. This was after I became paralyzed. I was totally paralyzed on one side. And they took me down to the MRI machine.

Joe 24:22

I suffered from claustrophobia. So that was question number one that they asked me so I kindly asked them for a blindfold. And they put me into the machine for quite a while. And then they found where there stroke occurred in the pons area of the brain. So paralyzed on one side and then complications with look, I think it's called bradycardia.

Bill 25:00

Bradycardia. Low heart rate.

Joe 25:08

Yeah. So because I've said it quite a few nerves going around my body, my brain wasn't making contact with my heart. So look, I was quite fortunate because the first time it happened to me, I had a doctor in front of me, I had my wife to one side, I was in bed in a ward.

Joe 25:30

And doctor was in front of me. And I started to explain to the doctor that I was feeling a little queasy, I felt like I was gonna pass out. And he said, it's not a problem, you're in a bed, nothing's going to happen to you. Within a matter of seconds, I close my eyes. I thought I've reopened them, but I was out for a little while.

Joe 25:56

The same had changed for me, my wife wasn't beside me anymore. And I had a

bunch of doctors and nurses around me somebody hit the emergency button, I think it was Dr. Collin, that did. And when I did open my eyes, I think he looked more pale than me because he was a training doctor and a lovely, lovely guy, too.

Joe 26:20

I felt so sorry for him. When I did wake up, because I thought I'd just close my eyes and open them up after a while. So they took me down to ICU after that. It did happen several times in in ICU. So they decided to put in a my arm and start delivering adrenalin.

Joe 26:48

And Isoprenaline. And as my heart rate came down, the nurses would pop up the adrenaline for me to keep my heart rate up. The great thing about where I was situated in ICU was there was needy desk, where all the doctors and nurses were at. So if I wanted to grab their attention, I could and I did and one occasion.

Intro 27:24

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. Like how long will it take to recover? Will I actually recover? What things should I avoid in case I make matters worse?

Intro 27:41

Doctors will explain things that obviously, 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 [recovery after stroke.com](http://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 28:07

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](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide. It's free.

Joe 28:26

starter code Dr. Charles I called him over I said, I feel like I'm gonna pass out again. And he was looking at the machine knows what to a machine there. And he

said to me, Joe, your numbers look fine wrist, and within a matter of seconds, I've crashed again. So the doctors knew and was actually quite odd thing to have a conscious patient telling me that he was it I was gonna pass out. So as the doctors did gather around, I remember Dr. Charles saying to all the other nurses and doctors, if Joe tells you that he's gonna pass out believe him because he'll tell you before the machines.

Bill 29:13

Man that is absolutely nuts. So was that traumatic for you? And what was happening every time you were opening your eyes again? How did that make you feel? What were you thinking about? What were you worried about?

Joe 29:27

To tell you the truth, I thought I was going to die. A lot of people beside me in beds, I was in an area in the neurological section so I had a priest on one side of the bed giving somebody the last rites. Another guy in the other side of the bed had to have his skull opened.

Joe 29:58

So thought I was gonna die. You know, I really thought I was gonna die. But by the grace of God, I'm still me today, and it changed me. I was already a happy go lucky guy before the stroke, but I think my son put it really well, when he said dad after your stroke, you grew a personality.

Joe 30:30

I didn't know whether to take offense to it. But look, I was even more of a clown after the stroke. In fact, look, he was down in hospital, it was really boring. And people knew who I was. So I've spoken to people about my business, and the nurses, they said, we want to come to the bypass, I'd be entertaining them and telling them jokes, when I really should have been resting.

Joe 31:04

So it was great that I had that and the nurses, the doctors were great. I don't recommend having a stroke to anybody ever, so definitely look after your health. Because you only get one chance.

Bill 31:25

I know what you're saying about the blessing of having your ability to make a joke and laugh and talk to people in all of that. I know a lot of stroke survivors in the

early part of their recovery they don't have that yet. Because they're out of it. And I was out of it a couple of times, because I had three bleeds. And then I had surgery. The second bleed was pretty dramatic.

Bill 31:48

It's the one that took away my ability to remember things and who came to visit me and my wife's name and my ability to drive and work and all that kind of stuff. The first blade was just just created numbness on my left side. So I was able to talk exactly as I am now even walk and move, it was all fine. The fourth, the third blade basically created more of the numbness.

Bill 32:15

And then the surgery created the ability for me not to walk again. And then I had to learn how to walk again and use my arm again. But it was only the second blade that took away my personality and my ability to be me. Yeah. Whereas the other ones didn't.

Bill 32:31

And that contrast later, I think made it easier for my family and friends when they come to visit. Yeah, my you know, he's still a smarter, so we still had no, all that stuff was still there. And that was good for them. So what what's your wife going through? Has she given you some information about what the experience was like for her?

## **Mental Scars caused by Progressive stroke**

Joe 32:58

Well, she was fortunate to be able to film some of my time in ICU. So I look at the video clips and the way I spoke because my speech was greatly affected. So I've come a long way from sitting in ICU for two weeks, not moving to now where people have to tell me to sit down and shut up.

Joe 33:32

So it's a big difference. She said, I scared a lot of people, myself included. Scars Yeah, there are a lot of scars, but they're not physical scars. They're more mental scars. I had problems with my memory. And I need to be able to have a memory of work. And I know I suffer a lot with my short term memory.

Joe 34:03



Sometimes I don't get my words out, right. I had to do speech therapy for saying a few words. And I needed to be able to greet somebody on the phone at work. So it was good morning pips faster. Good afternoon. pips faster and getting the two words with a P was a struggle for me.

Joe 34:33

So I did have a rehab center that that is a speech therapy with me. But thank God, you know, I improved so I can speak well. I'm Tia and I do tend to forget words. And I get unstuck day because it becomes frustrating because I don't remember the word that I want to say definitely is a struggle and the physical struggles, answering your phone and writing down an order.

Joe 34:33

The great thing that the NDIS is keeping an ephah. So it frees my my left hand to be able to speak to customers on the phone and take orders down. I've gone a little backwards when it when it comes to what I can and can't do with that is because of my hands, making passwords a physical thing.

Joe 35:39

So to be able to wherever all your machines will fettuccine off the machine is a struggle for me. But the great thing about my business is that I have trained staff there. So I spent three months in the hospital. And, you know, the guys that work, my head Pastor Mike and Mike, my administration lady, they just took over the business and treated like their own.

Joe 36:08

So I was just concentrating on recovering. And when I went into work, maybe a few days a week, but she spent most of the time with me in hospital. So it's great that I have those people there that can do those things. And so now I do a lot of nothing upstairs in the office, in an airconditioned office

Bill 36:30

Playing solitaire?

Joe 36:34

Not quite. But, I had some phase I did some batter entry. So I had to change the way I work. But I know one day, I'll be paying for it. If my hand doesn't improve, and I am making improvements. In my hand, I attend rehab twice a week. And I do physio therapy once a week.

Joe 37:06

So I'm very active on my rehab. And over the past few months, I've been able to do things that I haven't been able to do in the past simple things like using knife or being able to move my wrists being able to lift my arm.

Joe 36:34

And if I restart, and open and close my fingers. And again, it's all thanks to technology termination. There's a little device that I was given in hospital and I was one of the first people in in rehab to use an is called cider glove.

Bill 37:50

I interviewed the guys that make the glove.

Joe 37:52

You did? You have to thank them for me because I believe a lot of my recovery was because of that device. Because the chains attached to my fingers. It helped me to open my hands I was picking up balls and releasing them into a bucket. And that was a part of my therapy day in day out.

Joe 38:15

The great thing about it was that when I was released from the rehab hospital, I went straight into the public system. And there's a I think it's called stroke outreach, and they also bought the device. So I continued my therapy at Rockland Safra. So it was great to have that continuation, as well as doing task specific types of things like as a segment using the knife.

Bill 38:51

Britain man, you talked about earlier talked a little bit about the mental scars. Is there emotional scars?

## **Emotional Scars**

Joe 39:02

Very much so. I find it hard sometimes to use the right emotions. So an example I'm at a funeral I'll be having a smile on my face because I can't control that smile. And if I'm having an argument with someone, I'm laughing or smiling and it's the wrong use of emotion, but it's something that I cannot control.

Joe 39:35

So I annoy people when I argue with them and I'm smiling while I'm arguing with them. So they get mixed signals and that's frustrating because I managed to piss them off.

Bill 39:51

So is that something Joe? You are able to be angry before in an argument and you were able to be so at a funeral like, that's new to you. This is like a switcheroo of your emotion.

Joe 40:08

Sad movies, I cry. And I never used to, before the stroke, I'd be a tough one in the family and, you know, my boys and Antoinette would be crying on any sad movie. So now I'm crying.

Bill 40:33

But you laugh at a funeral or you smile at a funeral? What's that?

Joe 40:36

Yeah. It's because I can switch off that that facial signal, that smile or the emotion so I'm not sure what it is. But it's a bag of mixed emotions. I cry at work, and I never cry at work.

Bill 41:01

What do you cry over? because I cried and still do for me it's nearly been next year will be nine years, February will be nine years since the first bleed. So what do you cry about?

Joe 41:14

I cry that I see people using two hands on the keyboard. And I remember I was mad. I mean, it wasn't spectacular, but it was 35 words a minute. And I cry that I cry that I see my staff, maning the pasta machine, and I can't.

Joe 41:38

And when serving customers in the shop, to open a plastic bag. And to put product in it for me was a struggle, and I'm getting better. But that made me sad. I suppose the worst was you're probably not going to like me after this, but I spent three months in hospital. So I wanted to get out. So I decided with my family and I were going to Italy two weeks after getting out of hospital I already spent three months in the hospital against doctor's orders.

Joe 42:20

The reason why I had to travel was to buy a new pasta machine. Although in hindsight, it would be better to keep the old one because the old one is slower. And I could manage it a lot better. So this new finishing machine does 50 kilos per hour. So I went to Italy spent a couple of weeks there. I actually got the best rehab in Italy. So warping streets of Rome.

Joe 42:46

There's cobblestones, and because I have some issues, had some issues with my dorsiflexion having the cobblestones they made me lift my foot, and hyak. So I got better quicker. And I did some steps while I was walking the street subprime. But the reason why I say that is because the machine is now here in Australia, in my past the factory. We're operating it and it's a beautiful machine. But I can't use it. And that makes me sad.

Bill 43:25

Yeah, it was a good reason to go overseas, though. When I was in Rome after my own stroke. But it probably took me about five years to get there about a year after my surgery. We did all those cobblestone streets and we walked for 10 hours a day. Yeah. And like you man, it was really good rehab because it built my stamina and my fitness was up back.

Bill 43:54

And really gently while I was being distracted by these beautiful things in Rome. And I suppose I had the same opportunity in Melbourne in Australia. But I didn't do that here. I just stayed at home here for some weird reason. But of course, when you're in Rome, there's no you're silly to be in Rome and go nowhere and do nothing.

Joe 44:15

You want to be out and see things.

Bill 44:17

Yeah. So and there's only one way to see it. And that's by walking. There's no point driving anywhere. We did exactly the same thing. So I really appreciate what you said about being in a different place. And then using that different place as a reason to have real subtle therapy. And experience a culture difference and all that type of thing. And I'm not saying that you have to travel like you and I do.

I don't know how many thousands of miles is it to get the one.

Joe 44:52

We were originally supposed to get a Canberra. That was the discussion. I remember we were sitting as a family in a Chinese restaurant fresh at a hospital. And I'm saying to my wife, I've been in hospital too long. Let's go Canberra. And from that discussion, it went straight to Italy. And I kid you, not my wife and I, within two days of deciding, we're on a plane with my sons. And to me, that's how knee jerk reaction, it was for us two days, and we're on the plane.

Bill 45:32

Man, that's cool. I know that a lot of people can't do that. But from the point of view of, you know, how can we make this story useful for the people that have had a stroke, just go to another state that takes you an hour to get to or two hours to get to. And use it as an opportunity to learn something new if you can, and find a way to get there.

Bill 45:55

Even if you're in an electric scooter. Even if you know you're not totally mobile, do something somewhere else where your brain is preoccupied with amazing things. And you're not paying attention to the rehabilitation, it's such a great way to do it. And I wouldn't recommend traveling 16,000 kilometers, or 9950 miles.

Joe 46:19

And it's the best distraction, you know, you cannot sit at home. And I put us, you know, especially at a hospital. And I remember the first few days feeling sorry for myself about you know, what had happened to me, I still wasn't walking properly, I wasn't confident in leaving the hospital. In fact, I was one of the very few that would have preferred to stay in the arena, a bit more.

Joe 46:23

But I still had the gait belt on and, and wheelchair a onto a plane. But instead of feeling sorry for myself, at home, I was app seeing the world because I was stuck at home sitting watching TV, you know, I was walking and that contributes a lot to me getting better. And I want to make 100% recovery. And now it's been two years already. And there's been lots of recovery. But I want to get back to normal. I want to be 100%

# Healthier than ever after a Progressive stroke



Bill 47:33

Yeah, why not? Man, that's a great thing to aim for. I know that some people get frustrated with that term that I'm going to be 100%. But I can't use my arm or I can't use my leg. So for me, I can't feel my left side the same as I used to, it's never going to change when I get fatigued. It always goes to sleep before my right side, it always means that when it gets fatigued, I bump into the doorway on the left.

Bill 47:58

It means all sorts of things. But I am healthier now than I have ever been. I feel like I am 100% even though I have this ongoing feeling on my side and fatigue. Yeah, like maybe at the end of the day after a really long day, or after a really hot day. And maybe I haven't hydrated properly.

Bill 48:19

But I'm 100% and people find that strange because that's what I say to them I am that doesn't mean that my leg works perfectly or my arm works perfectly. It just means that I'm 100% healthy, and back to normal. And I do what I can do. And my body has a really good way of reminding me, I've done too much.

Bill 48:43

It says we can't do any more your left side is going to go weak now and you need to sit down and you need to rest and that is a tool that I never had before. Do you. You listen to your body now does it give you a lot of signals?

Joe 48:57

I do. I see it I feel it. Unfortunately, others don't. So by seven o'clock, you know I'd be feeling really tired. I feel fatigued and I'd use my balance. So you know people don't see fatigue. And that's the one sad thing because um, fatigue plagues me and it plays with my back my balance and you know I hit a run into walls, and I hurt myself I don't believe I've got a lot of scratches on my on my feet on my arm because I feel tired in the afternoon and all I want to do is sleep.

Joe 49:47

There is medication for it. And although it does help me, I find that when the medication wears off, I get this feeling of anxiety so don't particularly like to take it. And I really need to So, and that's the drug called modafinil. So I've used that to keep me alert in when I've had to be awake for longer than normal. But these days, I'm indeed by nine o'clock at night.

Joe 50:23

And people wonder why is it going so well, and it's because the fatigue that, you know, obviously, they don't see. But I feel because I can't walk properly, I lose my balance, I've fallen over a few times, because I'm that tired, that I won't need my my foot properly. So that is a problem for me.

Bill 50:48

Yeah, it does get better fatigue does get better, one of the things that you'll find is that it's similar to a muscle, the more you push it and go over the limit, the more it comes up, you become better at it. Yeah, and I'm not saying that you should push it and crash to the point of no return.

Bill 51:11

Because sometimes I used to push it and fatigue would take me a day or two to ever come back then you know. Whereas now if I just go and have a good sleep, then I'm fine. And I'm in bed, even nine years after stroke, if I wake up at 6:30 or seven o'clock in the morning, some days, I can be in bed by 9:30 10 o'clock, because I just the body's shutting the brain shutting down and I just need to rest it. Yeah. And it takes a while but people get used to you being in bed a bit earlier. It takes a while.

Joe 51:49

A The other issue I had, I mean living so close to work, I do get tired quite easily.

So midday, one o'clock on night come home and call it a day. And I'll go to bed for an hour. So wake up and feel refreshed and tackle the afternoon.

Bill 52:12

It sounds like the business could run completely without you though. You need to be there for other reasons other than just because it's there's an order coming through. Right? It just seems like there's more to it for you than just selling pasta.

Joe 52:26

It is I mean, I'm attached to my business. It's, I began the business in 1993. But I've also had a major shift in that I wouldn't mind retirement. And the only thing that's stopping me from resign is income. But given the opportunity, oh, consider selling my business. I have a hobby at home that I thought I would never ever take up and that garden. I was hopeless gardener, I did not agree.

Joe 53:09

And that would be to my father's disgust because he grew his veggies in his backyard. Tomato broth, beans. And I don't grow things. But I've taken on succulents. And guess what, it's good therapy, potting moving plants around watering and taking weeds out. So I'm learning to keep my balance and to use my hands to plant into pots.

Bill 53:48

You'll probably sell the past a business and then turn your hobby into a succulent business.

Joe 54:01

Yeah, I definitely would do that.

Bill 54:07

It's written all over your face, man. I could see it.

Joe 54:10

What is it? Is it the commercialist in me? I mean, the entrepreneur in me?

Bill 54:16

It's just you don't do anything by half. So I know exactly the type of guy you are. I'm a similar kind of guy, you know, I'm looking at.

Joe 54:23



I can't be sitting around. My dad, was 83 three before he retired and sold the bakery. So It kept him healthy. And I was having this discussion with a friend of mine yesterday that's being active and even playing crosswords or reading a book. It keeps the mind active. So I want to keep active.

Bill 55:03

The last few weeks and month or so, so we're recording this in mid December 2020. The last in Victoria in Australia, you know, we've had a really tough time and being at home doing nothing because of the Coronavirus for the best part of six months has been really tough on people.

Bill 55:22

And it really paints a picture of what life would be like for me, if I had nothing to do all day, every day, if I was at home doing nothing, and had no hobbies, and no passions and all that kind of thing. And somebody passed away about a month and a half ago, and she was my counselor that I'd been seeing for 20 years.

Bill 55:45

So we had moved beyond the relationship of counselor, I go there to be fixed by my counselor for my issues, you know, in my head. It was like that person, that wise woman that you go to for lifelong advice that she's been on the planet for a long time, and she knows things to teach me to pass down to my kids, you know, that was the kind of relationship we had.

Bill 56:11

And one of the things I was never able to find out Joe, in the time that I saw her was her age, because it's rude to ask some women their age, and I asked her once and she shut me down. Unfortunately, when she passed away, I discovered her age. And that was at the funeral, she was 82 years old and still working as a psychologist in her practice, every day, helping people.

Bill 56:43

And for me, that was so inspiring to hear that, regardless of her, ill health or the issues that she had, she rocked up to work every single day, and it kept her healthier, and living longer than if she had just stayed at home doing nothing waiting for the illnesses to go away or whatever it was, you know.

Bill 57:04

So hearing your dad's story is similar to me, it's that perhaps it had moved on for

your dad, it had gone beyond being about making money and all that cause it became about a passion and became about meeting people and seeing people and giving them their bread and having conversations.

Bill 57:23

And your succulent business is going to become that for you, you know, the thing that you do that's not really about money, it's about passion and a process that you've got to get through to get to an end point. And the end point is whatever you want it to be, it's actually the succulent is just the thing that gets the job done to get you feeling a certain way.

Bill 57:46

And now being cheeky and saying that you're going to turn it. But you know what I mean, for me, I don't see myself as ever retiring from anything. If I'm not doing the physical work, I'm like you I'm gonna find a bolt to sell something to somebody just for the sake of selling it not for any other reason.

Joe 58:05

That's right, I think it's an hour. But I mean, I've been very fortunate that I've had staff work with me for so long, that they know how to run a business. And that was one of the first thing I learned in, in business was to be able to put people in position positions where they decide how things go, and then the power to make the decisions. So I can't pick up and I can walk away.

Joe 58:41

But the thing is, I don't want to because you know, there's a 400 meter walk to work. That doesn't mean it will be the good there's a 20 stairs that I've got a walk up to go into my office that has made a world of food. So talking to people having lunch with people communicating, living normal life, I don't think I could stay at home. You know, I live in a I live in in Western Sydney.

Joe 59:13

There are a lot of cafes, friends stop by at work. They come and say they'll take me out for a coffee. And I enjoy that. It's not like it's it's pressuring me I am at that point in my life where I don't need to grow the business I can keep at this pace. So I'm happy to continue at this pace for a little bit longer.

Bill 59:41

Yeah, sounds like a good thing to do, man. Tell me about the pastor. If people

wanted to buy your pastor, where would they go?

Joe 59:49

Well if you live in them in Sydney, we're in a beautiful federation suburb called haberfield. And the business is called Peppe's pasta. And we're on Ramsey strip in haberfield. We've been there a very long time. And we've won a few awards as you can see.

Joe 1:00:13

So we enter the roll agricultural societies fine food show every year. Last year, we were fortunate enough to get a gold medal and also the most successful exhibitor at the show. So we're really proud of that. So it's a quality product. I do have to say, okay, it really hasn't affected us, there was a problem with supermarkets running out of pasta.

Joe 1:00:42

And we do have a couple of supermarkets around us. So a lot of customers filled into our store and began buying fresh pasta, they liked it, and then are continually buying it. So we haven't and I know a lot of businesses have passed that hasn't been one of those businesses.

Bill 1:01:08

That have struggled her, you guys selling staples, and people want to eat pasta to feel better during a look down because pasta really makes you feel warm in the heart and all that type of thing.

Joe 1:01:22

It does and, you know, a lot of people did take up pasta making and bread making at home. Breadmaking is not so difficult to try (inaudible). If you get the consistency wrong, you might as well for the (inaudible). And so people do try and they may give up and say, okay.

Bill 1:01:48

And if you're not a grandmother, you know who's been making it for 57 years, you probably got no hope of making really. Your shoulder, it's gonna be a struggle isn't it?

Joe 1:02:03

Took me a very long time.

Bill 1:02:06

Yeah. So you guys are on Instagram and Facebook and all that kind of stuff where will people be able to find you?

Joe 1:02:14

So if you look at Peppe's Pasa. And you find us on Facebook. Same for Instagram. You can call us the numbers are on our pages. We, but one of our most popular products is the lasagna. And we can kind of make it happen. And we do a family sized designer that helps people that don't want to cook so. And it is a very, very nice.

Bill 1:02:48

Yeah. And do you sell online?

Joe 1:02:52

And we're currently doing our website. So that should be up in the next week. We're finalizing some photography this week. And hopefully by Friday, we'll be done. And but you can get in contact with us through Instagram.

Bill 1:03:08

Brilliant, mate Joe. It's been a real pleasure getting to meet you and getting to know you and learning a little bit about your story. I'm so glad you reached out I really connected with you when you sent me that first Facebook message.

Bill 1:03:20

And I thought this is a guy that we definitely have to have on the podcast. And now that lockdown is over and I love coming to Sydney. I am definitely going to come past and have a plate of pasta with you. Even though I'm gluten free.

Joe 1:03:34

You are more than welcome and I guarantee you will not be leaving empty handed we have a saying and I'll say this in my dialect, (speaks Italian) which means with me, you'll never go hungry.

Bill 1:03:53

I look forward to it man thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Intro 1:04:00

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Intro 1:04:27

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Intro 1:04:49

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Intro 1:05:11

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Intro 1:05:31

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