

From 5% Chance Of Survival To Published Author - Ricky Monahan Brown

Ricky Monahan Brown's blood pressure had a reading above 300 over 200 and he was given a 5% chance of survival after a catastrophic brain hemorrhage in 2012. He wrote a book about his ordeal simply titled Stroke.

Instagram

Sandstone Press

Highlights:

02:26 Introduction

06:09 A Hemorrhagic Stroke

08:07 High Blood Pressure

13:50 A Dramatic Turnaround

19:56 The Importance of Having A Goal

27:11 US Healthcare System

42:22 The Power of Being Yourself.

51:21 Stroke a 5% Chance of Survival

58:49 Give Luck A Chance To Hit

Transcription:

Ricky Monahan Brown 0:00

One of the most tragic things that continue to happen under their system is that people who are fortunate enough to survive life-threatening experiences, whether that be a stroke or cancer or whatever, they find themselves getting through that, and then being released and being hit with these bills. And there are just terrifying numbers of people who then end up going into medically related bankruptcy.

Intro 0:43

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

recovery after a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 0:55

Hello, and welcome to episode 216 of the Recovery after Stroke podcast if you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience with a stroke, and you have been thinking about reaching out to be a guest on the show but we're waiting for the right time, this is it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10

If you go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact, you'll find a form that you can fill out to apply to be a guest on the show. Now when I say apply, everyone who applies to be a guest of the show gets on, no application process is difficult.

Bill Gasiamis 1:25

If you've had a stroke, or you care for somebody who's had a stroke, or you know somebody who's had a stroke, you will qualify to be on the show. Now as soon as I receive your request, I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over Zoom.

Bill Gasiamis 1:40

And then that'll be it. You'll be on the show. Now also, I would love to hear from people who have had any stroke-related questions, and they would like my perspective on their question. I'd love to make some short episodes that give my perspective on whatever you are curious about.

Bill Gasiamis 1:55

Now, they can't be medical questions in nature as I'm not a doctor and I cannot comment on your specific situation. But there can be general questions that are around stroke and stroke-related matters. So once again, if you go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact in the subject field, you will see a drop-down and if you choose the Ask Bill A Question option, then you can fill out the details. And when I have enough questions, I will answer them in an episode dedicated to those questions.

Introduction - Ricky Monahan Brown



Bill Gasiamis 2:26

Now, my guest today is the author of the book titled *Stroke A 5% Chance of Survival*. Ricky Monahan Brown must have a world record for high blood pressure because I've never heard of reading so high and more importantly, I've never had somebody lived to tell the story of reading so high, this is a great episode I hope you enjoy it. Ricky Monahan Brown, welcome to the podcast.

Ricky Monahan Brown 2:51

Thank you very much. Thanks for having me.

Bill Gasiamis 2:53

Thank you for being here. From?

Ricky Monahan Brown 2:58

Edinburgh, Scotland.

Bill Gasiamis 2:58

Okay, fantastic. Good to have you.

Ricky Monahan Brown 3:02

When it is 5:30 in the morning,

Bill Gasiamis 3:04

Oh man thank you so much then. I appreciate it. I could have done it a bit later if I'd known. But thank you so much. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Ricky Monahan Brown 3:16

Well, we were just talking about you making sure that the podcast is reasonably PG. So what my wife tends to tell people is that she and I had well, let me start from the beginning. It was a great week for me actually because this would in about a couple of weeks be 10 years ago now.

Ricky Monahan Brown 3:48

And I had just on a Friday, lost my job as a finance lawyer in Manhattan in New York City. And we were sort of just trying to take it easy. I managed to get a new job, and things were great. So we went to my now wife and I and my daughter went out to the Science Museum.

Ricky Monahan Brown 4:25

We had a fun day. And then we dropped my daughter off with her mother. We were tooling around on our little pink Malaguti scooter. We played a bit of pool, we had a couple of drinks. We had some of the best pizzas in the five boroughs.

Ricky Monahan Brown 4:50

And we went home and we're just sort of rounding the night off I suppose, trying to make the best of things on a fairly stressful time. When people ask her what happened, Beth tends to say, Well, if you're going to choose the way you wanted to go, how would you choose to go? Do you see where I'm going with this? I tend to say, we were engaged in vigorous nighttime activity.

Ricky Monahan Brown 5:24

And I think other people can call it horizontal jogging. So I found that I had a sort of tingling sensation in my left arm and then we took a little break. And she was saying that, you know, don't worry, you know, just have a rest have a drink of water, this will pass. And I was optimistic. I think the last thing I said to her before I lost consciousness was don't worry, everything's going to be fine.

Ricky Monahan Brown Had A Hemorrhagic Stroke

Ricky Monahan Brown 6:08

And as I was seeing that, I thought I was gonna die. But I believed it, and then I don't remember anything directly for another seven weeks, I don't think. So yes, hemorrhagic stroke, to be clear, so it wasn't a clot-based stroke. It was a, it was a burst blood vessel in the brain.

Bill Gasiamis 6:38

Do they know the reason why the blood vessel burst, what was the underlying cause?

Ricky Monahan Brown 6:44

Well, it was, well, yes, actually, this is a really sort of good message to get across to people as it happens. So I'd been working this extremely intense lifestyle whereby I was working lots of late nights, watching the weekends. And also not looking after myself the way I should, because there's a history of high blood pressure in my family. My father had a couple of coronaries many years earlier at this point.

Ricky Monahan Brown 7:18

Because of the stress, I had ceased to keep up with my blood pressure medication, so they discovered when they just wheeled me into the local Teaching Hospital, which fortunately was only about three blocks away. And they kept on taking my blood even before we got there, when the paramedics came to the flat, they kept on retaking my blood pressure because they didn't believe it was real. It was something over 300 over something over 200 which is enough to kill two men.

Ricky Monahan Brown's High Blood Pressure

Bill Gasiamis 8:06

That's enough to kill an army. I mean, that's the highest reading I've ever heard of. And I've had a lot of this high blood pressure type stroke, podcast interviews, and have that is everyone has been around 200, you know, to 10 to 20, but above 300 This is an absolute miracle.

Ricky Monahan Brown 8:30

I'm number one.

Bill Gasiamis 8:33

Well done. I mean, that's amazing. That's just absolutely amazing. So because I'm a simple man, I'd love to know how you got from your bed to was it an ambulance. Did they clothe you? Did they just throw a towel over you? How did you get from the state you were in to elsewhere?

Ricky Monahan Brown 9:04

Yeah. Well, I think we managed to sort of drive me in something or other but yes, it was an ambulance. We are again, we're very fortunate three blocks from the hospital. So I was being pulled into into hospital, you know, within about three minutes.

Ricky Monahan Brown 9:28

So yeah, then you know, straight onto a gurney. And the funny thing is, I've been as I'm sure a lot of people do. I've been back to that hospital even though I live about 3,000 miles away now. It's amazing how calm that place generally is. But apparently, things are pretty hectic as they were feeling near.

Bill Gasiamis 9:54

What was it like so you know you're at a hospital? How long before you come around? Do they operate? What happens? How do they get this thing under control,

Ricky Monahan Brown 10:03

They wanted to go straight into surgery and do some reasonably serious intervention because they couldn't do anything to get the blood pressure under control. So, we saw wild, obviously, but the particular expert surgeon who would have would have been doing that job was going to be available until first thing in, the actual morning the proper people who have been to bed and gotten up morning.

Ricky Monahan Brown 10:35

So, when he arrived, they did a trepanation or a troponin. So essentially, I've still got two burr holes in my head, which Beth and I quite enjoy allowing people to touch because it freaks them out, as I'm sure you can imagine. So essentially, they drilled burr holes in the top of my scope to release the pressure. And that was, that was sort of the first step towards keeping me alive.

Ricky Monahan Brown 11:15

Although, you know, one of Beth's you know, everyone's story is dramatic. And we're living in the future. And you know, I don't want to make our you know, my story special in some way. But uh, yeah, one of our best friends was a very, very accomplished to euros with through surgery as a happens. And he went to bed flatly and said, This is it. You're you're not going to see this guy again.

Ricky Monahan Brown 11:42

We're, done. So that's how that was going down. I should answer your question. I don't remember, all of this stuff has been relayed to me. I don't have any first-hand experience of this for about another seven weeks. And then something kind of cool, poetic happened. I'm a reader now. So I love this. As I say this was 10 years ago.

Ricky Monahan Brown 12:14

So I don't know if you apply this to your news, but there's something called hurricane or Superstorm Sandy, in New York City. So almost all of the city lost almost all of its power. In fact, in hospitals dotted around the city. Nurses were carrying newborn babies up and down stairs because lifts weren't working at all that sort of stuff. And there's this very striking picture of Manhattan, where you can see this line that's sort of almost down all of Manhattan on one side, all the lights are off.

Ricky Monahan Brown 12:53

And on the other side, all the lights are on, which you know, for a stroke patient is, you know, an image we can all recognize. So, yeah, I was I wasn't I was all the lights were off Avril. And of course, we're in a hospital full of people with brain injuries and strokes, they're very, you know, they're very sort of highly stressed. So we were all sort of kind of in a bad place.

Ricky Monahan Brown 13:21

But then weirdly enough, when the lights went back on in the hospital, and the lights went back on across Manhattan, Beth tells me that the lights went on. For me. That's the point at which I started a new beginning to have slightly more coherent interactions with people and or any sort of useful interaction at all. So that's, where things come together seven weeks later.

A Dramatic Turnaround For Ricky Monahan Brown



Bill Gasiamis 13:50

It's a pretty cool story. I mean, whenever you try to downplay it, it is pretty cool. You're, you had a blood pressure through the roof. You were in a certain situation while that was happening, and you're about to experience most men's dreams, you know, go going the way you know, there's that's the best way to go apparently. For you, maybe it would have been not. It would not have been.

Bill Gasiamis 14:24

And it happened. That everything kind of even after that sort of catastrophe, everything kind of went right so that you can get to be here 10 years down the track and move on. And you've still got the things you know, the holes in your head and you're talking and you're a writer now and like it's a pretty big turnaround from that to where you are now.

Bill Gasiamis 14:46

So it is dramatic and people who are listening and watching would also acknowledge them because they've had a pretty dramatic turnaround even though they might be earlier on in their lives. In the story, then your eye or further along, there is still a dramatic turnaround, there is an amazing amount of things that they've overcome resilience that they've had to find etcetera to be here, and it's no mean feat, because, you know, we don't have those skills before the stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 15:20

We have no idea what to do in the event of a stroke because we don't have those skills, we have no idea. So you'll have to learn it grow overcome, all on your own in one, you know, from one minute to the next, you got to expand yourself as a

human being to learn the things that you need to do to continuously remain above ground.

Bill Gasiamis 15:44

And also to the start somehow moving back into some type of existence, that you can experience a new normal or a level of normality that works for you or your family, or whatever. So it's a bloody big deal. I want to acknowledge that first.

Bill Gasiamis 16:03

But secondly, I had my stroke in 2012, as well, I was in New York. At the end of 2012. We saw the new year between 2012 and 2013. And we were there just after Hurricane Sandy in November, I think was Hurricane Sandy. And then in December, we're doing the cleanup and things were getting better.

Bill Gasiamis 16:32

And it was a really good time. Because it was the weather was nice and settled, all the bad weather had been gone. And people were we experienced New York. Well, the fact that I was in New York for New Year's Eve, was the most amazing accomplishment of my life, it was just ridiculously amazing.

Bill Gasiamis 16:53

That two months at the beginning of the year, we had the first blade or the second blade, and then somehow dragged me to get to the point where I was good enough, to overcome all my fears to get on a plane and do a 24-hour trip from the US and of the world as they call Australia, sometimes to the other side of the world to be in New York. I mean, it's a massive feat for both me and my family.

Bill Gasiamis 17:24

I was afraid when I was there, that it might happen again, while I was overseas, so I bought the most expensive insurance that I could get. So I was completely covered if it happened. And even though I thought that it might happen while I was there, we went anyway.

Bill Gasiamis 17:41

We weren't going to not go. And that's not something that I had ever done before. This is the part of me that I didn't know existed that I had to discover until after these damn strokes occurred, you know? So how long did it take you to get out of the hospital? And what were you left with that you had to overcome?

Ricky Monahan Brown 18:04

That was seven weeks, three and a half weeks in the local hospital, just three blocks from where we lived in, in Brooklyn, in sort of very intensive care. And I have no memory of that. And then after three and a half weeks, it was very important for the medical team to think correctly, obviously, to get me into as intensive rehabilitation as they could.

Ricky Monahan Brown 18:37

So I was moved to Manhattan, where they started work on the rehabilitation. And I suppose I was very fortunate. I mean, I suppose you make a good point, by the amount of kudos, we have to give a lot of the people who will be seeing this podcast, and for you know, being in a position where they're able to watch it.

Ricky Monahan Brown 19:03

So there is that, but for me personally, I tend to be very cognizant of the ridiculous amount of work that's involved here. Because I'm in physically and mentally, pretty decent shape. You know, there are deficits, of course. But you know, I'm not special I had a great deal of luck. And that's a huge part of it.

Ricky Monahan Brown 19:30

And people who don't have as great outcomes that's bad luck and that's tragic. And I give them more respect than anyone else because they're, you know, they're getting on with things and that's amazing. And I also have to acknowledge the crazy amount of help that we got, I mean, firstly, myself personally for Beth, and then all of our friends and our families and an incredible medical team as well.

The Importance of Having A Goal - Ricky Monahan Brown



Ricky Monahan Brown 19:56

So, again, very fortunate in that regard, but I think when you talk about your trip to New York for New Year, I think you've touched on something really important there as well. I don't know the extent to which you were thinking about or focusing on that trip when you were going through your strokes and all that sort of stuff. But we so one of the things I think, helped us get through this experience, was trying to picture a future.

Ricky Monahan Brown 20:28

And, you know, even something as simple as the idea of walking through Prospect Park, again, just to be able to sort of cling on to that possibility. And, and I started fantasizing about the idea of running a marathon or something like that. And I think it would have been two years later, we're back in Scotland, and I ran the Iowa, half marathon, sponsored by the brilliant scotch whisky mix. So that was a wonderful thing to be able to do. But being able to sort of focus on these things and sort of try to imagine that good times was a really important thing for us.

Bill Gasiamis 21:16

I like that, I like that it's like you're setting an intention for somebody that you're a goal that you need to work towards. And I like that, and we didn't have a goal per se, that was deadline driven, it was just driven by location, we're going to get there one day.

Bill Gasiamis 21:33

And I felt like that was better because then I didn't have I didn't make it, then I wouldn't have that I felt like I would have been more disappointed if the goal to get there by the deadline hadn't been achieved, right? So the fact that we have

something to look forward to made us get through the real bad times the many, many bad times that we had.

Bill Gasiamis 21:59

So yeah, I like that idea of planning a future regardless of how dire things may be, because they do motivate you to an extent it does motor its motivation or to have something that's in the future to work towards. And that's kind of when you learn about yourself, where you overcome, or the deficits.

Bill Gasiamis 22:25

And I'm not talking about just the ones that stroke created. Also talking about the ones that we create in our mind every day, which I imagined are not even real, you know, physical deficits, but then we manifest them as being real, and then we get in our way.

Bill Gasiamis 22:41

So I love that. And then you lost your job sounds like exactly the right time because then you didn't have to worry about getting back to work. And you didn't have to worry about your employers. However, that would have been a difficult time as well, because I imagine where you're covered by insurance or anything. So that was it. Okay, that you weren't working for a little while. What was that, like?

Ricky Monahan Brown 23:06

It wasn't great. So just immediately before that moment, because that could have been when my employment properly terminated. And at that point, it wasn't looking like I was going to recover. Unfortunately, you have, we have another aspect of health insurance in the US called COBRA, which essentially means that you can maintain the health insurance that you had, for some time.

Ricky Monahan Brown 23:12

So long as long as you pay a particular amount of premium. So you don't have to pay the full premium, which would have been just suddenly would have been impossible for us to manage. But a smaller amount. Having said that, well, I suppose the first thing to note is that at the end of those seven weeks, the retail cost of my health care to that point was \$600,000.

Ricky Monahan Brown 24:26

So we're very fortunate we managed to get the COBRA into effect and we were

able to embed was working at this point ourselves. So she was just not able, to cover that. Until when we stopped my stroke would have been and Sandy originally happened in October.

Ricky Monahan Brown 24:50

So my stroke was in September or October. Just as the calendar was turning it made it difficult to answer the questions like you know, what's your name? When did your stroke happen? All that sort of stuff. But yet Beth then lost her job just around Christmas time. Because she wasn't able necessarily to live up to the expectations of a New York investment bank while also trying to look after me. So, by the turn of the year, things were looking very grim and weak again.

Ricky Monahan Brown 25:30

And we had to decide to move here to Scotland because I was still going to be eligible for NHS Care over here. I know we had actually, I suppose in the same vein, as you know, these things that we use as tools to look forward to, it had always been sort of our idea to move to Scotland. As it happens, Beth's birthday is burns night, and her family's best friends were Scots and all that sort of stuff.

Ricky Monahan Brown 26:10

And I'd always thought about, I had originally always thought that I would move back at some point. When I first moved to America, permanently, I was thinking, oh, you know, a couple of years and then go home. And of course, 50 years pass, and you got a mortgage, and you got a kid and all that sort of stuff, and things don't happen. But yeah, the way we got through the insurance question in the end, was moving back to Scotland. About, what 10 years ago now.

Bill Gasiamis 26:43

You've got the NHS experience, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. What kind of level of coverage does that give you? In Australia, we've got the Medicare system, and the Medicare system covers anybody who doesn't have insurance for everything. And you walk into the hospital with zero costs, other than perhaps, you know, a 50, or \$60, medication prescription that you have to buy on the way out.

US Healthcare System

Bill Gasiamis 27:11

All of my healthcare, all my surgery, my MRIs, and all of my rehabilitation, was just on the taxpayer who I am and I contribute to the Medicare levy that we're charged annually. So what's it like, in Britain? And then what would have happened if you couldn't pay 600 grand in the US?

Ricky Monahan Brown 27:46

So firstly, the experience here with the NHS is that health care across the UK is free at the point of service fee, the point of access. So basically, all of our payments for health care just come directly through tax. It's slightly different across the different nations of the UK, where prescriptions, for example, in Scotland are also free. That's a decision that's been made by our devolved government.

Ricky Monahan Brown 28:24

I think in England and Wales prescription, you have to pay for a certain amount of your prescriptions. I think that there has been a way, across parts of the UK in recent years, but I believe our new prime minister is going to be taking that away. So yeah, free the point of service, which is amazing. I read a thing a while ago about how one of the good things about the NHS being held up by the population here is a sort of a foundational pillar of the way that we live.

Ricky Monahan Brown 29:02

No one standing to find this under a load of stress, that is because the British people love the NHS it gives them this sort of grounding an idea that all waves have value, which I suppose brings me to the next part of your question regarding what would have happened if we hadn't been able to see, get on COBRA and then get back into a place where we had access to free health care to the point of delivery.

Ricky Monahan Brown 29:38

In the US. One of the most tragic things that continue to happen under their system is that people who are fortunate enough to survive life-threatening experiences whether that be a stroke or cancer or whatever, find themselves getting through,

Intro 30:04

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 recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things that, you've never had a stroke before, and 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.

Intro 30:34

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 it's called The 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. And they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery, head to the website. Now, recoveryafterstroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Ricky Monahan Brown 31:07

That and then being released and being hit with these bills. And there are just terrifying numbers of people who then end up going into medically related bankruptcy. So you know, you've gone through this terrible experience, you may well have lost a great deal of your earning ability, the same things may apply to your families who will have caring responsibilities, all that sort of stuff.

Ricky Monahan Brown 31:38

But then you're looking at bankruptcy and the possibility of losing your home and all that sort of stuff, which is a tragedy. So again, we were very fortunate to have an out, have support becoming into the situation from a very privileged sort of situation. So yeah, it's a grim possibility.

Bill Gasiamis 32:02

Would you have been able to leave the US to go back to Scotland if you hadn't paid the bill? Had you not had cover?

Ricky Monahan Brown 32:12

That's a good question, certainly, I would never have been able to go back to the States. Yeah, I don't know what's going on in the land from the US. There will be some humanitarian ways of looking at that.

Bill Gasiamis 32:33

Yeah. Interesting. So, you then went through a recovery where you're left with

cognitive deficits? Did you have any issues in that part of your recovery that you needed to overcome?

Ricky Monahan Brown 32:51

Yeah. I think lots of solo survivors talk about the idea of the new normal, I suppose. It was a couple of years where cognition was pretty difficult. I was very fortunate again in that, my stroke hit the right side of my brain so I have sort of slight left say fiscal deficits, and a slight limp and I'm tired of that sort of stuff. But it meant that my expressive abilities were pretty much untouched.

Ricky Monahan Brown 33:34

I was very, very fortunate in that regard. I feel at this point, that my cognition is pretty much back to where it was. And although at this stage it is the new normal and I can't be entirely sure, for the stroke happened I was working these ridiculous hours and can be pretty spacey in my own real life already. So sometimes it's hard to tell whether I should be mad at the stroke or just reflecting on the fact that "oh, still you Ricky." But it feels like things are pretty together at this point. Again, very fortunate.

Bill Gasiamis 34:25

Yeah, you know, sounds kind of similar to me where I have the deficits on my left side, I get fatigued sometimes if I haven't slept well which happens from time to time and then the next day, fun, it's really difficult to drag myself through it. I'll be a little more unsteady on my feet you know, I might bump into the odd doorway. I'll have some pain in my legs and my leg in my extremities on the left side and I'll be a bit angrier and nasty without knowing that I'm being that way at the time, and then I'd have to apologize and do all that stuff, which is fine.

Bill Gasiamis 35:16

But it sounds like my journey has kind of got me to the point where I'm now pretty capable of sitting down, for example, recording multiple podcasts on a day, going through the editing process doing that which is far further along than what I have been, perhaps maybe for the first six or seven years after the first incident, and then after the second and third incident.

Bill Gasiamis 35:44

So I'm able to reflect on how far I've come. And I'm comfortable with being able to say, "Hey, look how far you've come and even though you've had two or three

bad days last week, or another two or three bad days is coming, that's okay, that's like, take your winds and rest, rest, rest and just overcome whatever challenges you have, and try not to do so much."

Bill Gasiamis 36:09

So that's kind of how I get around being impacted by the stroke still, you know, 10 years later, I just have learned a new way to listen to my body and pay attention and do what it's asking rather than pushing through and then falling into the abyss and then trying, like to find a way out and fighting it. And rather than fighting it and just sort of letting it ride, is that how you go about things? Do you have those types of moments like I described?

Ricky Monahan Brown 36:42

Well, you're touching on a couple of really interesting things that have a degree of universality to them.

Ricky Monahan Brown 36:50

Sort of learning to recognize death, it's and being able to adopt, coping strategies, a new account or a personal account for their deficits, and begin to make allowances for that, for me, something that I would have to do, particularly towards the beginning of the second stage of my recovery, if you will, would be to try to be more organized, all of the stuff that I would ever have to remember, are sort of the physical objects I would have to remember, we'd all go in very particular places, and they would always go in those particular places.

Ricky Monahan Brown 37:43

Until that was just a new habit that have been very effectively formed. So I've always been able to find the phone, the keys, the cards, the wall, all that sort of stuff without that particular. And that's a small coping strategy. But without that, all of that stuff we would have fallen apart daily. And also, I keep a lot of lists now I'm good at calendaring things, which you know, is not previously, it was just get from one thing to the next thing, just keep going and get it done. Now, things are a little bit more, more organized.

Ricky Monahan Brown 38:21

Another thing I think that I recognize, and in a lot of the things that you've been talking about here is having gone through these experiences. I think firstly, I find myself having a different set of priorities, I started taking my health more

seriously, I mean, I've taken meditation, for example.

Ricky Monahan Brown 38:51

And so I've got a much more sort of a generous outlook on my own life and other people and all that sort of stuff. One of them, my recreational therapist in the hospital came by one day and sort of gave me these. Remember, CDs. So she gave me these mindfulness CDs. And I started using them, that had always been something that I'd sort of been interested in but had never had either the opportunity or the motivation to follow through.

Ricky Monahan Brown 39:28

But I find that it's been something helpful for me as well. But I think there's there's a natural aspect that comes through just having gone through these things. I think a lot of survivors do find themselves reevaluating a lot of stuff, and having a little bit more of, for lack of a better word, holistic and empathetic, look on life. It's, again, being able to look at it from a position where I've been very fortunate. I have these little superpowers that I've kind of picked up on the way, you know.

Ricky Monahan Brown 40:05

Going through this, I think of my father, again, he and, one of his colleagues used to talk about the fact that one of the reasons that they had reasonably long and healthy lives, was because he had early life health scares, and had therefore started to take care of themselves a little better. They're doing that too. But anyway, I'm blathering on here, where are you going next?

Bill Gasiamis 40:30

Oh, I love it. I love it. The empathy side of it was interesting because that's something that I got as well, that was enhanced in me. Because immediately, because I spent some time in a wheelchair, immediately, I was able to relate to a whole bunch more people in the community. And completely understand. Use my small amount of time in the wheelchair to understand what the consequences of being in a wheelchair for a long time mean. And then also seeing people who were living on the street, and being able to see that I probably wasn't that far off there.

Bill Gasiamis 41:11

If things went wrong differently for me, then I could have been impacted in a way that would have potentially ended up with me having lots of other misfortunes,

perhaps, and ending up in a situation that I didn't plan that was out of the realm of possibility until after this injury with stroke. And I'm like, okay, I can appreciate those people now. Now, I know that when they ask for money, I'm not going to wonder what are they going to do with their money, what I'm going to do is give them their few bucks and let them work out what they're going to do with it.

Bill Gasiamis 41:46

And hopefully, that lets them do something that gets them to the point where they no longer have to be on the street at some point in time in their life, whatever. And it's like, it's such a blessing to have that where before, I thought that I had the answer to everything, I thought that I knew it all. I judged people based on my very small, my lack of life experiences, and my very narrow focus on the realm of possibilities for other people. And it was eye-opening, so eye-opening.

The Power of Being Yourself



Bill Gasiamis 42:28

And it's made my life richer for knowing that because I've interacted with people who I never would have interacted with before, who have just been themselves and they've gone just by being themselves, it has completely dislodged that the stuff that I thought was correct about them, which is completely incorrect because I was just making it up from hearsay or the news or all these unreliable sources about what it means when somebody is living in a certain situation, or when somebody has experienced a certain health condition, or whatever the situation may be.

Bill Gasiamis 43:10

It's like, okay, I don't know how else I would have learned those life skills. I have no idea how I would have learned them if it wasn't for that situation. And I'm glad that it happened. That part of it is right. So I get what you're saying like I get where you're coming from the little superpowers. That's exactly what they are. And if somebody listening to this hasn't got there yet. Well discover the superpowers, it's a matter of time before there will be some massive changes that occur that you didn't expect that you'll reflect on and you'll go, "Wow, wow, that came from this."

Bill Gasiamis 43:58

What a surprise. That's never how I would have thought that something so profound, that's how I would have come across it or discovered it. It's just, yeah, I'm amazed by it all the time. And what's interesting is that I've moved into writing a book, and I've seen how many stroke survivors have moved into writing a book and they've read in a book and they've put their story on paper, and then they've published and they've got it out.

Bill Gasiamis 44:24

And you became an author. So before you are an author, you are a legal Eagle, and then you've turned into this completely different path. Is authorship something that you were passionate about, but never did or is it something you've discovered? How did you become an author?

Ricky Monahan Brown 44:45

Well, Beth asked me the same question, not long after all this went down like that. When I started writing, she said, "Did you always want to be a writer?" And it turned out the answer was yes, but I forgot. I think this may not be uncommon as a teenager, but I wanted to write and ensure that showed a little bit of natural talent, if you will.

Ricky Monahan Brown 45:15

But you know, life just went in different directions, but then, having woken up, or having a sort of regained, sort of full consciousness, one of the first things I did was when I was granted access to my phone again, which, you know, took a few weeks, because, you know, if you're in a bed, that is more than enough room for someone in stroke recovery, to lose their phone for days at a time, but I'm able to get fuller access to it when my outlet or my sort of connection to the outside

world was through Twitter.

Ricky Monahan Brown 45:59

So I started, you know, just putting out these little things about what was happening to me. And you've come across this, I'm sure Bill, and one of the things that gets a lot of stroke survivors and their loved ones, through all these just horrible sort of, you know, blood and pain and just terrible experiences is this weird, observed black humor.

Ricky Monahan Brown 46:30

Beth would talk about how she would you know, these things would happen and she wanted to laugh, but she would feel terrible that I might think she was laughing at me, but that wasn't the case at all. So there would be just things like I was going through my struggle to read during these initial seven weeks, I would, I would demand access to a phone. So I could speak to my friend Tony Stark, who was CEO, of Ironman, and he was going to pick up.

Ricky Monahan Brown 47:04

And then just dumb stuff like ask me the memory questions, you know, what's your name? Do you know where you are? Do you know why you're here and all that sort of stuff? Do you know who the president is? And I will end up saying something lame. On one level, I soaked in and didn't care.

Ricky Monahan Brown 47:30

And then I would say ask me who the Prime Minister is. Who's the Prime Minister and I would say. You hate him. Oh was it David Cameron? So yeah, sorry, I'm just looking back at some of the, you know, the sort of more fun aspects of what happened. Oh, and sorry, just one other thing. My healthcare providers were incredible. And there was this one nurse who was taking care of me.

Ricky Monahan Brown 48:06

Who had spent time in Edinburgh, so we sort of connected a little bit and all that sort of stuff. And we started sharing Sean Connery impressions, which I'm okay as you can probably imagine. And then there's this tiny little Asian nurse, and then there's a booming Scottish voice emanating from this little room. Gold finger do you expect me to die?

Bill Gasiamis 48:49

From a nurse with Asian heritage who has not the same stature the voice, the

look of Sean Connery. It would be surreal to hear a Scottish accent as well. In that situation would be amazing. A lot of funny things happen during a stroke as well.

Bill Gasiamis 49:13

I often talk about them in that way as well that they created a little bit of lightheartedness when it was possible for things to be terrible all the time and we laughed when we had the opportunity to laugh we laugh because we might not have had that opportunity later. It might never have come, I might not have been around so it's not like you should.

Bill Gasiamis 49:37

Because stroke is serious and devastating and all the things that it is, doesn't mean you shouldn't find things to laugh at during a seriously devastating time, and you might not be in the mood, and that's okay. But if the mood allows it, you can embrace it.

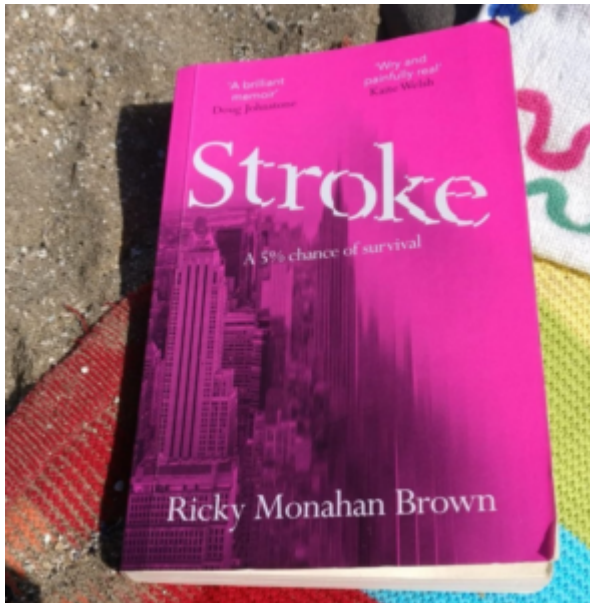
Ricky Monahan Brown 50:11

And I think this is one of the reasons that that a number of us do end up writing and in some form or another, firstly you find you have a story to tell. But also, there's a desire to sort of share some of this stuff. Because, you know, not everyone is there yet to, you know, these ideas of these little shots of light, these little moments of hope, if you can sort of push the possibility about for the people who are going to be lucky enough to access those moments, you know, give them hope to sort of hang on to that feels like a very positive thing to do.

Bill Gasiamis 50:56

I think so I love that. I love that idea that you know, the people might be listening, who they're very critical, acute stage of recovery, and they don't think there's anything funny better than we kind of giving them permission to laugh if a funny situation arises and make it okay to do that, not feel bad about it, whether they're a caregiver, or whether they're the patient, or a family member, you know, it's okay to have a bit of a life.

Stroke a 5% Chance of Survival



Bill Gasiamis 51:21

So, go for it, it works. And it makes you feel better, and it creates endorphins. And it, you know, gets the whole body changing its physiology and its chemistry a little bit. So it's a positive thing. I love that. So tell me about the book that you've written. What's it about? And what? And how long did it take you to get to the end of the whole creative process and then publish? Yeah.

Ricky Monahan Brown 51:54

So the process started reasonably quickly, as I see a lot of the, you know, I wasn't making memories, particularly during that sort of first seven-week period. But then sort of rebuilding some of these events as they happened. The fight has to be been tweeting meant a lot of this stuff had been sort of noted in places.

Ricky Monahan Brown 52:26

So in that sense, it was almost an immediate thing, but then it started turning into a more mindful, sort of a thing. And as I was in the very initial stages of recovery, I think one of the first things I did was when I was sort of making a trip on my own on the New York subway was, we'd come across this sort of readers workshop, in another part of Brooklyn.

Ricky Monahan Brown 52:55

So that was, that was a big project, we sort of sat down together, we, we got on the online subway, we made some No, so we figured out where I would have to change and all that sort of stuff. And I managed to get into a different neighborhood of Brooklyn. And that was, that was a that was a huge achievement, that was a real sort of landmark on on recovery.

Ricky Monahan Brown 53:15

So it was some very supportive people there. And that's kind of where that process began to become something a little bit more real. And then over the next, I mean, it's over, it was over years, because, you know, at that point, your concentration is still difficult, stamina is still difficult or bad sort of thing.

Ricky Monahan Brown 53:42

But I think I probably started I had a more or less finished manuscript in 2017. And my publishers for that book, Sandstone Press, here in Scotland, and they were at an export of sorts, in the north of Scotland, and they were looking for people to pitch ideas, again, as it happens on Twitter.

Ricky Monahan Brown 54:16

And I had, I think it was probably still 140 characters, but you know, it's a it's a crazy story, right? So I condensed it as much as I could throw it out there. And they were interested. So I had very finished very quickly getting the manuscript more polished.

Ricky Monahan Brown 54:40

And was fortunate enough that they picked it up. And yeah, I again, having stumbled into this sort of story that I felt almost obliged to tell because it is such a crazy story because there are things that you know, we want to pay As long as it went on reasonably well, and then when t 19, I think would have been the year that sort of that world in its final form and stroke call on a 5% chance of survival, because when you're going in without blood pressure, we think that was kind of where we are.

Ricky Monahan Brown 55:20

And if it wasn't survival as a 5% chance of survival, I'm getting into details point being a 2018 one of our major broadsheet newspapers here in Scotland made it one of their Scottish nonfiction books of the year, which was a huge honor.

Ricky Monahan Brown 55:44

And that's kind of given me, the opportunity to carry on with all of this stuff so myself and a colleague, I put together a spoken word night for a couple of years here in Scotland that won some awards. And I'm very fortunate in that my first novella comes out towards the beginning of next year, so it's exciting times.

Bill Gasiamis 56:08

Unbelievable, I just cannot, I just kind of grasp the amazingness of that, like, it's amazing, because this complete shift that happened all serendipitously like it just, you know, emerged, it somehow found you you found it, they found you, you know, and then the whole thing just kind of emerged, it's amazing. I know that we can't ever sort of do justice to a baby, how difficult the middle sections were, and the doubts and all that stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 56:38

I imagine there were plenty of them, right? But in the end, it seems like persistence and perseverance. Were part of what made it possible to deliver this thing and then change your career at the same time and move to a new career. This just desire to continuously go for it and solve little problems as they came up, like, how do I get to change trains?

Bill Gasiamis 57:05

Where do I have to get off, make some notes on the particular presentation that I listen to, and so on? We did all little kinds of negative solutions and problem-solving little bits at a time just added up. And then before you know it, you know, time flies and things happen. And then there's a book and now there's another one on the way. Does that encapsulate it a little bit?

Ricky Monahan Brown 57:38

Yeah, you spend so much time getting from day to day from hour to hour, and then you put them all together? And you find you're somewhere different altogether? And as you say, one mustn't downplay the Bloods and the tears in the snow. It's in the emotional ability. And the moments where I get emotional about it now at the moments where you're convinced that it's not going to work out, there's no way that your partner could stay.

Ricky Monahan Brown 58:22

Because look how awesome they are in fiber, they continue to put themselves through that. And again, I was lucky she did. But yeah, and again, I always find myself acknowledging a huge part of luck is played, but you keep putting yourself out there. And you try and give that luck a chance to hit. And that's another part of sort of what was going on.

Give Luck A Chance To Hit - Ricky Monahan Brown

Bill Gasiamis 58:48

I love that try and give that chance for the luck to hit. Yeah, that's awesome. I love that. It's like you've got to be, make yourself available so that when lucky things happen, you're around to collect on that lucky situation, or lucky episode or a chance meeting or whatever it was, if you're not out there, that is not going to happen. The luck is not going to hit because you're not putting yourself out there.

Bill Gasiamis 59:20

You're not making any moves towards this new version of you, or whatever it was. I'm trying to get people inspired about doing stuff. Despite not knowing what the outcomes are going to be, just do it anyway. And then just see where the luck lands and then take it and go with it and run with it. Now what I'm what I've got the cover of your book, up appears on the screen, I'm looking at it.

Bill Gasiamis 59:51

I'm looking at the back page and I'm going to read a little bit about what other people have had to say about it. You know, Katie, well, I don't know. Says No More about major neurological injuries should be this funny as much about navigating adulthood, and everything that comes with it, as it is about recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:12

And then Allison Stack says, By turns funny, philosophical, and morbidly fascinating. Stroke is a Reilly humorous meditation on love the strangeness of life and the miracle of second chances. And then Professor Sir Kenneth Kalman tells, an inspirational story of a young man with a stroke with fuss with a fascinating and unexpected ending.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:00:35

So it feels like another person when you hear that sort of stuff, but that's all super kind. And again, it's not just me, it's a story. I mean, this is happening, is something similar to happen to you, it's happened to me, it's happened to people who are going to be listening to watching this podcast.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:00:58

And yeah, you know, as all these people make their way through this, they are amazing people with amazing stories, you know, I got a chance to share my we all have these, these amazing individual stories. And I suppose, since you've been kind enough to be so kind, I should probably mention that the novella is due to come out at, the beginning of next year, I think.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:01:27

Takes another sort of real-life aspect, what's happened to me, and the publishers, Lemington Books here in Scotland are running a Kickstarter for something called a novella, express. And there's gonna be some amazing talent and content going out there. And if you want to find out sort of more about that, all that stuff's out there on the old interwebs.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:54

Yeah, we'll have all the links in the show notes where people can go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes, they'll be able to have a look at your episode, and then download a transcription plus, also, click on your links for that. And that'll be awesome for people to go there who are interested. And tell me about the novella, give us a little bit of a glimpse into what people can expect to find in that when it's finally sort of finished and released.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:02:27

Yeah. Well, I've always had an interest in gothic fiction. And, you know, sort of hearing some of the stories I'm telling you, the morbid state of my nature has not receded at all. I'm very positive. But, you know, you get the break in the brain surgery you get, you get MRIs, I still have two aneurysms. So you know, I do have, you know, those threads living inside me.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:03:03

So it's a gothic novella, and it's set in a place where I had some of my recovery, we have friends who have a small farm in rural Pennsylvania. And they were kind enough to let me spend some time recovering there. And I mean, you'll know this where you live, it's, it's something that sort of less evidence of when you're living in an area where you're in Scotland.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:03:36

But if you're in sort of a rural part of America, there's just these huge areas of land. And this farm is surrounded by trees, and there's something a little spooky

about it. So it's the story of a professional couple who lose their jobs and have to leave New York City for a farm in a spooky forest. And yeah, one of them dies. And we have to spend the length of a novella, figuring out why and how that happened. And it's about regret and loss and memory and all these things that stroke survivors think about a lot.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:03:36

I hear you. Well, sounds like an interesting book. That'd be fantastic when it's out. Well, I appreciate you reaching out. Joining me on the podcast and sharing your story. I do like the way that you're very you're underplaying this whole thing and you've done it from the very beginning of our podcast episode.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:48

I like it because it's nice that you're doing it but I'm gonna give you a little bit more credit for being here. Because the circumstances under which you are here are extraordinary. Absolutely. And then it's just like a celebration of you. Yeah, this is like, you're here.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:05

And the hostile conditions, you made it to the other side. And that's bloody awesome. And I'm so I get so excited when people are on my podcast because that means we all kind of made it right. And that's awesome. So it's a bit of a, me understanding why you're downplaying things, but then me also going, alright, I know you're humble, but I love it that you're here.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:30

300 you break a record for me, I never heard of 300 blood pressure. So, man, thank you so much for being on the podcast and reaching out and sharing your story. And I look forward to learning more about your book as it comes out when it does come out, please reach out so we can talk about it again. And so we can be on the podcast again. That'd be fun. And yeah, just thank you.

Ricky Monahan Brown 1:05:56

Thank you for the opportunity to share a story about some people and thanks to you for sort of allowing me to sort of access some of these stories. And yeah, it's someone who gave Beth a posted note during my recovery saying nothing is permanent. So yeah, keep on keepin' on, folks. It's been a real pleasure to have Bill give me a chance to meet you. Cheers.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:58

Thanks for joining us on today's episode to learn more about my guests including their links to social media and other pages and to download a full transcript of the entire interview. Please go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes. If you'd like to support this podcast, the best way to do it is to leave a five-star review and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes and Spotify.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:48

If you are watching on YouTube comment below the video like the episode and to get notifications of future episodes subscribe to the show and also hit the notifications bell so you can be notified of new episodes as they are made available.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:02

Now sharing the show with family and friends and social media will make it possible for people who may need this type of content to find it easier. And that may make a massive difference to someone who is on the road to recovery after their own experience with stroke. Thanks again for being here and listening. I appreciate you and see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:07:20

Importantly, we present many podcasts designed to give you an insight and understanding into the experiences of other individuals. The opinions and treatment protocols discussed during any podcast are the individual's own experience and we do not necessarily share the same opinion nor do we recommend any treatment protocol discussed.

Intro 1:07:37

All content on this website at any linked blog, podcast, or video material controlled by this website or content is created and produced for informational purposes only and is largely based on the personal experience of Bill Gasiamis. The content is intended to complement your medical treatment and support healing.

Intro 1:07:54

It is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice and should not be relied on as health advice the information is general and may not be suitable for your personal injuries, circumstances, or health objectives. Do not use our

content as a standalone resource to diagnose treat, cure, or prevent any disease for therapeutic purposes or as a substitute for the advice of a health professional.

Intro 1:08:15

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.

Intro 1:08:29

If you are experiencing a health emergency or think you might be, call 000 if in Australia or your local emergency number immediately for emergency assistance, or go to the nearest hospital emergency department. Medical information changes constantly. While we aim to provide current quality information in our content, we do not provide any guarantees and assume no legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, currency, or completeness of the content.

Intro 1:08:52

If you choose to rely on any information within our content you do so solely at your own risk. We are careful with the links we provide however third-party links from our website are followed at your own risk and we are not responsible for any information you find there.