

# 37. How I Rescued My Brain - David Rowland

## How I Rescued My Brain.

How I Rescued My Brain is a book by Author and Psychologist David Roland. In this episode of Recovery After Stroke podcast, we talk about the lead up to David's stroke how his profession came in handy while on the path to recovery and how he has changed his life since that fateful day.

Follow David on [Facebook](#)

Highlights:

01:01 How Bill discovered the book "How I Rescued My Brain"

09:01 The advantage of knowing that it's possible

20:15 David's Symptoms

27:12 Challenges David had to face after stroke

36:05 Trying to make our loved ones understand

44:53 Positive feedback

Transcript:

John 0:01

Yeah, you're exactly right there Bill. So because I've seen many clients go through difficulties, like depression, like trauma, and like many other difficulties and challenges in life, I knew that once you engaged in the process, and the process here was, you know, seeing a very experienced psychologist doing therapy with him doing the exercises that he asked me to do.

John 0:26

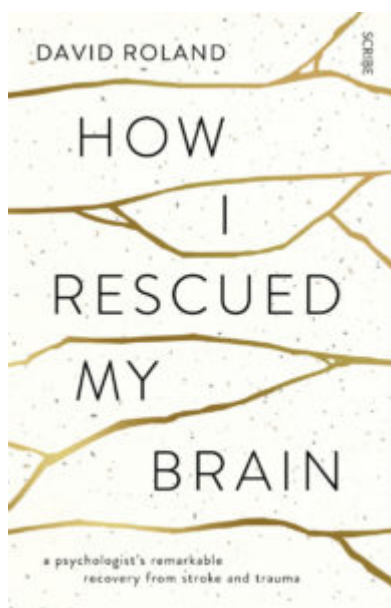
I had a lot of faith in the process. So I thought, Well, okay, it doesn't feel like it at the moment that I can change the way I feel. But because I had faith in the process and seen it work for other people. I thought, well, I'll just stick with it. And you know, it's going to change things. But you never know, of course, how

much it's going to change things and how long it's going to take. That's always an unknown.

Intro 0:52

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

## **How Bill discovered the book “How I Rescued My Brain”**



Bill 1:01

When I came across your book, in the bookstore in Carlton in Melbourne, it was after I'd done a circle of the table that it was on about three or four times, and I didn't notice the book. And I walked away from the table and went into this other section of books or along psychology and other matters related to the brain.

Bill 1:24

And for some reason, something made me come back to the table. We were your book was, and it became very obvious that the book was there at the time. But I'm not sure why I had missed it when I was intently looking at that particular table beforehand. And when I became aware of it, the title how I rescued my brain was something that I related to immediately because that's the quest that I'm on the quest to rescue my brain.

Bill 1:55

And I picked it up and purchased it because we were running out of time. The

bookstore was closing. And I didn't get to read it until after I walked out of the door and sat down on the nearest bench and started to go through the prologue and the first couple of pages and I was in tears within the third page. The book moved me because I automatically related to the story that you were telling.

Bill 2:23

It was basically my story and I think that other people will find this story very familiar, especially people that have experienced stroke. What made it even more fascinating for me was that for the first time, I personally had come across somebody. And this is not a fantastic or great thing but had experienced a stroke but somebody who was intimately knowledgeable and aware of, you know, the goings on in the brain and in your career.

Bill 2:54

You're supporting people in many challenges with many challenges that were related to the brand But in this case, now, you're able to with all of that experience, reflect on your own experience with stroke. Can you start by telling me a little bit about what you did before you write the book and before your experience with stroke.

John 3:17

So essentially, I've worked for over 20 years as a clinical and forensic psychologist. So about half the time I had therapy clients, about half the time I had assessments and reports that I was doing for the Children's Court and the criminal court. And I like the combination of both those things. I was married with three daughters, and I think at that stage, that was still primary school. And then I, you know, I've always been a physically active person, so I like exercising.

John 3:53

So at that time, I was doing yogur and you know, once a week of class and also ocean so mean, and and walking. And I like being in nature so it likes to do that. So I think, you know, on the face of it anyway, I had everything together. You know, the practice was very successful I had good colleagues had a good network of friends.

John 4:05

So you know, anybody looking from the outside would have thought, oh here is a successful person in you know, in every way. So things started to unravel before

the stroke, however, and what happened was I started to notice that I was getting more physical aches and pains like more backache, I had, I was getting abdominal pains which turned out to be appendicitis, but it wasn't diagnosed for quite a long time.

John 4:49

And also starting to not sleep as well. I was also starting to drink more heavily. You know, I was never a big drinker, but I noticed that I found Difficult to go through a day without having, you know, one or two glasses of wine. So that was new for me. And I was also starting to have nightmares, and bad, you know, when bad things were happening to me or to my family, to friends.

John 5:18

And I was also noticing that I didn't feel like talking with people as much and, and feeling generally more sad. And all of that turned out to be, as I found out, trauma related to my work, so is not only suffering post traumatic stress, disorder, trauma, but also depression. So that's the early part of the story, that's what was happening before the stroke and because of that diagnosis, so I went and saw a senior psychologist who had a lot of respect for.

John 5:54

And he made that diagnosis and also so my GP to rule out any physical causes. All those things were before the stroke and decided to close my private practice what I thought would be about six months and I get well again and get back to work, But things didn't quite turn out the way I had imagined.

Bill 6:14

Yeah, I understand. Curiously, when you're somebody with your background, so from my understanding you were a psychiatrist, or psychologist were you?

John 6:29

Yes.

Bill 6:30

So when somebody with your background is going through the things that I imagine you're dealing with your clients on a regular basis, and supporting them, and giving them tools to get through and overcome. Are you noticing yourself going through the challenges that your clients are presenting with? And is that how you begin the process to start looking at what's going on with you and sought

the help of your colleague?

John 6:59

Yeah, I think I think I had, I hadn't been teaching that I had that professional background and experience. So I was started starting starting to notice that I had symptoms. So of depression and, and trauma. So, you know, I wasn't looking forward to work in the morning I wasn't sleeping so well I knew there were some terms of depression.

John 7:24

And because I was having nightmares, a lot of bad things happening, I could see that that could be related. But the disadvantage was because I was I've been a helping professional at it never crossed my mind that I would end up being somebody who needed help, you know that I would be on the other side of the consulting desk, so to speak.

John 7:49

So I think it took me longer to accept the idea that I actually needed help. And when I went and saw the clinical psychologist that I mentioned it was because I wasn't sure I could telling these things. And he asked me lots of questions. And at the end of that interview, he said, Yeah, you've got post traumatic stress disorder and the depression that goes with it. So he was very clear.

John 8:19

And in fact, it was a relief to hear him say that because I thought, okay, I wasn't imagining and it's not great to have these disorders, but I wasn't imagining and that explains the way I've been feeling and how I've been behaving a bit. I guess the advantage then was, I was very open to getting once I understood what was wrong with me and getting help, and you know, being open to psychotherapy. And this is that the trauma state, so I hadn't had the brain injury yet. So I understood what was going on. I was, you know, a good and willing participant.

## **The advantage of knowing that it's possible**



Bill 9:01

Yeah, well, that's a big advantage to have at least the background that you had. And you probably also then had been able to see your clients go from being in a similar position to you to overcoming those challenges in becoming better. So you would have felt, am I right in saying that you would have felt that there was hope for a great outcome?

John 9:28

Yeah, you're exactly right, there Bill. So because I'd seen many clients go through difficulties, like depression, like trauma, unlike many other difficulties and challenges in life. I knew that once you engaged in the process, and the process here was, you know, seeing a very experienced psychologist doing therapy with him doing the exercises that he asked me to do.

John 9:53

I had a lot of faith in the process. So I thought, Well, okay, it doesn't feel like it at the moment that I can change the way I think But because I have faith in the process and seen it work for other people. I thought, well, I'll just stick with it. And you know, it's going to change things. But you never know, of course, how much it's going to change things and how long it's going to take. That's always an unknown.

Bill 10:18

Yeah, so you imagined that it would be six months, but I know that, like me, I imagine that my recovery after you know, dealing with certain challenges related to emotional well being and mental well being as well as stroke, took a lot longer

than I would have liked or anticipated. And what I thought was going to take months took years but what I think got in the way for me was the amount of time I put into my healing and my recovery. So most of my time was focused towards my work, and there wasn't enough life balance there. What was your work life balance situation?

John 10:58

Okay, so once I realized that I had, you know, what is a very serious mental health problem. trauma is very serious and depression can be very serious as well. And with discussion with the psychologist, and he agreed, I took what I thought would be six months of my private practice, so self employed, so I could do that.

John 11:26

And I thought, well, I'll just devote my time to getting Well again, well, actually, once I stopped working, I got worse. So you probably many of your listeners will know that. Sometimes you can hold things together when you need to. But as soon as you don't need to hold things together, then you fall apart. So that's actually a good (inaudible) really, once you fall, once you fall apart, and you don't need to keep holding things together, that's really the starting point and you can start to get well so what I did then was pretty much full time trying to try and get well.

Bill 12:02

Is that rock bottom?

John 12:03

I think so. I had a, I had another rock bottom, but that came later after the stroke. So the rock bottom for me in that first phase was feeling so hopeless and useless and so fearful, you know, normally you're actually very fearful, you're afraid something bad's gonna happen a lot of the time. And there are a few times when I felt quite suicidal.

John 12:31

You know, I get very black moods and I would think, well I'm no used to anyone and you know, I'd be better off it'd be better off for everyone else if I wasn't around. But what kept me on track and kept me holding myself back into thinking Well, I'm not going to do that is is my three daughters that I just didn't want them to grow up without a father.

John 12:57

So that was something that always kept me pulling me back on track. Plus, you know, I had a wife that I could speak to about those feelings and, and a couple of other good friends that I could talk to about those really dark and deep feelings and when I would talk about that, then I would always feel feel better and feel like I could get back on to to the road to recovery.

Bill 13:22

Yeah, I know that for me I've not had suicidal thoughts at all, but I've definitely had very dark and you know, thoughts that were challenging to my well being but not not to that end. I was also like you motivated by my children and my wife and being around for them and making sure that I was a part of their lives and I didn't have a negative impact on on their lives.

Bill 13:46

But with with friends and family, I didn't really have anyone to talk to until I saw the assistance of a psychologist who I saw once a week for the first few months and then got to seeing her once every couple of weeks and then got to seeing her once once a month and then stretched it out as I started to get through the things that would challenge me.

Bill 14:10

Now that was early on in my my life in my mid 20s. But I used to find myself feeling really frustrated when I would go to friends and family at the beginning, thinking that the best thing I could do was talk to them about it. And then they weren't really equipped to handle the challenges that I was coming to them with.

Bill 14:32

And I was making, I was making it very difficult for them to help me but also getting frustrated with them for not being able to support me or understand me. And I, I wonder the type of people that you are going to where they were where their colleagues in a similar sort of field that you were working in, or were they other people that you had just had an amazing relationship with over many years.

John 14:57

Yeah, I think in our boys so in one case There was a female friend who, you know, it's also a good friend of the family and just a very good person to talk to a good listener sympathetic and non judgmental, and not, you know, who wouldn't get



overwhelmed by me saying, you know, like, actually don't wonder whether I want to keep up.

John 15:25

And she would say, we don't want that. It's not like she did anything amazing. It was just somebody who was able to listen to what I was saying. Then I had a colleague who was also a mental health professional, probably had a couple of those who, you know, could understand what I was experiencing, not just from a personal point of view, but because they had, you know, work in their field as well.

John 15:55

And I think we're things that difficult for friends or family. Those who are having very strong emotional experiences is that they don't even have the language sometimes to explain or understand what it is that you're going through. And they can easily feel overwhelmed or fright or frightened by the intensity of emotion. Particularly, they've never experienced the same thing.

John 16:24

And so, for various reasons, unless they've been through something similar, I often find it's those who've been through some other life crises and come through it, Okay, then let's get to hear what somebody's going through and less overwhelmed by so part of this process of recovery is about finding those people who can listen to and manage the types of thoughts and feelings and sometimes but is that you're going through without being overwhelmed or frightened by it.

Bill 16:59

Yeah, I think it's really important to discuss that part of it because you and I are now talking about just mental well being. And we haven't yet spoken about the impact of stroke on, you know, people and the stress that that causes and how it influences people's mental well being one way or the other. So, this is really important because if you have these tools to deal with the challenges that life throws at you just on a day to day basis, then at least I felt that when I got to my stroke journey, say, almost 15 years after I'd first started to see a psychologist, I was very well positioned to deal with the emotional challenges that stroke created for me.

Bill 17:41

And as a result of that, it was less traumatic, although very serious, and although I required rehabilitation and had to learn how to walk again, and it's been six a six year journey so far, I still felt like I was in a lot more better space. After stroke, then I had been in my early years when I hadn't really experienced anything that was too dramatic.

Bill 18:08

As far as my health was concerned. How do you how do you relate to that part of the next part of your life? So you've gone through the process, you've experienced the stroke, and then you've overcome the challenges that you were faced with as a, quote unquote normal person who hadn't experienced a stroke but was experiencing some mental well being challenges. How did that support you in your stroke recovery?

John 18:37

What I would say is that, you know, commenting on your experience, Bill is that, you know, when we first have a major life challenge, like the one you're describing in your early 20s, and like the one I was describing, having experienced the trauma and depression, and you get through that, then you realize that you've got, you know, personal strength resilience, right than what you imagined. And so there's a sentence will, okay, life dealt me that blow.

John 19:08

So perhaps I'm more resilient than I thought. And I can deal with other blows, if they should come along. And also by that stage, you've experienced that, you know, being vulnerable, being fragile, having to reach out for help. And when you do reach out for help, it makes a real difference and that we can't do these things on our own.

John 19:09

So you're more likely to be resourceful more likely to ask for help, more likely to do the things that people suggest to you to do. So I think there are a couple of factors where if you've been through some crisis before and one like a stroke comes along or brain injury will then you're a bit more open to a asking for help. And so realizing, okay, this is a big challenge, but I've been through challenges before and I got through them.

Bill 20:00

Excellent. Now, can you tell me a little bit about what you noticed when you started to experience your stroke? So what was the symptoms that you experienced and how did it unfold?

## David's Symptoms

John 20:15

It happened during the night and during the night just a normal day normal night I got up during the night with a headache, and I can't say now how bad the headache was, but it was bad enough for thought. I need to get out of bed and take it panadol I think I took one or two panadol and then just went back to bed. The next memory I have really is and I didn't know at the time but I was actually in the hospital waiting room at the emergency department.

John 20:46

My wife had rushed me to hospital because she'd found me wandering around the house early morning dressed as if I was going to work. Well this is like, you know, been a year and a half in fact, before Last work, so it was ridiculous that I was dressed in my work, clothes, let alone up so early. But also I was just wandering around this house saying, What What am I supposed to be doing? And she was say, will you school holidays and you'll be taken to the girls today school camp.

John 21:20

But I had no idea that I was meant to do any of that or that it was school holidays. And she just told me that answer and then a few minutes later, apparently, I would ask you the same question again. So that's when she caught on that something was seriously wrong. Um, she said I felt very cold to touch and I'm not very green. So she organized a friend to to take care of the girl and rush me to hospital.

John 21:46

And my first memory as I say is being in the hospital waiting room just being you know, sort of interested in what this place was and what these people are doing there. I wasn't particularly freaked out by it. But then I noticed that, you know, nurses and doctors would come to me, you know, they took me into a room and they were asking me questions, which I found difficult to answer because I actually noticed that I'd forgotten a lot of things.

John 22:14

I just seemed not to be able to remember dates. I was asked to the prime minister was I couldn't remember who it was. And I didn't even know where I was. I only worked out I was in a hospital because eventually somebody told me that and I thought, Oh, that's a that's a hospital I think I've been to before when my wife was giving birth to her daughter. So it was a slow puzzle that I was putting together. And that first 24 hours, I was pretty much out of it that first day.

John 22:46

felt like it may have been an hour long, but you know, it's 24 hours and the next day, I was a bit more with it. And I understood that I was in a hospital something serious that happened but even though the top Come and say, oh, we're having a look at your brain. It didn't really register what the important that was. And I kept noticing that time seemed to be slipping by, you know, I'd be look at the clock and think, Well, you know, another hour has gone by, and I thought that was just a minute.

John 23:16

So my main symptom at that time was amnesia and disorientation. You know, if I walked out of that Ward, I would have just been totally lost, I would have had no idea how I got there or where I was meant to be going. So that was the main symptom. And then three weeks after that, an MRI was done on my brain, and that's when the diagnosis of stroke was actually made, and discovered that the (inaudible) of my brain had been damaged and part of the left temporal lobe, which has a lot to do with understanding conversation, and also in memory.

John 23:54

You know, where you are so sort of geographical memory. That's why I kept losing where I was and that's why also conversation was very difficult. I had a bit of right sided weakness it was still left vertebral artery on at the rear of the brain so so I had a bit of right side of weakness but I didn't have any loss of mobility I just felt incredibly weak like I was an old man. And you know, I would hold things in my right hand and sometimes they would just just drop for no good reason.

John 24:30

So in that first few weeks, I feel like sometimes that I was just dreaming it all. I was not always sure that what was happening was real. But because I wasn't sure I thought okay best to just pretend or act as if these things are really happening

that this person speak to me speaking to me is real. So answer his questions, was a very, very sort of in between world experience.

Bill 24:58

Yeah, I think in the beginning of the book you mentioned a lot of those things. And I related to that and found myself getting quite emotional at the beginning of the, the book when I read it and realized that you're basically saying what it is that I experienced. What I'm curious to know about is, firstly, what kind of stroke did you have?

John 25:24

Well, I had a blood clot in the left vertebral artery, the rear one. And the reason for that blood clot is not clear it was never discovered why I had it. So my understanding is 10 20% of strokes happened for no identifiable medical cause. My my arteries which checked out and they're all fine, and so it's possible. I mean, it was suggested to me by the ophthalmologist who was the one who diagnosed that I'd lost a quarter of my vision.

John 25:59

She's maybe you had a sudden increase in blood pressure, and possibly, you know, that could have happened as a result of a nightmare because I was waking up sometimes during the night, you know, cold sweat, sometimes afraid that I was about to be killed. So it's quite possible that my blood pressure to suddenly increased, but it was explained to me that, you know, little bits of material in the arteries be floating around that does cause a blood clot not because there's any pathology, just just a random thing. So I forgot I forgot what your question was.

Bill 26:39

Oh, no, that's okay. That was the question. It was basically what it was that caused it and what type of stroke you had. That's okay. So, so what was some of the challenges that you and the family faced after stroke? So for me, I had a lot of challenges around getting back to work and getting active again, I couldn't afford to be out of work. It caused a lot of challenges with the family with regards to, you know, my extended family that concern and they're unable to really be supportive in any way that was helpful to me. And that was frustrating to me.

# Challenges David had to face after stroke



Bill 27:12

They were able to drive me places. But that was frustrating also because I had to get people there when they were available rather than when I was available. So I found those early days of stroke recovery were probably the hardest but as things started to come back on for me, where my ability started to come back, my memory started to improve. I was able to drive after several months, I started to really appreciate my independence again, what was it like immediately after the stroke for you after those first few months,

John 27:46

I think there was all going through all those routine medical tests and the local physician put me through shine, identify the cause. I was very concerned I might have a follow up stroke because there's a you know, an increase chance of having a second stroke up to the first one. And wherever ride was that the second strike is more likely to be fatal than the first one. So it's pretty, pretty worried and no one else seemed to share that anxiety.

John 28:16

I think the family immediate family, I had young children, so they really had no concept of what I was experiencing. And we were also under a lot of financial stress by this time because we used up all our savings, the global financial crisis hit so what investments we had with difficult to get good value from we sold everything we could. So we're under enormous financial strain and we had to get good financial help from the extended family.

John 28:47

So all of that was an added stress, which was really not helpful in terms of recovery. So I had to focus a lot on that a bit like you're saying, you know, financially had to get back to work and stuff. There was a lot of concerns around how we could survive financially. So, besides that, then I had to work out well, how do I get better because I was what was called the walk and talk stroke.

John 29:15

You know, my stroke was actually diagnosed some weeks after I left hospital. So there was no rehab that I could do. You know, like it was taught and learning like this later, unless you've got physical mobility problems or speech, speech or swallowing problems. There's actually no real help or there wasn't. So I was left with the instructions from my physician, which was to just rest as much as possible. And don't do anything harder than read the newspaper.

John 29:48

Well, in the end, I was pretty unsatisfied with that. So that's when I started my investigation of what else could I do to improve my recovery and fortunately, I had an insurance policy and income protection policy, which finally kicked in after a while, like when we were so desperate I made a claim, unsure whether we'd become a better was.

John 30:11

So suddenly we had some income. And they actually sent me along to neuro psychologists about six months after the stroke well, and I noticed I was finding conversation very tiring, very difficult. I was needing to sleep a lot during the day noises were really bothersome. Having the children around the house was really tiring because I would just make children's noises and run around and that, you know, that would actually feel like was physically stabbing into my brain.

John 30:43

And, you know, my wife didn't understand, you know, the neurology of it or, or what, what was needed and of course, I could explain, and then either I'd never been through something like this before. So there was very little immediate Help. But as I got a bit clearer and like you, you know, may or may start to come back. I had this near I saw assessment and basically what he said was that your main areas of deficit is in auditory processing.

John 31:17

So processing sounds so many things like language. So my visual memory actually was very good, but my verbal memory so, I couldn't have not I could not have had a conversation like we're having now because you would have asked me a question. And halfway through my, so I would have totally forgotten. You know, halfway through the first sentence, I would have forgotten what you asked me or what I actually said. So, my verbal memory was totally shot. And I realized from my own training as a psychologist, I'd done some neuro psychology assessments and trained in before

John 31:55

processing was the thing I needed to work on. So that's why I discovered that there was a brain training program, computer based one that could help you train with auditory processing. Now those programs are pretty common, but in that time, they are quite new. And I worked out the program that would be best for me. And I started a regimen of doing that every day, the exercises every day, but I could only do half an hour, because I'll get so mentally fatigue, even when I did that in the morning.

John 32:29

So I never got more than half an hour. But after six weeks, I noticed there were really improvement, my auditory processing, through conversations were better I was remembering things that I was told and what I was saying much better. And I was around that time I thought, well, you know, this is really working and also, physical exercise was starting to kick in a bit more I could walk further.

John 32:55

So it's gradually improving the amount of exercise I did and eventually I I joined a polarity studio because I one of the things. So the stroke was I couldn't lower my head down I get incredibly dizzy somehow that affected the vestibular system, the balance system in the brain. So even unloading the dishwasher or picking something off the floor would make me woozy just from dizziness.

John 33:22

So the (inaudible) training meant that I could do all the exercises either flat on my back or on my stomach or standing up right or sitting up, right? You know, because of the machines that they have. So I couldn't go back to yoga for quite a while I couldn't go back to ocean swimming for quite a while because the waves



go up and down. But I was able after a while I go back to the pool where you know, you're not going up and down. So it's a gradual process over many, many months to find out what I could do and and but I couldn't do

Bill 33:58

Your stories. so familiar. I mean, that's one of the reasons I contacted you, but also because I love it when other people tell their story, because then it's easier for me to have somebody that I know somebody that I struggle to explain things to similar to you struggling to explain things to your wife, to just listen to somebody else talk about it, because that way, they can relate to the experience as a wife that they noticed.

Bill 34:29

But now from your words, they know, like what it was that I was going through, and they see that this is not just me, at the time imagining it or having trouble either writing it or whatever. It was actually part of the stroke and it was something that was new to me and how was I meant to get the message across. The challenge with the children was was what I faced, you know, the challenge with therapy at the beginning because I had a bleed. In February 2012, then I had a second one six weeks later.

Bill 35:04

Again, there wasn't any physical, so obvious physical issues. So I missed out on having a neuro psych assessment. My neuro psych assessment was six months after the initial challenge. And it was then discovered that I had problems with being able to make a conversation, understand what I was being asked, respond to a question. remember who it was that came to visit me.

Bill 35:30

So these things I think, are very common experiences that people that experienced stroke, go through and, and, and suffer. So what I hope is I hope that carriers come across these episodes, specifically these kind of episodes so that they can get a feel for what it is that their loved one is going through. What was it like for your wife to be on the receiving end? Have you ever had had the conversation with her to understand what she was going through?

## Trying to make our loved ones understand



John 36:05

Yes. I tried to explain to her as I worked, you know, what things would impact on me and what didn't? And so, you know, like a typical question she might say, is it just an example of a question, which was frustrating for her and frustrating for me, she might say, you know, what would you like for dinner tonight? She was a very good cook, and it sort of taken over the cooking role in the family. And I found that question really difficult to answer.

John 36:42

Because for a start, I had trouble remembering dishes, you know, food, I couldn't remember. It was like everything. It was like the world. The world of course, was going at the same pace it had ever gone on. But it was like I was in slow motion or the world. It's speeding. So somebody in the world would ask a question or say something in the normal way that they always would prefer me. It was different. It was it for me it was like they were talking really quickly or their wander really quickly.

John 37:17

And I would ask, answer that question by trinary number dishes that, you know, we ate or that she cooked. So that was one thing and then I had to decide what what is my preference? So it was another thing again, and then I had to remember the words to explain that. So, you know, often say, in those early days, it was like, you know, English was a second language. For me, it wasn't my first language. It was like a second language that I was trying to thinking.

John 37:48

So it's very frustrating for her and eventually I would explain to her and to the girls, that you know, my brain would get sore and you know, that I'd say if you make lots of noises, I get sore brain. And I remember saying once to my wife, I look, I can't answer your question, right? for her. It's just a simple question Not, necessarily about cooking could be anything. It might just require a yes or no answer. And I said, Look, I'm can't answer your question right now.

John 38:22

I've got a sore brain. And sore brain was like, I can't actually think at all. And, you know, just having this conversation is really hurting me. I remember saying, once I've got this, sore brain. And as he said, When will your brain be right, again, really frustrated. And of course, there's no way I can answer that question either. So I don't think she ever truly understood what I was experiencing at all.

John 38:51

And my my situate issue was that, you know, our marriage became more and more strained as things going on and we ended up becoming divorced couple of years after the stroke, so I don't think I've ever, although we're on friendly terms now and it's okay. We've never had a proper conversation, so she didn't really want to talk about anymore. So I've decided to leave it be but I know, she didn't fully understand what I was experiencing. And that's just common for all sorts. It's not particular to me.

Bill 39:28

No, I don't think so. I think a lot of people would relate to that. And the fact that it happens to a lot of people perhaps in this conversation will just allay some people's concerns, and give people the opportunity to just, you know, walk away and not get too overwhelmed by these conversations that seemed to go nowhere because we couldn't make them you know, go anywhere because we were not capable at that point in time. So, you're quite a number of years down the track now, and a one have you got back to your practice as a psychologist?

John 40:05

No, I haven't. So, I mean, if I had, if I had just had the stroke, it's possible that I could have got back to the type of work I was doing before, but probably no less hours because I still do get mental fatigue after a lot of concentration or a lot of conversation. But because I've had the trauma, the trauma came out of my work.

So it's essentially listening to, you know, the trauma stories of many, many people over 20 years, and I had worked in the prison system as well and had seen a lot of bad behavior.

John 40:49

And at times, you know, I've had my life threatened during the course of my work, so it was agreed really by my psychologist treating doctors that I should never go back to that work again the clinical work the face to face work because it could trigger you know another episode of trauma so even though I don't live with the the constant symptoms of trauma these days as occasionally I bought things you know, where I see bad things on the news happening to people, certain stories, particularly around children I tend to avoid, because I know that they they the ones that I'm most sensitive to.

John 41:33

So for that reason, I haven't gone back to to that work but what happened and what can happen out of a crisis like this when it all seems negative and positive can happen. And the positive has been for me that when I got well enough, I thought, well, gee, I I really feel like maybe there's a story here that I could ride that would help other people because I found hearing other people's stories and reading other people. people's stories are invaluable.

John 42:03

And these were the stories of other people that have been through, you know, stroke or brain injury or other major life crises and just that they could get through them. they've experienced the frustrations that that both you and I have been talking about, gave me a lot of confidence, and a lot of hope. So that will maybe my way of giving back to all those people who are yet to come is to is to write my story. And then I, you know, make contact with the writer center, I'd always enjoyed writing that I've never done it in outside of my professional writing.

John 42:39

And, you know, I spoke to one of the writing consultants, he said, Oh, look, I think that's a fantastic story. So then I went away and wrote a few things, showed it to him said, you look the content is good, but you just need to improve your writing skills. Because professional writing as a psychologist is very different. Very different for writing, you know, in a narrative way like you know, and you read a

novel way, you know, you just feel like, I mean the story because the writer is used all the right ways of getting you into the story.

John 43:07

So I went and did some writing courses on areas of writing, you know, which took me a, almost a year and, practice a lot and, and then, you know, I pitched the story at a Writers Festival and there were publishers that are and they said, Oh, you would like to publish that. And so now my main occupation is writing and, you know, speaking and, and though I actually really, really love it, so I write about, you know, psychology things, health related things. So I'm still drawing in my background, but I'm telling stories in a way that I didn't before and couldn't do before.

Bill 43:50

Well, I certainly resonated with your book. I also had an opportunity to tune into some of your YouTube videos, the way your Speaking on different topics, different locations, and I thought that was really fabulous to listen to and to read the book really touched me and really made it possible for me to feel like there was somebody else out there that knew me and understood me an experience what I experienced and explained it a lot better than I've been able to explain it.

Bill 44:22

So the book is an invaluable tool that I can hand to somebody and say, if you want to know what I'm going to just read it, read the book and understand. And I think that's really one thing that was missing. for me. I had a lot of communication with stroke survivors, a lot of connections and are a lot of people from the community. But I've never had a tool that I could pick up and say here, guys what, read that and take out the word David and replace it with Bill and 80% of the time.

## **Positive feedback**



Bill 44:53

It's you know, what it is that I've experienced, or gone through in one way or another So I am so glad that you got to put your previous experience of being a psychologist and use those skills to translate what you went through into a story because it's just so helpful. And I think it's gonna make a big difference to a lot of people. I expect you will have already had some amazing feedback from other people who read it. Tell me about some of those interactions. What has it been like for others who have picked up your book?

John 45:33

Well, you know, like, you're saying things that have other Raiders have told me to bill and it's so gratifying because, you know, you tell your story or your experience and you just don't know how it's going to resonate for other people. So certainly, you know, it's had a big impact in this community, both here and overseas. And, you know, the books been out for a few years now, and I still get emails all contexts, from people saying, I've just picked up your book or you know, thank you for this and some people said, it's been life changing, you know, like, it's the best advice that I ever had.

John 46:14

And I remember when the book came out and I was doing the rent, you know, on the writers tour around Australia and sometimes, I'm sorry, I remember one young woman who had had a brain injury when she was quite young, and she was still a young woman and you know, she's she obviously had a huge amount of energy even though speech was a bit jerky and her body movements are a bit jerky.

John 46:40

And before all this talk, of which I gave it a lottery. You can't help but notice the audience you know what they like before you start to present and I noticed her

and she was sitting right up the front and I thought he his trouble. You know, she was non stop talking to me. was was around and she's moving around a lot. But once I started talking, she was transfixed. Absolutely still, and not a word out of her until the presentation, she asked a really good question. And afterwards, she came up to me with her mother, her mother happened to be there as well.

John 47:20

And she said, David, I've learned more from you in this one hour than I have, over the years from all the health experts that I've been to. So, you know, who knows how true that is. But Kelly, Kelly, she, she was very engrossed in in the story and the way I was telling the story, and obviously really related to it. And then there was another young, a young boy who was like a teenager. And he came with his mother as well came up to me afterwards and said, you know, thank you very much.

John 47:55

He was obviously very shy person, but he looked me in the eye and said, Thank you for much this is, you know, it's been really wonderful. And his mother explained that, you know, I'd mentioned about the suicidal feelings, and he particularly had related to that and felt a lot more hope. So I've had other people have not had strokes not have brain injuries not had trauma, but there's something in the story that they resonate with.

John 48:20

And they, you know, so for whatever reason, you know, this is this is really touched me or given me some powerful, giving me ideas or if you can get through it, I can get through it. You know, so two things. The book was picked up in the UK, an agency that recommends books to health professionals to give out to patients and so it's been picked up, so it means it's available most of the libraries in the UK understand. So that was another really gratifying thing.

John 48:51

And because I really read the book, for you know, all the people that would need to hear another story, and I guess the publisher was Interested in this story? Not because not only because it was the survivor story, but because it was also somebody who had my background and you know, had a sort of an insight where I could talk from both points of view, you know, as the mental health person and also, as somebody with the experience going through it. And perhaps that's what

you picked up on when you said, you know, like, the book explains things that perhaps other stroke survivors haven't been able to explain.

Bill 49:30

Yeah, absolutely does. And the other thing about the book, and your story, particularly is that you're a health professional, and I don't wish for health professionals to experience stroke. The challenge with them being health professionals that haven't experienced stroke is they don't have really any idea how to support people within stroke recovery other than what they've learned in books. And although what I've learned in books is very valuable and important. It's just like me going to a motor mechanic and telling him you know how to fix my foot.

Bill 50:03

I mean, he can see it and go, look, it's broken. And you should probably do something with that. But he's a motor mechanic, and he knows how to fix cars who's never had a broken foot. So the opportunity to the opportunity to get you to tell your story makes it a lot easier for me to, you know, connect to you because of your experience. And I didn't want that for you. But the fact that you've done that, and you've been through that, and you have your background and your studies and all the things that you've done is just the type of person that I need needed to be speaking to early on, about my recovery.

Bill 50:43

And I refer back to yours, Jill Bolte Taylor, who is a famous neuroscientist who studies brains and all the things that we need to know about brains in relation to stroke because she's experienced her own. She's, you know, had her own stroke. And now she's coming from that place of somebody who's in the box seat to, to deliver, you know, solutions that are related to stroke recovery from a stroke patients perspective.

Bill 51:15

So that's what I get from you as well. And that's why I think it was important for us to talk and to get the message out further and to share the knowledge that you have, and also to make sure that more people can get ahold of your book. And that being said, is is this somewhere where you would like people to go to if they're interested in getting a copy of your book,



John 51:37

but I think largely available and awfully online bookstores. Some of the physical bookstores have it as you discovered, but these days, most of the online bookstores folded and it's also a typo. So I recorded the book and it was put out by Bill Linder. It's available on audible so you can download the book as an audio book, which can be really helpful for people who are having difficulty with reading after their, their brain injury.

John 52:08

And I might also say that the new book, the new book I'm working on is an extension of this one, it's not so much about me. But what I realized is exactly the thing you're saying is that when you been through a major life experience like stroke, like brain injury, like trauma, you just have a deeper feeling for what it's like to go through that. It's it's an understanding that you just cannot get through book learning. So the new books going to be about people who've been through a range of major life crises, how they survived them, but also perhaps even more importantly, how they grow own in positive ways. And what helps what helps people to grow after a major life crisis.

John 52:56

So exactly how do we support people going through Major lot of crisis during the crisis or, you know, maybe after this, but in the longer term, what helps people to grow? So we don't want this thing to happen in the first place is, but it's happened. So we can't pretend not otherwise. So given it's happened, how can we make the best of it? And sometimes people say, Well, actually, you know what happened, I'm really glad in a way because I'm a much, much better person. That's not always the case. But often people are grow in ways that become a different type of person and have different values in life. And they're very grateful for that. So the new book is going to be about that type of thing. So I'm hoping it'll be an extension from from how I rescued my brain. While I'm looking forward to

Bill 53:48

getting my hands on a copy of that one as well and keeping in touch with the other work that you do. I can definitely relate to what you said. I know that a lot of people can't say what I'm about to say, but I can say I will say it despite, in spite of the challenges that I, that I that I deal with on a daily basis because of what my stroke has created and left for me, it's the best thing that ever happened

to me. It's not easy and it's my life is not the same as it was beforehand. It certainly my life is not as easy as it was beforehand.

Bill 54:23

And I'm not talking about work financially or that kind of stuff. I'm just talking about the day to day, overcoming fatigue, that type of thing. But it's the best thing that ever happened to me, it's made me a different version of myself one that I prefer than the one that that I used to be the version of myself that I used to be, it's allowed me to connect with amazing people, your, you know, like yourself and everyone else.

Bill 54:45

And I've learned and I've offered a lot more, I've given a lot more back than I had ever given back to people who were in need. So hopefully other people experiencing a stroke can get to the point where they feel that it has also had a positive impact on their life. And that's what I wish for everybody. And that's what I wish for you and I really, really appreciate you making yourself available and being a part of the program. I will. I'll follow your next installment with interest.

John 55:18

Well, thank you, Bill, thank you for the good work that you're doing. It's wonderful that you've created this format, to share stories of other people and not only provide hope, but an inspiration but you know, practical guidance. So congratulations to you.

Bill 55:34

Thank you so much, David. I really appreciate it and wish you well in your ongoing journey and just keep doing all the good work that you do. I really appreciate what you do. And the fact that you wrote this book. It's touched me and it's made a difference in my life. So thank you.

Intro 55:55

Discover how to support your recovery after stroke and go to [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com)