

From Stroke to Service: Lara's Unlikely Recovery Journey

Internal Carotid Artery Dissection - How Lara Found Purpose After Stroke

A family ski day. A split-second movement. And life as she knew it would never be the same.

Lara Kaufman was a 41-year-old mother of three and a former chartered accountant living a full, busy life. On a ski hill just outside Toronto, she swung her arm with a ski pole to regain balance, and accidentally struck her neck with enough force to cause an internal carotid artery dissection.

It wasn't long before she collapsed at the top of the hill, right eye blurry, dizzy, and disoriented. Paramedics initially didn't recognize her symptoms as stroke. But by the time Lara reached a hospital that could scan her brain, she had suffered a **massive ischemic stroke**. She would soon need a **craniotomy** to relieve swelling. Her recovery had just begun.

"I was completely paralyzed on the left side of my body. My brain didn't even recognize the left side existed."

From ICU to Insight

For weeks, Lara couldn't walk, go to the bathroom on her own, or sit up without falling over. The left side of her body didn't respond. Her midline had shifted. She couldn't even tolerate having her photo taken because her face had swollen shut after surgery.

But through months of rehab, she began to reclaim movement. "I felt like recovery was slow. But looking back now, 15 years later, it was actually pretty fast."

“I’ve learned to do most things with one hand. I’ve got use of my right side, and I walk up to 6 kilometers. I’m independent again.”

Cryoneurolysis: A Game-Changing Treatment

For years, Lara battled painful **post-stroke spasticity**. Botox injections offered minimal relief. But in 2023, she traveled to Victoria, BC to undergo **cryoneurolysis** a novel treatment developed by **Dr. Paul Winston**.

This technique involves inserting a -88°C needle into spastic muscles to temporarily disrupt the nerve signal, giving stroke survivors a 6 to 9-month window to rehabilitate without stiffness. The results for Lara were immediate.

“After 14 years of no movement in my left arm, I can now do a bicep curl. That was impossible before.”

Redefining Success After Stroke

In the early days, Lara thought she’d be “back to normal” in two years. But normal changed.

She began volunteering with **March of Dimes Canada**, mentoring stroke survivors in rehab and later co-facilitating support groups. Every February 13th, the anniversary of her stroke, her family buys a cake and chooses one word to reflect her journey that year. “Accomplishment.” “Gratitude.” “Purpose.”

“If I could be successful in my recovery, I believed others could too. That’s why I keep sharing.”

Stroke Recovery That Keeps Evolving

Lara’s story isn’t one of overnight transformation — it’s one of dedication, community, and purpose.

Even 15 years post-stroke, she continues daily rehab, refuses to give up on using her left arm, and serves as an example of **post-traumatic growth**. Her recovery didn’t stop at walking again. It evolved into mentoring, speaking, and giving others hope.

Want to create your own recovery milestone?

Get the Book – *The Unexpected Way That a Stroke Became the Best Thing That Happened*

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Lara Kaufman's Internal Carotid Artery Dissection

A ski accident led to a stroke, but what followed was resilience, reinvention, and a surprising new purpose in life.

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Transcript:

Internal Carotid Artery Dissection - Lara Kaufman's Introduction and Background



Bill Gasiamis 0:00

Before we dive in. A big thank you to Banksia Tech for supporting this episode, proud distributors of the Hanson rehab glove by Syrebo. It's designed to help the stroke survivor improve hand function at home, whether you're early in recovery or years into it, you'll hear more about it later in this episode.

Bill Gasiamis 0:20

Links are in the YouTube description and at recoveryafterstroke.com. Now what if a split second movement during a ski trip was all it took to change everything? That's what happened to Lara Kaufman, a 41 year old mother of three from Canada, one moment she was gliding off a chairlift the next a jolt to her neck caused an internal carotid artery dissection and a massive ischemic stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 0:48

Within hours, Lara was fighting for her life, complete left side paralysis, a craniotomy, months in hospital, years of uncertainty. But she didn't stop at survival. She kept going long after the statistics said she should have plateaued.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04

If you've ever wondered whether recovery is still possible years down the track, if you've struggled with spasticity or been told you'll never by a doctor, if you're searching for purpose beyond the pain, this episode is for you, let's dive in. Lara Kaufman, welcome to the podcast.

Lara Kaufman 1:23

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23

Thank you for being here. Tell me a little bit about what life was like before stroke.

Lara Kaufman 1:32

Before stroke, I have three children, I have twin daughters and a son. My twin daughters were 10 and a half. My son was eight and a half. I was a full time working super mom. I'm a chartered accountant, so I was working, and actually at the time I wasn't in public practice anymore. I was working with my husband in the pet food business and working quite long hours.

Lara Kaufman 2:05

And then on February 13, 2010, we took a trip to Collingwood, Ontario, which is about two hours outside of Toronto, for a ski day. And we after a few runs up and down the hill, we I got off the chair lift, and I was walking toward the descent, and it's flat, and I don't know if you ski, but when you walk on a flat surface, you walk with your skis out like this, and you use your poles.

Bill Gasiamis 2:38

You drag yourself along with the poles.

Lara Kaufman 2:42

And the basket of my pole got stuck under my right ski. Instead of going like this, to yank to remove it the basket from the pole, I went like this, really hard, really fast, with the blunt end and punched myself in my carotid artery. That caused a carotid artery dissection, which then caused a blood clot, which then caused a massive stroke at the top of the hill.

Lara Kaufman 3:06

And all I know is my right eye was blurry. I was dizzy, and I felt okay. I don't think I should ski down this hill. And my husband was on the chairlift behind me, so when he saw me, he said I was foaming at the mouth, and eventually I collapsed onto my knees, and, you know, I said, I think you should ski down the hill. And goes, okay, it's okay, you know.

Lara Kaufman 3:26

And he kept saying, I kept hearing, stay with me. Stay with me. The kids were screaming. And, you know, from your children's cries, you know, there's a hungry cry, they're they, they're older, but there's a hungry cry that there's a scared cry,

you know, and a tired cry. This was a scared cry, and something I'd never heard before. And I didn't pass out. I was very awake, but not alert, just awake.

Medical Journey and Initial Internal Carotid Artery Dissection Treatment

Lara Kaufman 3:50

And then eventually, my husband called for speed patrol, who then came, and they called 911, and the paramedics came, they said they didn't see stroke right away, for some reason, I don't know why, but they did take me to the hospital and then, but that that hospital, because it's a small town, for whatever reason, there was no CAT scan machine there.

Lara Kaufman 4:12

They have one now, but time they didn't. And then they took me to another hospital, and there they diagnosed with a carotid artery dissection, and I need a neurosurgeon. There wasn't one there, so they might, fortunately, my aunt's brother is one. It was one of the top neurosurgers in the country, and so my dad called him. He's also a friend of my father.

Lara Kaufman 4:38

So my father called him, told him what had transpired, and he say, said they want to take her to Toronto, which is where I live, and large city, and they back in the ambulance. I went because apparently there were two snowflakes in the air, so the helicopters couldn't. Had to wait a half an hour to fly. And you know, as you know, with stroke, it's time.

Lara Kaufman 5:01

So they back in the ambulance, another hour back to Toronto. When we got to the hospital, my husband said they were like 40 people waiting in the bay for me, he's he's thinking, what great service you know, not realizing you only get that service when there's something you know terribly wrong. They had at this point, he hadn't heard the word stroke or brain damage, so he didn't know what was what.

Lara Kaufman 5:26

And they go into the hospital, and the chaplains pulling my husband aside, and my husband's like, No, I'm going with my wife. And he still had his ski boots on because he didn't think. He figured we'd go get checked out and then go back to

the ski hill, and then the the doctor came over. My parents met, met my husband and I there, and they took my parents and my husband to the quiet room.

Lara Kaufman 5:53

This is where they give you, you know, the bad news, saying that I had a stroke and there was significant brain damage, and the next 48 hours would be critical. Wow. And this point, I was oblivious to everything going on.

Bill Gasiamis 6:11

Did you did you have a realization at the time that you injured yourself? Did you connect?

Lara Kaufman 6:17

I knew something was wrong. I didn't know what. I didn't know stroke. I just knew something was wrong. I felt dizzy. I visited my right eye. Was it? Oh no, I did something very bad. Something's wrong. I didn't know what, I didn't know how serious. I just knew something was wrong, right? And then I shouldn't ski down the hill, because I don't think it's safe. That's all I could think about.

Bill Gasiamis 6:40

Yeah, so you made, but I got a couple of decisions that were critical to making the outcome even better than what it was that was a really good result from what happened you you hit yourself with the blunt part of the handle.

Lara Kaufman 6:58

Yeah and I went like this, really hard, but it was like this, like jerked, yeah, you know, because I was pulling it up instead of going like this one, like this, really hard, really fast, and it was a puff. I'd hit my chin. Maybe I would have fractured my chin, yeah, and had surgery, and it would have been the end of it, but because I happened to hit my carotid artery, yeah, you know the then the the effects of that, you know, if I'd hadn't hit so hard, maybe I would have bruised it. There was no mark on my neck, there was nothing. There was no cut, there was no mark, nothing.

Bill Gasiamis 7:33

So, from the injury, from the injury to hospital, how long passed? How much time?

Lara Kaufman 7:38

So injury to the first hospital, I'm probably going to say, about half an hour, and

then probably it was probably about three or four after four, four hours time I got to the hospital in in Toronto. But apparently, because the it was a bunch of bund forest trauma, I wouldn't have qualified for the TPA drug. No, no, because my husband did inquire about that. Yeah, um, if, if they did, if it did, if they could have taken the helicopter, would I? Could I have they? Could they have given me this drug? And they said, No, I wouldn't. Didn't qualify.

Bill Gasiamis 8:18

Yeah, time, the amount of the time had elapsed as well. So how long before you came kind of back into the land of the living? Were you aware? Was there a moment where you went from being kind of oblivious to then into awareness?

Lara Kaufman 8:33

Yeah. So some later, sometime later, that day they I when I was told that I had a stroke. Now, my grandfather, who I never met, who I'm named after, in 1964 I think it was or 65 for I was born, had a stroke. He had heart disease, and there was no blood thinners back then, and so I thought, I didn't know this at the time. I thought my grandfather died of a stroke. In fact, he survived the stroke, but he died a year and a half later of a heart attack.

Lara Kaufman 9:04

So my first, my thinking, because I didn't know that he, I thought he, I said, I, you know, I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I don't want to die. That's, you know, I have to be around for my kids like I don't want to die. That's all I could think about, is I don't want to die. And I was scared, okay, it was. And you know, my husband was saying, You're not going to die, you're going to be okay, you're going to be okay, even though he didn't know that or not. He just he lied.

Bill Gasiamis 9:32

A little white lie. That's a good lie.

Lara Kaufman 9:35

Yeah. And then I probably, I just remember getting they kept giving me CAT scans, like every office, every four hours, every eight hours, and the bed was very cold, and I was freezing. And so those are the things. It was the little things that I remember, not so much the big picture, because I was not told about the big picture.

Lara Kaufman 10:00

And then, and then they were monitoring me to see if I needed a craniotomy because my brain was swelling. Uh, okay. Had us the surgery four days later, and I remember I had to sign something to to to allow me to to authorize the surgery. My husband had to sign too, because they knew that I wasn't up to it wasn't 100% there.

Bill Gasiamis 10:25

Yeah. So you had a craniotomy, yeah? How much of the skull did they remove?

Lara Kaufman 10:32

Like the whole scar, this big. And they took it out for so February, February, 17, 18th, whatever that day was, they took it out and they put it back at the end of April.

Bill Gasiamis 10:47

Now, if you're working on hand recovery after stroke, there's a tool worth knowing about, the Hanson glove by Syrebo, available through Banksia Tech. It's safe to use at home even years after stroke, with six therapy modes, including stretch, grasp and release and a patented mirror function, it helps retrain your brain and hand together.

Bill Gasiamis 11:12

Banksia Tech ships internationally, and it qualifies as low cost assistive technology. Visit Banksiatech.com.au, or check out the links in the YouTube description and show notes are recoveryafterstroke.com to learn more. Now, let's take a moment. You've just heard Lara describe the surreal moment she hit her carotid artery and how within hours, her world collapsed into chaos, paralysis and silence.

Bill Gasiamis 11:39

She lost her ability to walk, to sit, to move, and yet she found a way forward. If you're in that in between place, not where you were, not where you want to be, just know this, the plateau is not the end. Healing does not follow a schedule. Hope is still on the table. Let's get back to Lara and what happened when she started helping others, February, March, April, so about three months in total.

Lara Kaufman 12:06

Yeah. They kept it out, and then I had to wear a hockey helmet, not in the hospital, but when I went to the rehab hospital, I had to wear a hockey helmet,

because the only thing separating my brain from the outside world was my skin. So if I hit it, if I fell and hit my head, it's game over.

Bill Gasiamis 12:23

How do you deal with that? So I a few months earlier, you were running around the business the kids being usual, normal, healthy person. You go skiing, have an you get an injury, you wake up in hospital. You've had a stroke, now your brain's swelling, and then one day, you wake up after a craniotomy with half of your skull missing, parked in a box somewhere in a refrigerator.

Lara Kaufman 12:53

I don't think I really understood what was going on. It's like you get this information. You're like, okay, okay, you know, like, you just, you just kind of go with it, and you don't really understand the ramifications of what's really going on, you know, I thought this was February. We were supposed to go to Florida in March, and I thought I was going, you know, I didn't. And my husband says, you know, you're not going to Florida. Go, yeah, here we are going, don't worry, it's okay. We'll go, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 13:23

Delusions was huge. That's okay, I understand that as well. Now, did you catch yourself in the mirror? Did you have a look and go, what on earth is going on here? What am I looking at here?

Lara Kaufman 13:37

No, I did not look. After the craniotomy, my eyes were swollen shut, like I could see cracks, and so I knew I there's no way I look good, and because of that, I didn't want anybody taking my picture. I regret it now, because I would love to see what I look like, then it would also help, you know, see how far I've come, even though I know I've come a long way. Yeah, I wish I had pictures from back then, but I I didn't want anybody taking my picture, so.

Bill Gasiamis 14:04

Yeah, fair enough. And then what about the part of the surgery when they put it back? What is that like? What is that experience?

Lara Kaufman 14:14

I remember that more because I had been in rehab for six weeks, maybe longer. And so I, like, you know, in the there were little things like in the re in the rehab

hospital, the nurses transfer you from wheelchair to bed, you know, and back. Whereas in the hospital, you in order to get to wheelchair, they gotta, they gotta lift you in this, I call it the elephant lift, you know, with the parachute.

Lara Kaufman 14:47

And then they bring you down, they put you, and you feel like you're this, like this elephant in a zoo, being lifted up and putting it because the nurses aren't trained to transfer you, which was such a simple thing. You. So there were and I was more aware when I was in the hospital the second time than I was the first time, much more aware of my surroundings, the people, the nurses, everything.

Bill Gasiamis 15:12

Sounds like the the healing of the brain had started to happen already. The swelling had gone down. Things started to come back online, and you gave you the opportunity to be more with it.

Lara Kaufman 15:23

Yeah, exactly. And I was, I mean, at least I feel I was.

Bill Gasiamis 15:29

You know that part where you forbid images, photos, that type of thing. Do you think it was part of the not having accepted what happened? Or was it actually just because of the way that you looked?

Lara Kaufman 15:47

I thought all this was temporary. I really thought this was all temporary, and this was a blip in this, you know, in the scheme of things, and that's just not having a full grasp of what, really happened.

Bill Gasiamis 16:00

Just being ignorant about stroke, which is normal, at your age.

Lara Kaufman 16:04

Ignorant about stroke, ignorant about my situation, you know, the doctor said, you know, to you, you know, it'll take you two years to recover. You'll be back. They didn't say back to normal. But when they said it'll be about a two year recovery, in my mind, you know, in two years, I'll be back to normal.

Bill Gasiamis 16:28

I know it's, it's an interesting statement, because everyone who's been through stroke kind of has a moment like that. They have the back to normal moment, and then then they have the, there is no back to normal. And then that's the moment as well, and that's pretty dramatic, but, yeah, craniotomy tends to be a bit more dramatic, and therefore more recovery, more healing, more areas that have been impacted, interacted with, touched.

Bill Gasiamis 16:55

You know, there's so much to comprehend, you know, for the body to comprehend and realign and readjust, not to mention the possibility that you've got deficits from the actual stroke. You know, the part of the injury which shut down your brain, some of your brain cells. So where is that? What type of injuries did you end up with after the stroke?

Rehabilitation and Early Recovery From The Internal Carotid Artery Dissection

Lara Kaufman 17:20

So when I had my stroke, I was completely paralyzed on the entire left side of my body. Couldn't feel a thing, and my brain didn't recognize the left side at all. So my midline, which used to be center, was now moved, you know, to the right side, and I couldn't even sit in a wheelchair because I kept falling over because I had no trunk support at all.

Lara Kaufman 17:43

And I went from that to, you know, the recovery was, I felt was slow, you know, and nobody feels it's fast, but in hindsight, was actually pretty quick, looking back now that it's been 15 and a half years, you know, I can now walk five kilometers, maybe six at one time, and I'm fairly independent.

Lara Kaufman 18:15

My left arm is still partially paralyzed, so I don't have a lot of use of it, but I've learned to do most things with my right hand, so I've just kind of made do with what I have, and I've always had a positive outlook on things. I really just believe that, you know, this was there's a higher reason for all this. I read a book many, many years ago called why bad things happen to good people.

Lara Kaufman 18:43

And although I don't remember the details of the book, I remember, you know the title, it's in the title. You know that there's, you know, why bad, but the good things come from it, you know? And so I said to my husband, there's gotta be silver linings here. This is, this is so bad, there's gotta be silver linings. And I kept looking. I was like this for the first two years, looking for where you know, where are they.

Discovery of Purpose and Helping Others



Lara Kaufman 19:06

And then someone told me, when you're meant to find them, you will. And then I would say, about six months after that conversation, I was approached by March of Dimes Canada, which is a disability charity organization helping people with disability, empowering people with disabilities in Canada. And I got involved with them, with their they had a stroke program looking they were looking for stroke survivors to peer Council stroke survivors that were in the hospital.

Lara Kaufman 19:39

And my doctor thought I'd be a great person to do it. And I said, Okay, here's my here's my reason like here's and I started doing I went to the rehab hospital every week for two hours from 2013 until 2020 till covid. And then started doing it online, having one. To one calls, and really helped me, you know, talk to people, meet people from all over with all walks of life, and listen to their stories. And it helped me in my journey as well.

Lara Kaufman 20:13

And I would go and I'd, you know, they were so thankful that I used to come home feeling very selfish for I'd get some such good feedback from it that I'm thinking of what I'm such a selfish, selfish person, because I'm getting the rewards, you know, when I know, in fact, it's the opposite, and I'm helping them and but it's just the way I really enjoyed it, and I still do it to this day. And you describe, whenever they ask me to do something, I I just don't say no. So I'm now, now co facilitating a peer support group, a new pilot project.

Bill Gasiamis 20:46

Weird. Isn't it like you're describing me exactly. It's exactly what happened to me, is I went to the Stroke Foundation. They put me in touch with stroke survivors. We started to share. And I feel a little bit more like understanding and, you know, empathy and support.

Bill Gasiamis 21:04

And then from there, I volunteered. So I started coaching, telling people about stroke, raising awareness in the community, what to what the signs are, what to do if you think somebody's having a stroke, that kind of stuff. Amazing, awesome. And I was saying I was coming home going, Oh, this is really cool. I'm getting a lot of a lot out of this.

Bill Gasiamis 21:23

And then I thought, I need more than that. I need, I think I need to create a community online. All these seeds were planted by other people, by the way, the word, it wasn't me that came up with them. And then I just found myself doing the podcast. And then, you know, being 30, 40, 50 episodes in and going, Oh, this is really cool. I'm getting so much out of this.

Bill Gasiamis 21:46

I didn't know that the stroke survivors on the other end of the Zoom call were getting something out of it as well, which was just my naivety, you know. Just thought it's a good thing I'm getting something out of it. Bonus. And then I started to really get excited when people started sharing that they were needing that episode, thank you for that episode, it's great that I found this person, I connected with this person, I reached out to this doctor because of what you interviewed them about.

Advancements in Stroke Recovery and Technology

Bill Gasiamis 22:16

And that was mind blowing. And then it was around episode 40 when I said stroke was the best thing that happened to me. And that's the thing is, how do you describe that to somebody who's so early on that you have the opportunity to get there? It might. It's not the best physical experience, health experience. It's not that part that's good. It's what comes of it later.

Bill Gasiamis 22:39

And I was looking for a word to describe it. I didn't know, how do you package all of those amazingness and then just say it in one sentence so somebody knows what the heck you're on about, right? And I stumbled across the work of Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, two researchers in the United States that coined the term post traumatic growth.

Bill Gasiamis 23:03

And that's me to a T, right? And my book is called The unexpected way that stroke became the best thing that happened. And in there are the 10 steps to get somebody to experience post traumatic growth. They're the things that I did and all the things that the other people did that said that they had that stroke was the best thing that happened to them.

Bill Gasiamis 23:25

Do you know? It's so weird, but that is the opportunity that arises and and just for the people listening and everyone know what Post Traumatic Growth means, it's something that happens after a trauma. The trauma doesn't have to be a stroke or death of a loved one, trauma is on a spectrum, and it's different for everybody. So it doesn't matter what the trauma is.

Bill Gasiamis 23:47

And basically, if you experience after that particular incident, spiritual development, a sense of new personal strength, you improve your relationships, a greater appreciation for life, and you have taken action of or you've seen new possibilities you're experiencing post traumatic growth. That's what I love it I love come after all of the trauma that you went through and, yeah, that's what it's about. It's about and it comes. It came to me more than anything, after I did

things for other people, stopped making about me and started making about other people.

Lara Kaufman 24:36

Yeah, and for me, like one of the first people that I went and I went to the hospital, one of the first patients that I had visited, she said to me, you know, I've read about stroke in a book, but I didn't know what it looked like until you walked in the room, and I was, like, blown away. Like, wow. Like, the impact that I could have. You know, as as a mother, you just want to have an impact on your kids, right? I don't think beyond that, but to have this kind of impact, like you're doing as well, it's quite remarkable.

Internal Carotid Artery Dissection Challenges and Setbacks in Recovery

Bill Gasiamis 25:06

It expands your horizons. You know, you go from your identity being I'm a father, I'm a husband, I'm a dad, I'm a I work, I've got a job, I've got I run a business, to something more than that. I don't know what those other things are for other people, but for me, it's somebody you know, who has a community, who helps people, who people help me, who on a connector, I can connect people from all over the world, like now, Stroke Foundation, call me, you know, ridiculously, almost every second day.

Bill Gasiamis 25:39

Can you do this? Can you help out with that? Can you, of course, like you, it's a yes. So there is something, there is something about it where you don't realize the benefits for the greater community and yourself, and therefore how you turn up at home, how your example, the example you're setting for your kids, what happens after a diversity you go through a really tough time, but how can you behave, regardless of what your deficits are, what your problems are, how do you respond? And then you give them a a sense of if if you guys ever find yourself in a terrible situation, here's one example of how you can tackle it.

Lara Kaufman 26:26

It's exactly what. So in grade 12, one of my daughters, it was a little thing, but one of your daughters was having a difficult difficulty with her, one of her teachers, and her teacher, I don't know, just, it's just, there's issues. And I said to

her, you know, she's I said, you can give up, or you can, or you can, you know, persevere.

Lara Kaufman 26:47

And I said, Look what I've done. You've seen me persevere. You know, you can persevere too. Because one thing that's for sure, guaranteed that shit's going to happen in life. You know, it happens to everybody in different forms. Sometimes it's financial, sometimes it's emotional, sometimes it's, it's, it's, you know, family problems, like, but stuff's going to happen everybody.

Lara Kaufman 27:13

I believe everybody gets hit with something. So it's not what you can't control. What you can control is how you react to those things that happen. Yeah, that's the one thing we still have, is the control of how to how to respond to that.

Lara Kaufman 27:25

And so you can curl up in a ball and cry and live your life that way, and you know, and your community and friends are probably going to drift off because people don't want to be, people aren't don't want to be around that. Or you can stand up straight, you know, and, you know, dust, you know, brush the dust off and get to work and do what you have to do and what you don't have to go and volunteer. You don't have to, just have to get yourself just get back up and and do what you gotta do.

Bill Gasiamis 27:59

Yeah. I think you have to learn, don't? You have to learn about yourself, about the situation, about how you can heal, how you can overcome. You have to backfill those skills that you didn't get along the way, that are going to be necessary for you to use to get you to the next stage.

Lara Kaufman 28:16

And what I found is you have to accept. You have to accept what happened soon as you accept what happened that Okay, now what do I have to do? Yes, what do I want to do?

Bill Gasiamis 28:29

Again it opens up more opportunities acceptance. I feel like it just opens up solutions, rather than problems.

Lara Kaufman 28:35

Exactly you go right to the solutions, as opposed to, you know, woe is me, and you know why me? And this is, yes, it sucks. You know, it's not a picnic, it's, it's not a walk, it's a mountain climb, it's not a walk in the park, and it's challenging, and it's, you're gonna cry and you're gonna scream and yell and go through all the emotions, but go through them.

Bill Gasiamis 29:03

Yeah, go through them. Was this someone that you bumped into or that sort of turned up out of nowhere that you thought, Oh, well, and kind of helped you take the next step. Did you have a did somebody? I had a couple of people who sort of turned up out of nowhere, stepped up, became my mentors, people I didn't expect and and they kind of had, they created a, like a shift in my trajectory.

Lara Kaufman 29:34

I can't say that new people, per se, my husband was my wasn't, is my rock. And he, you know, Google spoke to everybody, anybody possibly could, about stroke recovery and where to go. And so he laid the groundwork and found all the right, you know, people to contact, and helped me take those first steps. You know, when I came home.

Lara Kaufman 29:56

You know, the after outpatient. You know, the right, private therapy/therapists and social worker, physio, occupational therapists and all that, and and this, it was all about recovery at the beginning, and then, and then, my doctor was very for my physiatrist at my hospital was also a huge help. She sort of became an unofficial quarterback, and I say unofficial because it was not her role.

Lara Kaufman 30:27

She just, she's the one who introduced me to the March of Dimes Canada program and said, you know, this is the person, this is the contact person you call, you know, if you want to do this. And so I, I called, you know, got involved, and then from there, got involved in lots of other things afterwards.

Bill Gasiamis 30:49

Did you have moments? Go ahead. What were you going to say?

Lara Kaufman 30:55

My friends rallied around us. Our friends and family were huge. Was very lucky to

have a massive support system.

Bill Gasiamis 31:03

Yeah, yeah, it's really important.

Lara Kaufman 31:07

Cousins drove me to my feet to my therapy appointments, and when my mother couldn't do it. So it was very fortunate to have that support system. Not everybody has, and everyone rallied around us and brought dinners to my home, for my family, um, picked up my kids, took my kids, my best friend, organized like a grocery list, grocery shopping every week. People would sign up to do groceries for the every week for my family, um, and and organize pickups for my kids play dates and people's and other after school programs. So I was really lucky to have that.

Bill Gasiamis 31:49

Yeah, wow. What a community. That's awesome.

Lara Kaufman 31:52

And people who I wasn't friends with, would, like, call my friends and say, you know, how can I help? I want to do something. So it was, it was amazing.

Lara Kaufman's Journey and Tradition

Bill Gasiamis 32:02

Yeah, you do find people come out of nowhere all of a sudden, yes, family and friends, they're obliged to an extent. But then there's also, there's, I'd say, some people, random people who I knew, but yeah, really know who did so much. And it's and it was like, and then they did their job, and then they kind of went off and disappeared again.

Bill Gasiamis 32:24

I was like, Well, what's all that about? I mean, I'm grateful for the way that it happened, whatever. I don't have any expectations beyond that, but it was just amazing. They've just rocked up, done the they put the cape on, they did their thing, and then they just slowly, kind of, you know, went back to the place where they were when we knew each other.

Lara Kaufman 32:49

And I was okay. I was very grateful for what I got. I never really questioned or said, yeah, oh, you should have done more. You should have done this. I was just very grateful for what I got. Yeah, not a lot. It was very grateful.

Bill Gasiamis 33:01

Yeah. Did you have surely, there were times when you had doubts and concerns and worries about everything you're going through, what the future looks like. Are you that?

Lara Kaufman 33:13

At the two and a half year mark when the doctor said in the hospital, it's going to take two, three year to recover. So I get to two and a half years, and I'm like, This is it? Like, seriously, after everything I have done for the past two and a half years, this is all I got. And I was like, and my physiotherapist said, it's not true. It's not true. You, you stop recovering when you, when you, when you just when you give up. If you don't give up, you'll still, you'll always recover.

Lara Kaufman 33:45

He goes, you'll plateau. Your recovery will be your your your prove your plateau. You'll improve plateau. You'll you'll do this. And he said, so don't listen to that. And he was right. And I have five plateaued many times over the 15 and a half years, and sometimes I taught for six to seven months where I've just been the same, but then I keep going, and then I start to see improvement, and so on and so forth. So my biggest pet peeve is when is is hearing people say the doctor said I'd never do dot, dot, dot. Because then a lot of people sit say, Well, then why should I even try? And that is, I get very angry.

Bill Gasiamis 34:28

I don't understand why a doctor would say, you'll never and then make a statement about it.

Lara Kaufman 34:35

They don't know the doctors that save your life in the hospital, they're not involved in the recovery. The physiotherapists that are, but even, like I've spoken, I do a lot of public speaking at universities and speak at like physiotherapy conferences and stuff, and I've said, you know, if you never use the word never, because you don't know.

Lara Kaufman 34:59

Unless you've got, unless you've got a crystal ball, you don't know, yeah, yes, you know what science can tell tells you. But science is improving every day. There's new technologies and therapies being developed every year. And one of the things I did was, in addition to my husband, is I've researched the stroke recovery industry to see what's new in the industry.

Lara Kaufman 35:22

And I see these new, new technologies and therapies being developed all over the world, and they're coming to all, you know, in Australia, I've heard things, I've seen things in out of the United States and Canada and Israel, Germany, you know. And new things are coming out all the time, and so never and I actually, last year, I went to town called Victoria, British Columbia in Canada.

Lara Kaufman 35:53

It's in the West Coast, and a doctor developed, I have had a lot of spasticity, and this doctor developed this new therapy treatment called cryoneurolysis. And basically what they do is they inject a very cold needle of minus 88 degrees into your spastic muscles and nerves, and it with the with the water in your muscle, it creates an ice ball.

Lara Kaufman 36:21

That ice ball effectively destroys the nerve, and the destruction of the nerve, then you basically it's like the middle man between the brain and the muscle, takes away the spasticity and just and for minimum of six to nine months, so sometimes even longer, and I went last June, and it was brilliant, and it was a game changer.

Lara Kaufman 36:45

I had no movement in my arm. I couldn't my tricep was so tight that you I was like straight was my right arm, but it was straight. And now I can, with with assistance of the back of the with my shoulder stabilization. I can do a bicep curl. You know, I may go back in September for my fingers, my fingers, I still can't open them. I can make a fist, but I can't open them. So he said, he would consider maybe doing some different muscles this time, but it was a huge thing.

Bill Gasiamis 37:23

Can you ask him for me if he would be on the podcast? I'd love to interview him.

Lara Kaufman 37:27

Oh, he probably would in a heartbeat. Yeah, please. He's the nicest man, and he

actually went to Europe, I don't know how long ago, and he saw they were doing some things like this in Europe, and then he with, with no money, he started this clinic in Victoria, British Columbia, and he's now training doctors from all over the world to learn this treatment.

Lara Kaufman 37:57

You know of a physiatrist in in Melbourne who would be interested in, like, who'd be interested in learning this? He can go to he or she can go to Victoria and train.

Bill Gasiamis 38:09

Well, I'd be up for looking into that, learning more about it, and then going from there. It's the kind of information that people with spasticity, who stroke survivors are so many of, oh yeah, would love to hear about. And if it's that, if it's it doesn't seem that invasive.

Lara Kaufman 38:28

It's painful, but it's not invasive. There's no drugs, and they're not injecting anything into just putting a very cold needle into you. So it's, you know, using the water and, like, it's, yeah, it was amazing.

Bill Gasiamis 38:47

And then pain, decreases your pain, and all that type of stuff?

Lara Kaufman 38:52

It decreased my pain, my discomfort. And, you know, I was able to, like, lift my arm all the way back this, whereas before I could get to here, now I can go all the way back, and the spasticity has returned. It has not, not as bad as it was before, but it has returned.

Bill Gasiamis 39:15

And then do they know why it returns?

Lara Kaufman 39:20

Because your nerves grow back. The nerves get destroyed, but they do grow back, but it takes six to nine months. So what it does is it gives you a six to nine month window to do rehab, whereas, I'm sure you're familiar with Botox treatments, Botox gives you a three to five week window. You know, three to four times a year. This gives you a six to nine month window to gain movement, instead of that three to five week window, which is tiny, yeah, and I did Botox for

14 years and got that much improvement.

Bill Gasiamis 39:57

Zero, yeah, I know some people have it's very hit and miss for a lot of people, what was that treatment called again?

Lara Kaufman 40:04

Cryoneurolysis.

Bill Gasiamis 40:06

Alright, everyone Google the heck out of that.

Lara Kaufman 40:08

If you Google cryoneurolysis spasticity, I don't know I could spell it. There's a YouTube video of doctor Paul Winston.

Bill Gasiamis 40:29

We're going to find it. We'll have the link in the show notes. We'll make sure people can watch it, and then I'll have, I'm going to reach out. I'd love to interview the doctor about that.

Lara Kaufman 40:38

Dr. Paul Winston out of Victoria, British Columbia.

Bill Gasiamis 40:42

Yeah. Okay, excellent. So that's the thing, right? 15 years ago that wasn't on the horizon.

Lara Kaufman 40:53

Exactly, that's even 10 years ago. So that's why I'm saying, like, new things are coming out all the time, you know? So you know, the best time to have a stroke is 20 years from now. Apart from that, it's today.

Bill Gasiamis 41:06

I read the book Think and Grow richer by Napoleon Hill. I think I read it about 30 years ago and in and the book was written in, I think, the 1920s and you know, Napoleon Hill has a reputation for being a bit of a kind of like a capitalist, you know, the worst kind of capitalist, I think there's a lot has a bit of a reputation for that.

Bill Gasiamis 41:29

But what he was doing was sharing stories about how you think, how you put your mind, into work, and the results that it gives you, you know what you think is perhaps what you're going to get anyhow, one of the passages I specifically remember was that his son was born deaf, I believe, either in one year or in both years.

Bill Gasiamis 41:55

And the doctors back then said that he'll never be able to hear anything, because he's been he has been born deaf, and then, sure enough, the first iteration of hearing, surgeries or devices to help people hear start to come, start to be invented around 20 or 30 years after his son's born, and Sure enough, his son gets to be able to hear and it's the story that you read 100 years after it has been written, and you go, Oh man, like the thinking hasn't changed, the way you approach life hasn't changed, the way you talk about problems hasn't changed.

Bill Gasiamis 42:42

Everything is basically the same. We're the same as we were back then. The times and circumstances and some things might be different, but general ways to go about life are never, are never, never different. They're always the same. You always have to have the same philosophies that people have used for 1000s of years. That's why we get so much when we learn from the ancient Greeks, it was 2000 years ago, and we pick up those books, and we read about them, and we hear about them, and we apply them to our lives, and we say, wow, that's transformative.

Bill Gasiamis 43:14

Well, it's not it's just humans. It's just what humans do, and certain things impact you in a negative way, and certain things impact you in a positive way. And if you're a doctor, and you go through all the study, all of the cost, all of the effort, all of the hours at the hospital, all of these things, years and years and years, 1000s and 1000s of dollars, hours and hours and hours, you get a patient, they have a stroke, you patch them up, and just before you send them home, you finish with you'll never do that again. What's the point of it all?

Lara Kaufman 43:53

Yeah, my my doctor actually said to me, you know, after I says, After telling me, you'll never do blah, blah, blah, you'll never play piano. You'll never, you know,

type, use your use your left hand to type on a computer. And I looked at him, and he's like, prove me wrong. Now, I haven't been able to do that yet, but I say yet. I always say, yet, yeah.

Lara Kaufman 44:16

But then, you know, years later, when I saw him at one of my appointments, he goes, You know, I have he goes. He goes, I have to, I have to learn more about the human will, because I'm seeing that the human will plays a huge role, you know. And I really believe that attitude is everything, yeah. And the best part about it positive attitude and gratitude, that it's free, doesn't cost anything to be grateful, and yet it can actually help. It can actually improve your recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 44:45

Absolutely, there's a chapter in my book about it. It's the it's your mindset. It's the first chapter in my book. If you've got the wrong mindset, all the rest can forget about it. Yeah, have the right mindset, you have to apply a recovery mindset.

Lara Kaufman 44:59

There was a study. In the US, of on US war vets who suffered traumatic brain injuries, and it proved that the ones who are more resilient recovered better and faster and stronger than once someone's who didn't. And resilience is like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets. So, yeah, you know, tap into you can tap into your resilience, which you have. Everybody has. You know, you can actually recover better, stronger and faster.

Bill Gasiamis 45:27

I have a little bit as well. I have a theory about my my guests on my podcast compared to the people who are not on my podcast, not saying that everyone has to be on my podcast to have the why? Not? They do. They do. I need to get to 1000 episodes. But that's not the point. The point is like people who are sharing on the episode are demonstrating something every single episode, and every person is different, but they are all demonstrating something.

Bill Gasiamis 45:59

And that's something to me, is like the willingness to talk about, learn from expand your mind, your horizons, share information that you've gained and learned, and those things come together and are a very important part of your

healing and your recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 46:18

The the willingness to want to turn up to a podcast and share your story in the hope that it might help other people, says something about how far your recovery has come. And that doesn't mean that the amazing people who leave comments, who subscribe, who help me with Patreon, who watch the YouTube ads. It doesn't mean that they're not doing that.

Bill Gasiamis 46:42

What I'm sort of saying is, is that I think that sharing on a podcast, regardless of whose it is, is like shows you've arrived. It's the next level, the thing that you what else can I do to improve my recovery? I've done nutrition. I'm sleeping better, I'm exercising more. I'm more grateful I have good I've improved my relationships.

Bill Gasiamis 47:04

Like, what's next? Well, now it's about other people. It's how do I impart my wisdom, my knowledge, the things that I've gained, onto other people? That whole thing sort of suggests that you've arrived not at the very end of the whole thing, but at a next stage, at the next level, I'll call it the next kind of like, well, we'll just call it a stage. You know, you've arrived.

Lara Kaufman 47:31

The Gasiamis effect.

Bill Gasiamis 47:32

Yeah whatever, we'll give him my one, yeah, we'll give him my Gasiamis. You've arrived to stage Gasiamis or something I don't know, not at all doesn't have to be on my podcast. But you know what I'm saying? It's about that you've made it about others. It's not about you anymore. Even though the podcast sharing is about you, it's also not about you.

Bill Gasiamis 48:01

And, I think that would be lovely if people said, I've been listening for three years, and now I finally decided to reach out to be on the show. I mean, that would be great, because they perhaps gained courage, they perhaps confidence. That perhaps gained wisdom, knowledge, you know, is Yeah, stage you have somewhere, yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 48:26

So I love what you're saying there. And you know, the statistics are statistics for a reason. They they are just there to inform a way forward from a certain situation out of a hospital, just for the time being. As statistics never stay the same. They always change as the population changes, as our abilities change, as our technology changes, statistics always move.

Bill Gasiamis 48:55

And you can't take one snapshot in history and go, I'm going to apply that to every single stroke survivor I meet afterwards for the next 15 years, it's just not it's not smart. That's not what you do. You use it to inform your decision at the time, but then at some point, those statistics are no longer relevant because things are completely different.

Bill Gasiamis 49:16

And anecdotal evidence should inform you enough to say, Okay, I have, I've told 10 strokes survivors they're never going to do X again. And I never followed up to find out if they did do X. And that's the that's my biggest challenge, is they make a statement, they send you on the way, and they never call you up and say, by the way, did you ever walk again or whatever, again, and it frustrates me no end. It's one of the my biggest pet peeves. Don't believe him.

Lara Kaufman 49:51

And the thing is, like, you know, like I was talking with my physiotherapist a couple weeks ago about, you know, recovering my arm, and I'm putting in, you know, three. To three, three to four hours a day of rehab, just in my arm, you know, for the for the past year, and, you know, in hopes that it's going, I'm going to get the use of my arm back. Yeah, I have no guarantee.

Lara Kaufman 50:12

There's zero guarantee is there's hope, and that's what I'm, that's and that's what I'm, what's what I have hope that it will, you know, make a difference. And he said to me that the reason that there's no there's just, you know, there isn't documentation for somebody 15 years post stroke, who's putting in this many hours a day, you know, to the statistics aren't there. So then it's just all on me. So you'll get it. You'll get these. You get partial use of your arm, all of it, you know, or you won't get any. Well, I already have some. I can already, you know, do some things with it, but.

Bill Gasiamis 50:51

One guarantee is that if you do nothing, you'll definitely get nothing.

Lara Kaufman 50:56

That's my saying. I mean I have a quote. There's two guaranteed things in life, death and taxes. I have found a third do nothing and nothing will happen. Do something, and you can get this much, this much or that you don't know, but you don't know if you don't try.

Bill Gasiamis 51:14

You have to go after it. I completely agree. So looking back on your journey, 15 year journey. How have you changed, physically, emotionally and or mentally? Are you a more expanded version of yourself? What are the what are the biggest lessons been?

Lara Kaufman 51:38

Oh, that's a big question. Um, physically, I'm like, I'm able to, I'm just, I'm independent, I'm I drive a car, I do my grocery shopping. I'd run errands. I, you know, able to. I'm physically active, not like I was before, obviously, but I am physically active. Um, you know, my husband, are traveling the world.

Lara Kaufman 52:04

Something that we really want to do, coming to Australia is going to be a is a big trip. It's, you know, we're going to be doing a lot, and I didn't want to give it up. And I, you know, I didn't want to give up something that I love to do.

Lara Kaufman 52:20

So I'm doing it. It's a challenge. There are some we've had some interesting challenges, but we just kind of, I suck it up and do whatever, just do the best that I can do, you know, given the situation, and that's so I've, I've, I've learned to be more accepting of myself and learn to give up, not give up things that I want, but except in a different way.

Lara Kaufman 52:51

I believe I'm more grateful for what I have than, probably what I, you know, prior to more accepting of people, other people as well. It's, it's so hard to say because I don't remember exact I never asked myself, like, what was I like before? Like, I don't remember sponka. You know, I was 41 years old when this happened, you know, so I don't remember like, I and I think, you know, what's interesting is that

you know, right right after the stroke, I could remember everything.

Lara Kaufman 53:37

You know exactly the way I was and how I am, how I was, post and pre. And you know what I felt when I when I had a bad day? It felt like it was like a really bad day, even though, you know people, you can have strokes of hours. Have bad days. Normal people, regular people, have bad days.

Lara Kaufman 53:57

And what I didn't realize, what my social worker points out to me, she's like a lot of people put their pre stroke life on a pedestal, and they think that they were here when they probably were here, wow, and now here. So they would, they think that, that they fall in, you know, so much further than they actually did, because pre stroke was, that was this glorious life where you never broke a nail and nothing bad ever happened, you know, and we all know that that's just not true, right?

Lara Kaufman 54:29

So when she said that to me, I realized that the fall, yes, I fell, but I didn't fall as far, the drop wasn't as big as I thought may, and how that me kind of put things to perspective. But now that it's been so many years, I don't remember, yeah, I think I was as good of a person as thin as I am now.

Bill Gasiamis 54:52

I love it. I love it. The Fall, how far you've fallen. That's really amazing, isn't it? That's all tied to identity. I think if you identify it as somebody who, if your identity was shallow or or confined to some small number of things, I am a office worker or I'm a gym junkie, I am a whatever I am, and there wasn't a larger version of that, and now you're not those things, then you could see the fall from grace, supposedly could be, yeah, appear more dramatic than it is.

Bill Gasiamis 55:31

And then the idea is to expand your identity. Is to find, even though I've had a stroke, what what can I become? It's not about what I was and and why can't you be a gym junkie that has left side deficits? I mean, I've interviewed stroke survivors who were power lifters. One particular lady was a parallel power lifter. Her left side, I think, was the of a scrawny little kid. Her right side was the size of a power lifter.

Bill Gasiamis 56:04

She was completely but she was a power lifter, and that's the thing we haven't you've got the opportunity to redefine your identity and to start moving in directions you'd never done before. I mean, there's so many stroke survivors who have probably won gold medals at the Paralympics and on all sorts of world stages that weren't in that space before stroke, and never occurred to them to do or to compete in that kind of way until after they had this stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 56:36

So you that it's just imaginary. The whole pedestal that we fall off of is imaginary 100% and if you are, and if you sort of associate your success with I achieved X, Y and Z, or I had this much money, or I worked that many hours, or then again, you're limiting yourself based on what you do, not who you are as a human person, you know, like, what you do.

Lara Kaufman 57:09

That's what I mean. What was I before my stroke, I was a full time working supermom, yeah, you know, who would try to do, you know, kill, multitask as much as possible, you know. So when my kids went to karate, I went grocery shopping and, you know, at the same time, because God forbid, I should spend the 45 minutes watching them do karate. You know, I had to go do an errand because I was working during the day.

Lara Kaufman 57:39

And, you know, try and kill as many birds with one stone kind of thing is as possible. Was Michael, after my stroke, I couldn't read a magazine and eat breakfast at the same time because, like, if I would read and forget to eat, or eat and forget to read. So I couldn't multi, like, that's considered multitasking. I couldn't do that. And, you know, as a point, you know, once I was able to do it. Now I read during breakfast every day as kind of as a screw you stroke thing.

Bill Gasiamis 58:11

That's training as well. It's multitasking, and it's helping Neuroplasticity and all sorts of things. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love it. So you you probably see stroke as something that shaped you in a very meaningful way.

Lara Kaufman 58:25

Yes, it's given me a purpose, for sure, to help, to to help others. And it's really

given me, you know, I went from accounting, which is great, you know, but it's a job, you know, to, you know, actually helping people with their law, helping people get their lives back.

Bill Gasiamis 58:46

Yeah, and it's it gave you meaning, not like you didn't have meaning before you had children and, yeah, family, but it's expanded it, right? So that's the thing, that's another thing that people don't seem to realize early days of stroke, is that meaning doesn't have to end because you had a stroke and now you're not doing all the things you did before, your meaning can also be expanded. You can be a parent, even though you're not the karate going parent anymore, you can still parent in a different way.

Lara Kaufman 59:18

In fact, actually, right after my stroke, when I couldn't do anything except for sit on a couch basically, and watch TV all day. You know, I felt like I had lost my identity and and somebody said to me, you know, you're still a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister and a friend, and so I could be all these people from the from the spot on the couch, yeah, right. I could play all these like it's still, you know, nag my husband. I could still, you know, give him crap when he did something.

Lara Kaufman 59:51

I could still tell my children what to do. I could still do all those things. Still, you know, have lunch with my sister or my friends. They could. Still do all these things from the very comfort of my couch. Yeah, you know, being unable to walk, being unable to move to to drive a car, to do to work, to do all these things. And so when I realized I had, I could, I could wear all these raw wear all these caps in the comfort of my house, the comfort of my couch that helped me, that gave me hope that I I'm not useless, because I did feel useless at the beginning. Yeah. What good am I? I can't do anything. I can't do anything.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:37

Well, it's such a big shift in a very quick shift from being super mum to being couch mum.

Lara Kaufman 1:00:44

Not even nailed a little, big bathroom by myself.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:47

It's so dramatic. And it completely makes sense people find themselves there. The idea is, okay, it's temporary. It is. It might seem like forever when you're going through it, and it might feel like never ending, but it is temporary. Now on this in the span of a lifetime, it's temporary in in the span of the two months since the stroke and since you found yourself on the couch not being able to do anything.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:15

Okay, it seems like forever, but it's gonna go, it'll it'll pass. You'll look back and you'll go, my gosh, it was five years ago. I had this struggle. It was 10 years ago I had this stroke. I can't believe how quickly it has gone for me and seemed slow at the same time too. I'm experiencing, you know, two versions of time all at the same time, quickness and slow. Yeah, exactly. So I don't know how I got here that quickly, and it took so long. Does that make sense?

Lara Kaufman 1:01:50

So true, and I was in the hospital for four months, yeah. So this was, you know, I didn't get home till four months post stroke, and then I could, I still couldn't go to the bathroom on my own. But because, but I, but, you know, as a 41 year old mother who toilet trained three children, you know, I was determined. So the first thing I learned to do when I came home from the hospital was teach myself to go to the bathroom by myself. And was the first thing I did. And I did it pretty quickly. I think, you know, I don't remember how many weeks it took, but look, I just want to close the bathroom, close the door, not if somebody's standing next to me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:34

That's a fair, a fair request.

Lara Kaufman 1:02:37

Yeah, you literally take your dignity and leave it somewhere else after a after a stroke, for many people.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:45

Yeah, that's a very, very, very important milestone in anyone's recovery, to be able to toilet themselves.

Lara Kaufman 1:02:53

Did you have physical deficits after your stroke?

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:55

Yeah, so physically I was all good until surgery, and then after surgery, one of the complications was I woke up with left side deficits, couldn't feel my left side, couldn't walk, couldn't use my left arm a whole lot, and had sensory issues, still have numbness and little bit of spasticity. It doesn't close any of my fingers up, but I feel it in my muscles, the way that they open and expand and contract, they get painful.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:30

It puts me out of balance on my leg, so my leg is a little bit weaker, my left leg, so I tend to sway a little bit when I walk. I bump into my wife all the time and walk next to each other, and she's always complaining, why do you keep bumping into me? It's like I become magnetic.

Lara Kaufman 1:03:52

Love, touch, love, touches.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:57

Yeah, I'll rename him actually, yeah. I love that. And what happened after surgery was I found myself day day one out of surgery, nurse came to me and my bed said, have been to the toilet yet? I said, No. Said, Okay, let me help you go to the toilet. She was on my left side. I reached off the left side of the bed, put my left leg down, and I'm not I'm like hours out of surgery, collapsed in in intensive care, or wherever I was, whichever unit I was in, I don't think it was intensive care.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:31

It might have been high dependency, and I'm on my ass hours after surgery, first fall after surgery, what with a nurse standing next to me, she was tiny. I'm I'm not quite six, or I'm probably about 5859, and she was tiny compared to me, and she probably went, half what I weigh, and she goes, I'll help you. And put your arm around to be well, it made no difference. I've put my arm around her, and I was just bang straight on. The ground, and screamed my lungs out, and then realized, okay, I cannot walk.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:06

Then they put me back into the bed, and my surgeon comes along, and she goes, What's going on here? And I said, Well, I can't, can't walk. I fell out of my bed. And she said, Okay, I'll put you into rehab. In rehab, I got to rehab seven days

later. By the time I went through all the after surgery staff, and they were trying to suss out my situation, where I was at, and I remember being in the ward now waiting day two, I'd say, being in the ward, waiting for the nurse to come after I press the buzzer to go to the toilet knowing I can't walk.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:44

And they've put me on laxatives, slow release laxatives for two days so that their bowels can move, because they hadn't moved yet, and then they kicked in. And then I'm at I'm on in my bed. The nurses aren't coming back after I've pressed the buzzer, and there's a wheelchair next to my bed, and I lean forward with my right side, I grab the wheelchair, and I drag myself off the bed, and I end up in the wheelchair.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:11

And I can't push it much, but I'm pushing it as much as I can to get to the door of the toilet, which is at the end of my bed. It's literally three meters away, four meters away, to get to the end of my bed. And I get into the toilet. I open the door, get into the toilet door, and the nurse turns up. He said, What are you doing? I said, I'm trying to go to the toilet.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:30

She goes, you're supposed to wait for us. I said, I've been waiting for ages, and I've gotta go I'm busting, I've gotta go. Please get me onto the toilet. They get me onto the toilet, and then they're not leaving. And I said, okay, yeah, go now. She's like, I can't leave you in here alone. You're a high risk of falls, all that kind of stuff. Have to stay with you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:55

I said, there is no way I'm going to let you stay there. You have to please close the door. Just go to the other side of the door. Please do not stay in here with me. We argued for what seemed like forever. We didn't really argue, right? I was just being begging her, basically, I got to begging, and she finally said, Okay, I'm gonna go behind the door. Do not get up. Do not move. I said, I swear to God, I'm not going to move or do anything.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:22

I'm just going to do what I have to do, and I'll call you as soon as I'm done. And sure enough, we went through that process and we got done. But that was my

first experience, you know, my realization that things are not well and things are not going exactly as I planned or thought they would, and I've got to have to challenge myself to overcome some more of these issues that I never experienced for three years of brain hemorrhages, because I had my brain hemorrhaging three times over almost three years.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:52

So I had deficits. I had memory issues and cognitive issues and speech issues and fatigue and every kind of issue you can possibly imagine, uh, after the bleeds, but never anything physical. And this was the first time. So it was quite a, it was quite a, quite a drama. But like you, I don't know what it was. I just had this weird kind of calm amongst all the chaos, because there was also chaotic moments, etc.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:26

I had this weird calm, oh, you can't walk. Oh, all right, well, we're gonna have to learn how to walk again. I wasn't quite concerned that I've got to walk. I was just concerned that I couldn't go to the toilet on my own and and I didn't know if that would come back or not, but it was a big drama right there. After the moment passed, I went back to regular chill, relaxed bill in the in the bed, just waiting for things to happen, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:53

So I had this under I had this calm about all the obstacles that were in front of me, I just figured they were obstacles. It may have helped that I did a lot of counseling and coaching beforehand. It may have helped that I had already started to kind of reach out to medical professionals and learn about Neuroplasticity and all that type of stuff. But I didn't take any of the setbacks as permanent. I just took them as stuff I've got to overcome. I didn't know, how.

Lara Kaufman 1:09:26

Yeah me too, I think for me, it was just delusional, or just not. I didn't understand the gravity of what had happened. Yeah, okay, this is what this is. I can't walk right now. I can't do this. Okay? Well, I will, you know, it's gonna take, I'll rehab, yeah, like, I'll rehab. Just like, Yeah, I'll just rehab. We have my way back.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:48

And I had this bigger picture understanding, you know, where I and I love to throw in this example every time I remember in the podcast. Last episode. It's like

Stephen Hawking, the great physicist you know, who was at the top of his field and had zero ability to move a single muscle in his body for the majority of his adult life. And it's like, if that's the if that's what's possible, well then, you know, I don't need to get overwhelmed or over, uh, overly concerned about all the challenges that I might face that I don't know about, because that's what it was possible for this, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:37

So once you sort of expand your thoughts about like what people are achieving in life, and who is the most limited person in the world and achieving the most in the world. Stephen Hawking, well, then I don't know what's what? What's the excuse to focus on all of the problems and all of the deficits and all of the obstacles? What's the what's the excuse? There's there's no credible reason to be focusing on all the things that we can't do.

Lara Kaufman 1:11:07

That's actually a really good way. They never thought of that. But you're 100% right.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:13

Once you start at the at that level, it's like, okay, all the rest is in the mind, it's all arguably, it's all bullshit. It's all just shit you come up coming up with to limit yourself because you're afraid or something.

Lara Kaufman 1:11:26

And for me also, like I also learned 10% of people who have a stroke die, yeah, and I didn't. And so there's just based on the fact that I'm alive, there's a greater purpose for me, there's, I didn't survive. Just, is it just luck? I didn't buy it, you know? Yeah, I there's, there's a reason, yeah, um, also my, in addition to what I said, best thing I said earlier.

Lara Kaufman 1:11:59

So when I had my twin daughters were born via gestational surrogate, um, with three years of infertility, and then we they were born, and then they were 14 months old. I got pregnant. We call it Immaculate Conceptions. We have no idea. We had two. We had 214 month old babies, you know, walking around, crawling around, and so we weren't looking for a third, or wasn't planned.

Lara Kaufman 1:12:31

And, you know, so when something good happens, you call it a blessing. So what? What do you see? You call it a curse when something bad happens. I don't believe it. I don't believe in curses. So I remember, I remember when I got pregnant with my son, I remember thinking how the stars had to be lined up, just so for me to get pregnant with all the issues that I had, and so it was meant to be.

Lara Kaufman 1:12:58

So my my because my ski accident was also a freak accident. The stars were lined up, just so, for this to have happened, it was, it's meant to be. So if it's meant to be, then there's going to be something. There's good. Good has to come from this. And so then I said I was like, looking for it for a while, and then eventually, you know, I found, I found the good and helping other people, and it made me feel good, and I was helping other people as well, and just gave me a sense of purpose. Yeah, the greater than more beyond being an accountant.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:40

Did you put away your skivvy and your blouse and all that kind of stuff?

Lara Kaufman 1:13:48

We don't have that, never did accounts, those for lawyers, not accountants for accountants. Get a calculator. I love it. But actually, my son is, is actually in the school to become an accountant, and my father was an accountant, so he, if he, when he, if he passes his exams this September, he'll be the third generation in our family, so, and I'm helping him along.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:16

There's a history there. That's great. There's nothing wrong with that. It's a great profession. Of course, we're just playing around. If anyone is an accountant, don't get offended. We love accountants. They keep us probably paying less tax or something and out of jail, yeah, for sure, it's been a real pleasure getting to know you and chatting to you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:36

Thank you so much for joining the podcast. I've got one question that kind of comes up every so often, is, why after 15 years, is it necessary for you to join me on the podcast? Like, do you know what I mean? I always think about me as being strange and bizarre that I'm 12 years out and I'm still thinking about stroke, and talking about it every day, like, why do you feel the need to still share about it on

the podcast?

Lara Kaufman 1:15:07

Because I feel like I've been successful, not 100% but I feel like I've been successful. And so if I can do it, I think other people can too, and as long as they believe that, you know, we would joke, because when my speaking, I my husband refers to me as the goat of stroke survivors, you know, and so and, you know, maybe he refers to me as that. But I think that I'm just one of you know, 1000s of other people just like me, who, if you get the right maybe navigation, you know, tools. You can be just like me too, and have success.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:48

I love it. I love that you have success and it's despite what you didn't get back, or what you potentially supposedly lost.

Lara Kaufman 1:16:02

I'm grateful. I have a good life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:06

I love that. That's a great way to frame it, is, even after all this time you've had success. And that is what I hope for every stroke survivor listening, is that they can get to that stage where they can feel like they've had success, a small one, a little one, a big one.

Lara Kaufman 1:16:22

Yeah. And what we do? I should have mentioned this earlier. What we do in our family. My husband started this four years post stroke. Is every year on the anniversary of the accident, we celebrate with a cake, and we put a word on the cake. So the first year was my husband and daughter were talking the day before, like on February 12, 2014 he goes, do you know tomorrow? She goes, yes, the day Mommy had her accident, and he said, how should we celebrate it? She goes, we should buy a cake.

Lara Kaufman 1:16:49

And he goes, Okay, let's put a word on the cake. What word should be? She goes, accomplishment. And then every year, you know, my other daughter picked the word. The following year, my son, then it was my husband's turn, and then it was my like, you know, so every so we have, every year I've got, like, I don't know, it's 12 years now, 12 years of 12 cakes and every one there's a word.

Lara Kaufman 1:17:12

So now I look every February 13, we look forward to what's the word going to be. We figure out who's going to pick it, whether it's someone in the family or a close friend. And, and, you know, I look forward to, the anniversary to see what word is going to be chosen.

Reflecting on Lara's Achievements



Bill Gasiamis 1:17:27

Yeah, that's a great way to reframe it, and an amazing tradition. I love it. On that note, Lara Kaufman, the goat of stroke recovery. Thank you so much for joining me on the podcast.

Lara Kaufman 1:17:40

Thank you. Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:43

Before we wrap up another thank you to Banksia Tech for supporting this episode and making stroke rehabilitation tools like the Hanson rehab glove accessible to more stroke survivors. If hand movement is part of your recovery, this glove might help visit [Banksiatech.com.au](https://banksiatech.com.au), or use the links in the show notes and the YouTube description.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:05

Now, let's pause and reflect. Lara Kaufman didn't just endure a massive ischemic stroke caused by an internal carotid artery dissection. She didn't just survive

paralysis, craniotomy and years of uncertainty. She went further. She mentored other survivors. She co-facilitated support groups. She even tried a cutting-edge treatment, cryo neurosis, and saw breakthrough results.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:34

And every year, she celebrates her stroke anniversary with her family by choosing a word and putting it on a cake a word like accomplishment, gratitude, purpose. But she's not just recovering. She's redefining success, one word, one step, one story at a time. If this episode resonated with you and you'd like to help me reach 1000 stroke survivor interviews, consider supporting the podcast on Patreon, your support covers the editing, publishing and sharing of real recovery stories like Lara's.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:08

Just go to patreon.com/recoveryafterstroke, and if you want more stories of post-traumatic growth, check out my book, *The Unexpected Way That a Stroke Became The Best Thing That Happened*. Written by a survivor for survivors. Links are in the show notes and Youtube description until next time, keep enduring, keep redefining, and remember you're not just relearning your rebuilding. See you on the next one.

Intro 1:19:35

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Intro 1:20:05

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professional.

Intro 1:20:30

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Intro 1:20:54

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