

Life After Meningococcal Recovery - Mike Rolls

Life after meningococcal recovery.

In September 2001, at the age of 18, Mike's life changed forever. He contracted one of the deadliest diseases on the planet, Meningococcal Septicemia while on an end of season Football trip. This lethal, fast-acting and brutal infection left him with horrific internal and external injuries, including multiple amputations. Mike's chances of survival were as little as 5%.

Mike's journey back to health was aided by his positive outlook, an adaptive mindset and his choice to "embrace with open arms" the many challenges that lay ahead. His determination to live a happy, fulfilling life is evident in his accomplishments as a double amputee, like running again after many years, representing Australia in golf, climbing one of Australia's tallest buildings and passionately advocating and supporting other amputees who experience similar circumstances.

Getting back on your feet and meningococcal recovery.

After his meningococcal recovery, Mike has become a qualified Counsellor, is a highly skilled communicator, and a passionate supporter of Charities Limbs 4 Life and Interplast Australia. Amazingly, Mike has a handicap of 5 in Golf which is far better than when he had legs! Mike is an emerging Professional Speaker who motivates and inspires his audiences to reach for the stars in all that they do. Mike believes that we are all far more powerful than we can ever imagine and his story is a testament to the power of the human spirit. Mike walks his talk, he lives his message and inspires us to do the same!

www.mikerolls.com.au

Transcription:

Intro 0:04

Recovery After Stroke podcast. Helping you go from where you are to where you'd rather be.

Bill 0:14

This episode of Recovery After Stroke podcast is brought to you by BillGasiamis.com. Are you looking to get your health back on track? Do you struggle with a lack of energy? Are you recovering from a major health scare? The improvement in my health came after I hit rock bottom in 2012 when at the age of 37, a blood vessel burst in my brain.

Bill 0:37

The clot that was created was the size of a golf ball and caused me to forget my name stopped me from recognizing my wife and put me out of work for nine months. While researching how to recover my health, I discovered that what was causing the symptoms apart from the blood clot that remained in my head was the inflammation in the brain.

Bill 0:58

For more than four years now, I have rested The topic of inflammation and add found that it is the cause of many illnesses including heart disease, Alzheimer's, dementia, multiple sclerosis, and many more. Even more startling was that some of the foods we can make inflammation worse, while others can help to eliminate inflammation and therefore, create an environment where good health can flourish.

Bill 1:26

As I started to change my eating habits to reduce the inflammation in my brain, I began to notice that I was also losing weight and unintended consequence that was quite a pleasant surprise. Without exercising, I lost the title of 15 kilos. If you would like some effective strategies and some guidance to help you on your journey to recovery, drop me a line. Go to Bill gasiamis.com. fill out the contact form and I'll be in touch and now it's on with the show. Good day everybody and welcome to another episode of the podcast.

Bill 2:06

On meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or the meninges. A thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord caused by the

meningococcus. germ jerm meningococcal disease is caused by a bacterium called neisseria meningitidis. Also known as meningococcal bacteria. Some people have the bacteria living naturally in their nose and throat. In a small number of people, a dangerous strain of the bacteria can move through the lining of the throat causing what is known as an invasive meningococcal disease.

Bill 2:44

This can take the form of a blood infection septicemia or infection of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord meningitis. That infection can develop quickly and cause serious illness or death. Early diagnosis is vital Although meningococcal disease is uncommon, is a very serious disease that can occur in all age groups. And in Victoria the highest risk groups are children under five years of age and young adults aged 15 to 24 years since vaccination began in 2003.

Bill 3:19

Very few cases of meningococcal disease caused by the zero Group C bacteria are seen in children under five years. Symptoms of invasive meningococcal disease in infants and young children can include fever, refusing to feed irritability fretfulness grunting or moaning, extreme tiredness or floppiness, dislike of being handled or nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, turning away from light, otherwise known as photo phobia, drowsiness convulsions, Fitz or twitching, red rash, or purple, pinprick spots.

Bill 4:00

All larger bruisers. Today's guest is Mike Rolls. Mike is a survivor of one of the deadliest diseases on the planet. And born and raised in the Bayside area of Melbourne. Mike has dedicated a number of years of years to rehabilitation after becoming a multiple amputee at age 17. Mike is an ambassador for interclass and an incredible organization that send brilliant plastic surgeons throughout Asia to perform essential surgeries for those in need, and is a founding member of limbs for life Peer Support Program.

Bill 4:38

Helping amputees to adjust after significant life changes. Mike's aim is to use such a brutal life experience to benefit others in a profound way. Going through such a difficult time at such a young age has taught Mike many valuable lessons. Welcome to the show, Mike.

Mike 4:56

Thank you very much, Bill. A pleasure to be here on your podcast.

Bill 4:59

Right So good to have you. Thanks for being here and agreeing to be interviewed.

Mike 5:05

That's okay. It's my pleasure.

Bill 5:07

I think your message is really strong and people need to hear it.

Mike 5:12

I think so much just quickly for that intro, you taught me a fair bit about meningococcal that open. I didn't know maybe I haven't really done yet your research, but what was that word? Nasira something? What's the actual technical term for it?

Bill 5:27

Neisseria meningitidis.

Mike 5:31

Sounds like a distant relative of yours, Bill. I never heard it called that before. So there's got plenty of different names but doesn't matter what you call it. It's, it's a pretty disgusting disease that unfortunately exists. And, you know, just last week, Clayton was a young 18-year-old kid after you know, a few weeks after he's done ECU 12 exams and just causes so much heartache to families. To not just the people that catch the disease, but the loved ones who have to, you know, go through that ordeal. Sometimes when the patient is asleep in a coma or whatnot, they have to make these brutal decisions for on their behalf, which is, you know, it's never ever nice for anyone involved.

Bill 6:21

Your experience was at around 17 years of age. Tell me about you before then what was you know, little Mike Rolls like.

Mike 6:29

So, being an eight, I was actually 18 when it happened, so not 17 but it's a bit of a technicality that I suppose I was able to you know, drink and I was considered to

be an adult. So there was also that partying thing going on at the time, but before that, as a kid growing up, I guess I was just sort of had boundless energy.

Mike 6:50

And sports was just the focus of absolutely everything. I you know, I didn't really get along. You know, didn't love going to school and being stuck in that class or science or something like that, all I wanted to do was get out of lunchtime and keep the footy, play cricket handmaids just be outdoors and play a ton of golf growing up as well, which was a real passion of mine and continues to be to this day.

Mike 7:12

But growing up I was born and raised in Melbourne, moved to Sydney for three short years then came back down and I consider Melbourne to be well and truly to be my home and such a wonderful place to live to grow up and the opportunities that we get here down in Melbourne. And also the sports culture really, you know, something that contributed to my love of sport sports, Kendall world Mike Yeah, absolutely.

Mike 7:36

So especially when you vote for Hawthorn don't hold that against me but we've had a few good years now. So it's, it's been it's been a good ride and and also, you know, in the summer of just getting out and being able to access some of the best golf courses around around the country and around the world that matter is wonderful.

Bill 7:54

When you did all of that kind of stuff. You were pretty carefree you never at once. Never once would you have ever thought of, you know, meningococcal or even probably knew what it was would that be accurate?

Mike 8:05

Yeah, absolutely. So I remember you know, vaguely having heard about it snippets but you know if you look at the statistics on it on the disease I think last year 222 people contracted it either the whole cost cost of the whole of last year and of that number only 20 I think 12% of that number we can seriously or die from that good so you didn't mess it around one in a million chance of getting to the point where I got to win or die so it's a such a such a rare thing. And it was no

surprise that I hadn't heard about it before I can track it a little. It's not something you can keep your eye out for. And that's why unfortunately, a lot of cases it's misdiagnosed because it is such a hard thing to pick up.

Bill 8:48

It's 20 deaths per year.

Mike 8:51

20 deaths or serious injury yeah, 22 I think it's or all losing limbs and surviving from it. And unfortunately One of the scariest things about the disease and the things that terrifies you know, parents and people catch it is what it does to the body, you know, everything sort of shuts down, you get septic shock, and you start to lose parts of your body now, it's probably they wouldn't be any any worse disease that I'm aware of any way out there apart from things that are degenerative, I know it's not a degenerative disease, when you can, we can recover from it, even though it's a long process.

Mike 9:28

It's not like contracting, you know, getting something like cancer or something like that, that's gonna break down and break you down over time, but it is certainly fast acting and brutal. You know, the difference between living and dying can be minutes or hours a day.

Bill 9:44

So, as we get to continue with the conversation, I suppose what we're going to emphasize is the take action, sort of message here, we're going to tell people amongst other things that they really need to, you know, if if something is suspect that just take action on it, just go and see somebody If people aren't listening, feel, let them make sure they start listening and explain to them what your gut instincts are, especially parents, even family and friends of people.

Bill 10:10

That's one of the things in my message that I share about, you know, stroke, if you notice symptoms that aren't right, and if things don't feel right, you know, just just take action on I'm better off being wrong then. Making even a mistake that can be life threatening, you know.

Mike 10:26

Detrimental when I think isn't that isn't that true with everything in life, though,

Bill? I mean, you think there's something off then you know, ignoring the problem, or just taking somebody's word as gospel? When when something deep down says, you know, this isn't quite right. Yours is never a good thing to go against your instincts. Anyway, so I think taking action, anything you do, and making sure like you said, perfect example, don't don't be afraid to make a mistake, because you can learn from it anyway.

Bill 10:53

Yeah, brilliant, mate. Tell me about what what it was that led to you contract. In meningococcal, and then what happened. So give us a bit of an insight.

Mike 11:05

So like I said, in sports man, I ended up joining a football club called the Hampton united footy club down there in Hampton and the South Asian suburbs. And I was playing a pretty good level of footy division to play in the seniors and apply them when I was 17. And then when I was 18, in my second year, we had a pretty successful season.

Mike 11:25

But it was decided shortly after, you know, or halfway through the season that we would go on a football trip down there to Tasmania, in Hobart and I'd never been before and I, you know, understood what goes on a football trip sounds like a lot of fun and a lot of partying and getting up to mischief. And as an 18 year old kid, I was like, Yeah, absolutely. I want to go. So I decided that I booked my ticket with the team.

Mike 11:49

And I remember waking up that morning to go and my mom drove me around to a friend's house and from there we're going out to the airport to to get into the To the plane to go down there to Tasmania. And that's the very last memory that I had. And then the next memory I had was five and a half weeks later waking up at the Alfred hospital and knowing after tracking the disease somewhere along the line and the trip, and being too sick to fly home, where they rushed me back by ambulance to the Royal Hobart hospital, and started to treat me and then the doctors called my parents and told them to get down to Hobart that I had about an hour to live.

Mike 12:28

And it was all sort of panic stations from there. And that five and a half weeks I was in a coma, there was many times where they were told to say goodbye as delivered the spread of the last rites. And it was just a really awful time going from, you know, being able to run around a football field to the next moment. My parents are, you know, touching guys situation where I could die at any moment for the tubes unconscious, and long in a bit, not able to move and then the prospect of actually losing limbs. On top of that, you can only imagine what you know you being a parent before you go you imagine what that would be like.

Bill 13:08

I can't imagine it's sending chills up and down my spine, it's not a comfortable thing to have to listen to let alone understanding that somebody is actually many people have been through this just to listen to it. It was really difficult and, and all power to them for getting through it and knew getting through it. But at the time, when you don't know it really is difficult. I just I know from my own experience with the brain hemorrhages again, like, I'm very conscious and aware of what's going on, but I really don't know where it's leading.

Bill 13:42

And that not knowing can freak people out because the next thing is you start to question everything you've ever done as a human being and whether or not the relationships that you've gotten, you know, when good enough whether you spoke appropriately to the people that you love, whether you you know, treated them Well, and I was lucky because I had time in front of me.

Bill 14:04

And I realized that as things got started to get diagnosed that it wasn't ever going to be as risky as that. And I was never going to just check out that quickly. But I imagined that and your parents, you know, would have probably gone through something similar that would have been thinking about all the things that hadn't hadn't done, and the thought that they might not get to talk to this son ever again. Yeah, yeah, would be the worst nightmare.

Mike 14:36

Yeah, I guess it comes back down to the whole, you know, living your life with no regrets, I think. And that's one of the worst things you do in that situation. As I've spoken to my parents as well. You start to say, oh, wish I hadn't done this wish I'd have done that. And you get into this cruel cycle of starting to think about what

you could have done better, but it's, again, what you said before about not having that control.

Mike 14:58

And it's like, you know, the weather We're just in a position where they were just being fed information where the doctors couldn't tell them anything solid. So there was this whole period of not knowing and it could have just been a coin flip. Either way, which, like you said, you know, it's a ridiculous thing to listen to and even talk about now.

Mike 15:16

God damn like, like miss out, Mark seriously, that's not how I yeah. So so like, okay, so they were in that position where it was, every single day was was a challenge and there's nothing worse in life you know, if you if you're driving a car, you know, they say some people are really bad passengers. The reason is because you're not in control.

Mike 15:40

And one of the hardest things to do is when you're not in control of something and you're not there, there is no way of gaining control, then you feel really defenseless and helpless, and it's a horrible way to feel. So that's exactly what I imagined they were feeling for about five and a half weeks and then as soon as I work out with the Alfred hospital, then not only will it Feeling like that. But I was at that point because I was working up.

Bill 16:04

What did you find? What did you find when you wake up?

Mike 16:07

Well, that was one of the hardest things to take in because I was on so much medication and pain, pain meds at the time. I mean, they had to explain over and over again what had happened to me and explained my injuries. And I was, it was like, learning that over and over again, which was heartbreaking for my parents to have to explain that and the doctors to explain that but to slowly hit around the injuries and what had happened, and especially when you hadn't heard this stupid disease, before, having to having to learn about it over and over again was really difficult time.

Mike 16:41

And I guess it's, you know, when I woke up my injuries were so severe that it wasn't just a matter of always waking up, you'll be fine. Now on the road to recovery. It was still a day to day by day proposition to do with because of lung infection. I had golden stuff on my lungs. Then I had I was riddled with it. You know, my wounds, everything like that.

Bill 17:03

Bleeding in the brain?

Mike 17:05

Yeah, that happened exactly brain scan. So I told my parents when I woke up on I had three small strokes and they were wondering how that would affect me and my cognitive abilities and just all sorts of stuff might The only thing worth working is your heart really so. So it was just a massive total shutdown. And

Bill 17:26

What a heart that is, man, that's a message. That's the heart of a thoroughbred the.

Mike 17:31

Yeah. Well, maybe it was because I was so crazy about sports that that maybe it was my fitness was quite good as well. Maybe that was part of the reason why I was able to recover.

Bill 17:43

So we can move along. And just put everyone's mind at ease. What were the injuries and then we'll move along.

Mike 17:51

Yeah, sure. So externally, pretty severe. And that's what everyone sees when they see me when they meet me. on a day to day basis. The first thing All notices on a double amputee so I don't have any legs below my knees. That is the probably the most probably the least of my concerns Initially, I lost my right leg and half of my left foot and then two fingers on my right hand part of my nose, extensive skin grafting all of my body but internally, liver failure, kidney failure. I had the three blades on my brain as I mentioned, my stomach was completely shut down.

Mike 18:25

I was being fed for chewing my stomach because I was not eating anything

because I had a tracheotomy in my neck. And on top of that, my y plummeted from 80 kilos down to 47 kilos at the time. So I almost had my body weight and given the fact I'm six foot four, I looked a little bit like a a broom at one point in time, I guess you could say, straight up and down. Right? It was it was it was nothing off me and it was just painful to move left or right in the bed. Sitting up was was impossible because I get vertigo and spew and it was just a lovely time Bill.

Bill 19:03

Was it rock bottom or below that? Because I have this thing that I say about rock bottom that it's often a very good place to start from and it's not permanent. It's temporary at the time and might feel permanent. But you slowly started to recover. Tell me about how you slowly started to recover.

Mike 19:22

I think there was a lot of bottoms. You know, the moment you need to hit rock bottom, then all of a sudden you get worse A week later or whatever. And it was just due to different infections and lung infections. I think the key I guess, instead of calling it rock bottom, probably the scariest moment was when I tend to take my cube out of my neck one night where I was pretty keen for that to happen because I wasn't able to speak this whole time.

Mike 19:45

And it's a pain in the ass. Let me tell you a bit having to communicate by an alphabet board where you got to, you know, point to the letters in order to explain what you want and talk talk to your family which I wasn't able to do so finally, they were like came in and told me they were taking that out. And then they came in, took that tube out. And because I had stuff on my lungs still, I didn't have the strength or the ability to breathe on my own. When I'd left the room. I think that took two hours later, I started to struggle to breathe and my parents had gone home for that day. And and, and I started to panic a little bit cold for the nurse.

Mike 20:22

And she didn't come in for a few minutes, and then I started to really panic. And for those listeners that have got asthma, they probably know a little bit about what I'm talking about here. But even the more you The more you try and breathe in, the harder it becomes, the more panic you become, and the more you need them, because your adrenaline's racing, etc.

Mike 20:40

And then I looked at my knuckles and they're all blue, and that was probably the moment that I thought that I was going to check it out. I was like yeah, this is pretty serious now. It'll have to be you know, some some sort of intervention or some sort of miracle so I press the nurses Bell again, she finally came in and called a Code Blue And doctors rushed into my room and started to do everything they possibly could to stabilize me because I'd gone completely blue.

Mike 21:08

And I was literally getting no oxygen at all by that point in time. So they had to actually put me to sleep or into the tube and I went back to the ICU for another three and a half weeks after that, too. So that was probably but I think those really, really low moments. So rock bottom, as you call them. I think you start to make deals with yourself, you know, you start to think about spirituality and things of that nature in your bag and you go, you know, if I can get through this, don't don't let me die, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Mike 21:37

And you start to think about all the things that you promised yourself, you'll do if you can just get through this traumatic moment. And, you know, I started to think about all the things you know, instead of the things that I had done in the past, I started to think about all the things that I never get to do in my life and because I was so young, and I loved it. Living that was the most distressing part for me it was these things I'd miss out on.

Mike 22:05

Not being able to believe not being able to enjoy the everything that I dreamed and hoped to doing in my life. That was that was my biggest concern at the time and and luckily go back to ICU that was you know, the, the biggest The biggest thing was just to wake up and it was a battle from they're trying to stabilize me, etc. And then I had to work my way back up the ladder. Yeah, till even eventually, they could successfully take it out and I was strong enough to breathe on my own and, and then I moved on from there.

Bill 22:34

Okay, so after you did that self reflecting, and these are the things that I'm going to do. And then you get out of ICU for the second time and you start coming around. Is that the motivation? Is that the hope? Oh, well, okay, now I've got

something to focus on. I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna do that again.

Mike 22:52

Yeah, well, I guess. You know, one of the things that we all I think that can stump us when we're looking at goals and things that we want to achieve and allows us to Trying to look at the Gulf look at the gap between where you are and where you want to be and say on it's insurmountable. It's too far. Yeah, you just think, oh, there's no way I could do that.

Mike 23:09

So, you know, lying in a hospital bed, it would have been stupid of me to start thinking, gee, I want to play golf next week, or I want to do you know, I want to go on a holiday around Europe, or I want to do climb Eureka tower or do certain things that I'm doing today, that if I hadn't thought about it back then it would have been, you know, almost demotivating to think about that. So it's really, really important to keep things in perspective and to work towards them on a slower level, and on a more realistic level. So my biggest goal at that point in time was sounds really stupid to normal people was to sit on the side of the bed.

Mike 23:45

And that was the biggest thing I could think of, you know, because just being able to sit up at all or to even move my electronic bed on a diagonal was a huge thing to be able to do and then it was to sit on my own without throwing out or without passing out from being dizzy, was a huge thing. So then when I did that, then there'd be another goal and that might be to move from the wheelchair from the bed to my wheelchair in the wheelchair to my bed. And then it was to wheel around on my own without having someone pushed me.

Mike 24:20

And then it was to, to sit up on the bed and do some some sort of exercise. So there's all these very small steps that lead to that paved the road to recovery. And I think that you've got to be really careful about where you visualize yourself. Because if it's too far away, if it's too insurmountable you you can be really, you can almost paralyze yourself. You can say, I'm never going to get there. But yeah, that's amazing. What time

Bill 24:45

Yeah, that's a really big insight for people that are sort of listening who might be

caring for somebody that's unwell at the moment, is just give people the opportunity to achieve small goals and then celebrate the wins if there's a very small win how you can Do that last week you just did this and absolutely. I get a lot of similar stories from people recovering from stroke who wanted to be able to tie a bow in their daughter's hair.

Mike 25:11

Exactly. Yeah. And to the everyday person if you say that to them say hey, listen, today was a great day I tied a bow in my daughter's hair, like Oh, good Anya. A big deal. It's not a big deal, but it's all relative. It's like, you know, with certain people, you know, I look back at the you know, if I sit up on the side of my bed in the morning, I don't sit there and celebrate and Hoot and holler.

Mike 25:34

But at the time when I was doing that there was cause for celebration because it was seemed like something that was impossible for so long. You know, you you're lying in a bed for the best part of like an eight and a half weeks, completely horizontal to the point being a bald patch in the back your head bill. Yeah. So it's, you know, it's it's completely it's all relative, you know, that was that was a first goal and then once I Polly got home then it was about building strength. It was about putting weight on and just slow slow steps. Then I finally stand up using a prosthetic leg.

Bill 26:10

How long after your hospital stages you go home, how long did it take before you end up getting home?

Mike 26:14

Probably six months? Exactly. So I got sick in September 20 24th of September 2001. And I got home on my birthday that was a goal and we really push it forward, even though I was quite unwell still. March 17 I finally got home and I was able to you know, there's still a bit up in our living room and it was was a pretty big die for the family that built a ramp at the back that I could use a wheelchair on and I was just good to be in a familiar surroundings again, with my dogs and just being at home and instead of that horrible sterile hospital environment that I was in for.

Bill 26:55

Yeah, I can relate to that might be going home was amazing. I managed to get myself home. Couple of days before Christmas, and it was good for the best Christmas you could ever you could ever have. Like it was just amazing. So yeah, he. Absolutely. So you at home and now you're sort of starting to get re familiarized with yourself and your, your your six months out massive, massive process that you've had to undergo.

Bill 27:23

What are some of the tools that you use to get you to the next level? So did you have to seek assistance from a psychologist, you know, what were some of the tools to help you overcome what you had been through and then overcome the challenges that you were going to experience to get back upright?

Mike 27:44

I guess in terms of psychologists, I had a couple of counselors along the way in hospital and also in rehab, but I'm very, very blessed to have such a really strong supportive family that we are open, we talk to each other and they They really were, who I leaned on, and they leaned on me as well. I mean, when I got home we used to we brought the way through.

Mike 28:08

Remember, we know from the very start, we used a lot of humor a lot of the time to sort of lessen the impact of the severity of the situation. You know, I remember going home and I'd pretend that my amputated leg was a horse or something like that. And I remember speaking to my parents, when they walk into the room, and they'd giggle and you're not laughing, you're sort of crying in those moments.

Mike 28:28

And, and it was nice to sort of lighten it up and try and make it a little bit of a, you know, a little bit of joy is probably not a good word, but just a lot in that situation out. Yeah. As opposed to having this heavy sort of really dense content the whole way through that six months. It was nice to have that sort of comic relief, I guess.

Mike 28:55

And then it was about trying to, like you said standing up getting in a wheelchair going into a car Being able to sit up but I had, you know, such a long period of time where I was trying to trying to get up right and also being able to sit up for longer than five minutes without being in extreme pain because I had no weight

on me.

Bill 29:16

Yeah, I'll just let the listeners know for people that can hear some noises or people in the background. Yeah, Mike is in the amazing suburb of St Kilda at the moment. And he's sitting in a co working space which we love these days. And from time to time, we're going to hear some people chatting in the background, but that's not going to stop us from having a an awesome interview.

Bill 29:41

Your I remember you the first day I met you, I was invited to come and sit in on a group where some speakers get together to teach to support each other sort of developing the skill of public speaking. Yep, and I was I was coming in fresh, I only knew one person there. And I was greeted, and I felt really welcome. I felt like I had known you guys Forever After about five minutes.

Bill 30:12

But one of the things that I continue to go back to and I just also record when you said you might a little bit of humor about it, is how very quickly you're very comfortable at getting the prosthetic limb off and handing it around for everyone to check it out.

Mike 30:28

Why not bill? I mean, if you can, if you can do it, why not? So that's, you know, I think normalizing the situation and creating humans that they will otherwise if I walk around with a with a gloomy look on my face, and one of the things is when people see it, it's quite confronting to do but but it helps break ice. It's a really good icebreaker.

Mike 30:50

If you're doing things like that. Then all of a sudden people are well this is this guy is obviously comfortable with the situation he's not doesn't have any qualms about taking legs off in front of people. When I speak to students, I'm always taking my legs off and doing crazy things and getting them to hold them in an audience and take photos and whatever it is because it is the who gives, who cares? Really, I mean, it's a it's just a limb it comes off what's decided that you can't use that as a way of communicating.

Mike 31:21

Breaking the stigma and a wide, wider of connecting with people emotionally, you know, like they feel more comfortable around me and I feel more comfortable around them.

Bill 31:30

Yeah. And it was also it was good fun. And it was a first time I had ever experienced somebody being so forward with that type of thing. And you know what, it wasn't bad. It was great. I actually really quite enjoyed the way that you look at look at it and the way you go about it. And also remember one of the Instagram photos that you put up and when you did you had to leave it.

Mike 31:51

Yeah, just recently. Yeah, that's right. That was just a bit of a laugh. It was talking about the the actual long Part of the cat I don't know what they call it might have my shades shades or something. Yeah. Because I'm pretty tall. So I'm six foot four. So when I take my legs off, I'm still probably just as tall as most people.

Mike 32:10

But I took the legs off and I'm sitting there and I just, you know, I was talking about, hey, look, check out all this leg room. So there was just something simple that I that I've thought out all them you know, those having those bits of those laughs because that's the thing I think we're especially when it comes to speaking, public speaking, is the best way to connect is to go against the grain.

Mike 32:35

Now when people see me walk on stage, I'll probably if I had to guess I probably guess they're thinking, well, this is this is an interesting looking man. He's told he's got no legs. This will probably be pretty heavy story. We're going to hear about some pretty heavy content and I guess they're probably bracing themselves for that. So when I start to tell a crazy story about which I do start off with all of a sudden it breaks that initial assumptions that they're having about saying, oh god, you know, and then all of a sudden I'm cracking jokes and you're like, Whoa, this is actually quite entertaining, then that's the best way to deliver it because it'll help people to connect with you on a bit of work on a better level.

Bill 33:16

Yeah. Work with me. Tell me about the first time you played golf again after after all the stuff that you had been through?

Mike 33:25

Yes, that was a huge moment. So I guess one of the hardest things to come to terms with once the storm had passed, I guess and I was in this situation. And I realized, okay, well now I'm not in danger of dying. And I was at home doing rehab and things like that. going in on a daily basis, I guess then my attention turned into, you know, it really sucks that I'm never going to play football again. It really sucks that I'm never gonna you know, be able to play physical sports, tennis, things like that again. Gonna be a bit of a struggle.

Mike 34:02

And that was my mindset at the time. I remember thinking, you know, and then I had this terrible thought that you know what, what's it gonna be like to play golf again. And surely, that's something I can still do. But I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to hit the ball would have the balance for it, etc, etc. And then one day, I was lying in bed, probably about a year on, I reckon, maybe nine months to a year on our throw. I was at home and I wasn't doing much as a weekend and dad popped his head into the room and said, Hey, you want to get for a bit of a drive?

Mike 34:33

And I agreed because he had this you know, who's really Kane was a lovely day outside, grabbed the wheelchair, he wheeled me out to the front put me in the car. And by this point, I was I had my prosthetic leg in this little booty thing that I used to wear my left leg, which helped me to stand etc. And we went down, headed down 10 minutes down the road, 15 minutes down the road, and then I thought I'm getting a bit sore when my going home.

Mike 34:59

So I told him and he said Little bit further a little bit further and, and To cut a long story short, we ended up getting a fairway down the coast and by this point I'm like, Look enough's enough. I've had enough. It's 40 minutes and down the coast. That means 40 minutes back, etc. And he pulls into the golf course the dunes in any in the head and told me and I'm like, what are we doing here? And he goes, I'm just gonna go and have a way.

Mike 35:22

And I said, Oh, come on, would you please hurry up so it goes off. And I mean, it takes about 10 minutes I'm thinking Where the hell is he comes driving back in

the golf cart. Nice. And I'm thinking to myself that cheeky cheeky rascal opens a door and I'm saying what are you doing with that? He says, Why don't we get for a drive? And I and then again, I start putting up the the roadblocks and saying now there's no no way I can do that.

Mike 35:46

I'm, you know, it's it's too bumpy or hurt, etc, etc. But he keeps convincing me. And I kept sort of like I sort of was starting, you know, looking back I was I was starting to get this mindset Have I can't do it can't do this. I can't do that and telling myself all these things that I couldn't do before I actually tried them. And I realized that was a very slippery slope.

Mike 36:09

And what helped me realize that was was this particular day because dad took me out, like course, and we're driving out the first day away and he stopped the cart. And I thought to myself, well, what's going on now? And he turns around, and he'd snuck a golf club into the cart with him and pulls out a couple of golf balls out of his pocket, and he says, Why don't you have a hit now?

Mike 36:29

And I really sort of cracked it and I said, Dad, I caught on and he just sort of started standing up and and started all you always excuses as to why I couldn't possibly get a golf ball. And he promised me It helped me up, put the ball in the fairway and I agreed. He stood me up holding me by the hips and I remember swinging back and hit this ball beautifully, about 150 meters down in the middle of the fairway.

Mike 36:56

And I was so excited that he got the hold me out and dropped me flat on my face. And we both just burst into laughter It was one of those those moments where I was so wrapped and so pumped to hit the ball, he was terrified, he'd hurt me until he realized I was laughing. And it was a great moment because it just sort of reinforced the fact that, you know, if I was going to leave any sort of happy life or any, you know, life that I could be comfortable with, and, and proud to leave, following such a traumatic event, I really needed to reject my thinking and not say no to things I needed.

Mike 37:35

And I think that's, that's relevant to every single person on the planet. I think that sometimes we we make decisions for ourselves before we even tried things we tell ourselves, you know, the only thing stopping us from being the person that we should become is ourselves. Yeah. And, and that's what it came to. I mean, I was a different person, physically, I changed a lot. But that didn't mean decided they weren't things that I could do well and did really, really accelerate at.

Mike 38:01

Instead of worrying and moaning and winching about the things that I could no longer do like football and that sort of stuff, big deal, you know, you've got to find other things to do and just get over things because not everyone's good at something. So, you know, I think it's a really valuable lesson that day for me. And since then I've been able to, you know, play concentrate all my energy on the golf and play a better level of golf than when I had had still had my legs.

Bill 38:26

Yeah, that's before we get to that point, you had to do something pretty dramatic, to get to the point where your golf improves even more.

Mike 38:35

I was sort of one of the biggest challenges as an amputee playing golf is balance. So I've got great prosthetic legs now and as I said, legs but originally when I lost that half of what I had this booty, and I used to wear and it would always break down I'd have foot problems and everything and I long used to make a really tough decision to amputate that leg when I first had a diagnosis of osteomyelitis.

Mike 39:00

And the leg went to the, you know, the the corporate rehab doctor, when she said she told me I had to make a decision and do something about this bone infection. So she told me to go and get educated, get, get some different opinions from doctors, which I did. And I really knew deep down what I wanted to do, I was so sick of this call this dead weight that I was holding was holding me back from doing what I wanted to do.

Mike 39:28

I was sick of spending days in bed waiting for my foot to heal. All these things that were, you know, my appetite was shut out. I couldn't, you know, do the things that I wanted to do my energy levels were right down. And I knew deep

down in my heart that I just wanted to have some closure to get rid of this leg and to be to have some finality to what had happened all those years ago.

Mike 39:52

So then a surgeon who asked me is the only one actually that asked me what do I want to do? And I said I want to chop it off. Can you do it? Can you do that? And he told me it'd be a bit of a difficult situation because of the skin grafting, but he can do a two stage operation and advance revision surgery. So I booked in and when I told my parents and my family, sorry, friends, and just people in my social networks, what I plan to do, everyone thought I'd completely lost my mind.

Mike 40:22

The fact that I've got one leg left, and I'm gonna chop it off was something that people didn't really have the ability to get their head around, but no one really knew exactly what sort of pain and discomfort that limb was causing me. So I decided to as I talked about, whenever I speak to amputate the dead white pill. And I think it's taught me so many lessons in my life.

Mike 40:48

And it doesn't just apply to what I went through but it is relevant in terms of out the overall areas of our lives that are holding us back. I think we all understand And what's not good for us and what is good for us. And sometimes, you know, we leave it there anyway, it took me eight years to make that decision and and the only thing I regret more than anything else is not making it sooner.

Bill 41:11

And how good is your golf now?

Mike 41:13

So I went was originally with that troublesome foot, I got down to 12. And now I'm down to six. So if you want to get better at golf, just chop your legs off.

Bill 41:22

Awesome. I think I need to get better at golf, but I'm not sure if anything that I do is going to make a difference. So well, we'll leave it at that for me. And recently, you've been some people, some others have been paying attention that your golf and recently you played at one of the major tournaments here in Melbourne.

Mike 41:42

Yeah, so that was a bit of a highlight. I golf been very good to me, played in 2014 at the world disabled Golf Championships, and then I came back to Australia and I've been lucky enough to be invited to a few of the prime events where I get to play with people like Brandon gray, from South Africa, who's a fantastic golfer.

Mike 42:02

And just recently I got a an ambassador role with Cobra Puma golf. Who really great people, and they, they really aligned with the way I live my life and my message into and they're they've got their their motto is, is doing things differently. Now that's the perfect example I can't stand from a personal point of view, I don't like the word disability. I think that it just focuses on what we can do rather than what we can.

Mike 42:29

So I use the word adaptive. So it's just about you know, everyone needs to be adaptive to the situation. And that's what they they do. They adapt and they think differently, I think outside the box, and they work out ways to achieve what they want to achieve. But nothing's off limits, though. Explore each and everything that's available to them and I've created an incredible amount of product.

Mike 42:51

So it was a fantastic Mona to be asked to be an ambassador for them. And that led to great things last week, that pulled a swifty on me where they I got an invitation to the World Cup of golf pro em. And I said I'd be great to play with Rickie Fowler who's number 12 in the world, fantastic golf from the States, who's one of the he's a main main guy.

Mike 43:13

And I said, Oh, can I play with him? And they're like, you know, you can't play with Ricky and you think that they get everyone wants to play Ricky, I'm like, I was worth a try. And, and I got there on the day and then pulled a few strings and I looked at the, the lists and indeed, I was playing with Ricky and and had around and I just got my new clubs and right before and I played pretty terrible golf, but it was still a fantastic experience to be out there seeing how they go about their business.

Mike 43:41

You shouldn't have said you play terrible golf. Might you just ruin the whole, you

know, story? night? Was it a lie? There was? Yeah, it was. No, I didn't get going until about the 14th hole. So then I started to come good. But before that, it was it's fairly embarrassing, but now, now I'm getting used to the clouds. It's like we're in a new parachute.

Mike 44:04

It's certainly not going to be I'm not going to remember the rounds so much, we'll just be more experienced having that having that opportunity to, to be amongst it and just to get out there and to do your best with what you've got.

Bill 44:19

It's been really interesting getting to know you as well, not only because of what you've been through and the way you approach life and the things that you do, but also just to watch you how you take things on and you just go for it and you take action towards it. It's a little message that I think people that are just able bodied we'll call them able bodied I don't know what else to call them.

Mike 44:42

Really take for granted this taking action thing and I've I've seen you run upstairs because when we get together on a Thursday night, it's on the third level or wherever it is, and we're going to go up the stairs and I've seen you run up the stairs and I thought, jeez, I was complaining a couple of weeks ago because I'm eating leg and what I've been through and how it feels that I can't do that anymore. And here's a guy on two metal legs running up the stairs and I better get my ass into gear and get moving. So I've learned a lot from you, but you thought you're taking to the next level. What else did you do after running up our three flights of stairs?

Mike 45:18

Well, yeah, for the last three years, as you said in the introduction, I'm an ambassador for India plus as well. So there's this amazing organization that help out that sorry that that goes over to Southeast Asia, to poorer countries and provide training to the surgeons over there so that they can fix things like do a lot of cleft palate work, burns, work, and reconstructive surgery, which is wonderful, because when we think about plastic surgery, a lot of the times we're thinking of cosmetic surgery in this country and a little bit of taboo, I guess, associated with it, but my life would be very different without the wonderful work of the surgeons in in this country.

Mike 45:57

So I'm very grateful for that and for what they Being able to allow me to do in my life so, and five of the surgeons that they that work for in the past have operated directly on me over the years. So I'm very grateful to them and he interplay apples to white lion, run the Reiki climb in Melbourne. And three years ago, they asked me I got involved with them and they said, Hey, would you be interested in doing the Iraqi climb?

Mike 46:21

And I'm thinking, you know, how many highs that now I know it nine levels. And I had a house where I had two levels once and that was, you know, I'm like, Okay, well, I never really thought about it. But it's, it's I think it was a week. It was a 2014 sales week. It was two weeks before I was due to go to Japan and play golf and I'm thinking I could probably do this year I'll have a go but I really hope it doesn't stop me for the goal.

Mike 46:50

And I remember going there and you know, doing a little bit of training in the lead up to it. And it wasn't an easy thing to do, but I ended up you know, a couple of times you Do you feel like you want to quit, you're like, Oh, this is ridiculous, there's no oxygen, my legs are killing, you feel like you're gonna throw up a few times on the way out there because you just can't breathe and it's just, it's not not wonderful.

Mike 47:11

But when you get to the top, which I did that first time, it's like something like 1900 steps or something like 1600 steps or something like that. 300 meters in the air. It's a wonderful feeling, being being able to look over Melbourne and a good sense of achievement and also the fact that you've, you know, that you've sort of helped up for a good cause as well and help to raise money for to great charities is a wonderful feeling also.

Bill 47:41

I didn't realize that last year or in the one that just passed the club that just raised a couple hundred thousand dollars.

Mike 47:47

Yeah, they do get some good support corporate and everything just about it's a

wonderful event. People get really involved in it, they wear funny outfits and they get teams together. And one of the greatest things I've found over the last three years Doing it is I made a ton of people involved in organizations and, and whatnot that I speak to and in particular, a very close friend of mine who was the president of interclass until just recently where he was replaced by a guy called Keith Mutola.

Mike 48:12

But I was speaking to sort of add to one of the events at the, the the lunch and I spoke to, to him and I said, Would you, you know, why don't you do that climb with me next year? And he and he basically told me or not, I think so. And I don't think I could do that. Or I get that a lot from people and I said, Well, if I can't, if I can do it naturally, it usually usually cannot go.

Mike 48:41

Which is a good way to get people on board and get people to you know, stop telling themselves I can't actually try so he he went up the next year with another guy called Jack Roush and it was just a wonderful a wonderful event for everybody. And he that you do it you think why the hell have I agreed to do this? And then when you get up, you realize it was all worthwhile.

Bill 49:07

I know all about that. Why the hell did I agree to do this thing I recently did the 1000 steps at out of Melbourne where, where it's an sitting of a sort of beautiful bushy area. And there's 1000 steps, I call it the nzqa climb or something along those lines. And it was the first one that I'd attempted something like that. Added to go with it. I went really well. I got up there. And I posted about it on social media and I just shared with people that you know, it was only a year before that, that I actually couldn't walk at all.

Mike 49:41

Oh, well. So when you're seeing an incredible feat,

Bill 49:44

Yeah, it's an incredible feat, pardon the pun upon and you get there and you've pushed yourself and you've done something that you hadn't ever done before. When I was considered to be normal. I hadn't ever done anything. like them for ever tried. And now I just had to do I had, I had to get up there, I had to know

what it was like to be able to push through the pain, and all of the stiffness and all the things that I had never experienced and that I really wanted to know that it wasn't going to kill me or, you know, made me or make me worse off. So I think doing that proved to me that all it was going to do was you know, be a temporary sort of discomfort and then after that, whether it was a day or two or whatever, it was going to go away and it will be fine. And I'll and I'll be able to, you know, do whatever I always did.

Mike 50:33

So absolutely mate. And and just quickly, you know, just if I can say towards the end of this, you know, meeting you it's been for the first time a little while ago as you said that first night but hearing what you've been through as well is that you're you're fairly inspirational yourself, mate. So I wouldn't downplay that I've seen the way you go about things that I've learned an incredible amount of view in terms of how you went about regaining your health and your life and something I'm very interested in learning a lot more about because I believe in, you know, optimized thinking and making, you know, building yourself up the way you possibly can. And I think you've learned and you've educated yourself to do the things that you need, you know, you need to do in order to get the best out of yourself for your family and friends.

Bill 51:16

Yeah, thanks for saying that. Yeah. And it's what's it what it's about really, and that for the people listening, right, it's about educating themselves so that they can work out their version of their recovery, or their version of their getting better at something, rather than doing my version or Mike's version. You know, there's no point yet because it's not exactly they love they might not go for that. So I definitely would never play golf to get excited about life, I would do something else. So so that's what I do.

Mike 51:46

And that's the thing. I don't I don't when I speak in schools and things like that. I don't really talk about golf. It's not really, because it's like when someone talks to me about racing cars, man, I'm like, oh God, I'll switch off here. That's not familiar. You know, like you said, you gotta find something that you're passionate about, you know, and there's always something that we can find, you know, in this life that that is going to give us purpose and give us meaning.

Mike 52:10

And I'm not saying golf is what it is, but it's definitely been a big part of my recovery. And like you said, everyone's different now. And we just need to search and search insufficient to find something that we know is going to give us motivation, increase our optimism and and help us to achieve what we want to achieve.

Bill 52:32

Nice. Tell me, mate, before we wrap up, you're also a founding member of limbs for life, what's limbs for life about?

Mike 52:40

So lymph life is a fantastic organization that was started in 2004 by a lady called Melissa noon, and she's a good friend of mine mill. She had a traumatic accident, where she lost a leg and injured her other remaining leg as well. So she realized when she was doing her rehabilitation that there was no support network whatsoever for amputees in Victoria or Australia, for that matter, wow. You know, just just a place where people can get information people can talk to our amputees get together, do things like that.

Mike 53:14

So she started limbs for life and has since gone from strength to strength she's been she made her last work and she works tirelessly have no manual on it works just as hard. She's like a she's a real, real true partner. She just gets things done. She lobbies for funding from the government, she advocates from amputees passionately has done for us.

Mike 53:36

This the role I have is with the peace support program they offer so when people are new amputees, particularly young people, gives the hospitals a chance to say Hey, have you got in touch with limbs for life who can come and give you a bit of, you know, possibly offer you support from another amputee, someone who's been through something similar and that's where the value lies. You know, for new new patients.

Mike 54:00

They get to see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel that's something I would have killed for like you know, when I was hospital I would love to have

meet met someone. Yeah. Just Just for five minutes just talking about a you know, how do you go to the toilet at night? You know, what's this? Like? What's it like when you know do you get sore here? What's it like to wear like those sorts of questions be answered by socks and counselors who have their place but there there is a real value it in linking amputees about their amputees.

Mike 54:27

And I do that on a regular basis. They're always calling and saying hi this, you know, unfortunately someone who's lost a limb from from traumatic in under traumatic circumstances would you be able to speak to them and I will go out of my way to to do that. Because I feel like it's a really worthy thing and it can help people great deal.

Bill 54:45

Yeah, it's really important. It's good work that limbs for life does. And we've had, I've had an amazing time interviewing you and getting to know a little bit more about you and what you've been through. So Thank you so much for that. Before we wrap up, can you tell me if somebody wanted to get in touch with you for a motivational speech or anything along the lines of meningococcal Where could they go?

Mike 55:16

Just you can just go to my website, Mikerolls.com.au or you can email me at mike@mikerolls.com.au as well. And like I said, before I speak in I do keynotes and workshops and all types of things, particularly education but also to corporate as well. So if you can't remember my name, sure, just typing double amputee, Victoria, legless blog, whatever you can Google, I'm sure you'll find me some way. Because there's not too many of us running around Victoria.

Bill 55:47

Just before we go, you said like listen, that reminded me of something you're about to launch one of your own podcasts. Can you please quickly tell me about that.

Mike 55:56

Give it a plug so it's with one of my great minds been petting Gil, another awesome guy. Who is is a champion is 16 at 16 went blonde pretty much overnight call let me get this right it was called optic new something in Europe.

The bloody hell always get that wrong anyway crazy thing went blind overnight. He's 21 now is a big country boy and he's out there doing great things on the speaking circuit in Melbourne and around the country actually.

Mike 56:25

Same thing works. So we learned a great deal from each other. I'm just just launching a podcast series called legless and blind and it's going to address some pretty serious issues but also have a little bit of fun on the way too so

Bill 56:38

Legless in blind podcast makes everybody look out for that one. It's gonna be hilarious.

Mike 56:43

Make sense.

Bill 56:46

It's hilarious. Mike, thanks so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Mike 56:50

You're welcome, Bill. Thank you very much for having me.

Bill 56:52

You're welcome, mate. Well, everyone, I hope you enjoyed that episode. It's my actual great pleasure to have been able to Interview Mike, if you loved this episode, do us a favor and share it wherever it is that you've come across it into your social networks. If you know somebody that has experienced meningococcal or has become an amputee, share it, let them know about this give them an opportunity to connect with other people that have been through it, and come out the other side. And while you're at it, if you've loved this episode, and you think that it has been worthwhile, do us a favor and go across to iTunes, give us a five-star review that will help other people find the podcast and then from there, hopefully gonna make a difference in other people's lives. Thanks so much for listening. I really appreciate

Intro 57:42

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