

Loss Of Vision Stroke | Rachel Miller

Rachel Miller is living with Loss Of Vision caused by an ischemic stroke when she was 46 years old

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Rachel Miller 0:00

The first step of putting alcohol down is recognizing that my life was unmanageable. And I couldn't live like that anymore. And the same thing happened four months ago when I was trying to keep working, sometimes 12-hour days because I wanted to do my job and I wanted to be successful. And I had just reached the point where I was doing the thing that I had aspired to do above my head hurts so bad, I couldn't live like that anymore.

Rachel Miller 0:32

And I sat out on my front porch, and I just started crying. And I was like, I can't live like this anymore, and I had to walk away. So I've had to do it twice. And it's like my sobriety was practiced so that I could prepare for how to live with my vision and paraments in a way that does not reignite all of my mental health issues.

Intro 1:03

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

Bill Gasiamis 1:16

Hello, and welcome to the Recovery after Stroke podcast. The final touches on my book before it goes live, keep coming, change a word here remove a line there. And it is a testament to the exceptional work being done by all the people involved to ensure that the end product is professionally presented, and of high quality.

Bill Gasiamis 1:37

To celebrate the end of the four-year journey from concept to almost a book. I'm giving away the first chapter free. The book is called "The Unexpected Way That A Stroke Became The Best Thing That Happened." And it shares 10 secrets from stroke survivors that will transform your life. If you go to recoveryafterstroke.com/book and fill out the form, you will receive the book in your email inbox a few moments later.

Introduction Rachel Miller



Bill Gasiamis 2:03

This is episode 274, and my guest today is Rachel Miller, who is living with vision loss after a stroke and is hoping to connect with other stroke survivors who are experiencing the same thing. If you'd like to connect with Rachel you can visit the show notes at recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes and find all of her contact details there. If you leave a comment on the YouTube video of this episode, I'll ensure to pass on your information to Rachel and connect you.

Bill Gasiamis 2:36

If you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your stroke experience, come and join me at the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them. All you need to do to qualify is be a stroke survivor who wants to share your story in the hope that it will help somebody else who's going through something similar.

If you are a researcher who wants to share the findings of a recent study or you are looking to recruit people into your studies. You may also wish to reach out and be a guest on my show.

Bill Gasiamis 3:08

If you have a commercial product that you would like to promote that is related to supporting stroke survivors to recover. There is also a path for you to join me on a sponsored episode of the show. Just go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact Fill out the form explaining briefly which category you belong to. And I will respond with more details about how we can connect via Zoom.

Bill Gasiamis 3:30

Rachel Miller, Welcome to the podcast.

Rachel Miller 3:33

Hi, thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 3:35

Thank you for being here and reaching out. Tell me a little bit about your stroke story because there's more to your story than just a stroke.

Rachel Miller 3:45

Yeah, there is. Thank you first of all for allowing me to share my story. I've been trying hard to share my story so that I can find somebody who has the neurological vision impairments that I do I've had a hard time finding that so I appreciate you allowing me to be a part of your podcast. So yeah, my story starts with alcoholism.

Rachel Miller 4:19

And I'm seven years sober over seven years sober. And gratefully I had that time to work a program that the day that I had my stroke on June 2021. I had a foundation for what to do and recovery, but this is very different. Very different than recovering from alcoholism. So um, yeah. Do you want to hear about what happened to the stroke?

Bill Gasiamis 4:55

Yeah, just give me a bit of an understanding of how it happened or what happened. And then we'll go for the rest of it.

Rachel Miller 5:03

Sure. So I was working that day, and I had gone outside the front door to take my Weimaraner out to go to the bathroom. And I was standing outside waiting for her. And we were just talking before the podcast about my ability to entertain myself. Well, part of that is me talking to myself, you know, I think we all do it. But I was talking to myself kind of whispering to myself thinking about what I needed to do for work and stuff.

Rachel Miller 5:40

And all of a sudden, what I was thinking was not what was coming out of my mouth, I couldn't form the words like I there was nothing wrong with my thinking, but it just wasn't coming out right. And I just had this moment of panic. And so I

went inside and, and talked to my boyfriend and my son, and I told them, I couldn't talk, you know, I said, I can't talk, and they looked at me, like I had three heads, you know, I was 46 years old, with a history of alcoholism, and a history of mental health issues.

Rachel Miller 6:30

So for me to walk in and say, I can't talk as far as like how, what's going on with her now that I quickly was able to, I read, I tried to read a piece of paper and, and I knew what the words said, but I couldn't say it. So immediately, my boyfriend took me to the hospital, which is 15 minutes from here. As soon as I came in, they hooked me up and gave me an MRI, I found out I was still having the stroke. And they had somebody, they wheeled in a guy on a TV screen from Georgetown hospital.

Rachel Miller 7:18

And they did some testing on me, he kind of guided the nurses in the room had tested me and concluded that I was having a stroke and that I needed a clot buster, immediately. You know, it's interesting that we were in the middle of having a stroke and yet we're in charge of making those life-changing decisions at the same time they were asking me Do you want the clot buster, a clot buster with hesitation after hearing some of the, the statistics for brain bleeds and stuff that can happen from a clot buster, you know it, it was only gonna get worse if I didn't get it.

Rachel Miller 8:09

So I went ahead and got it and it was serious business, you know, they all come in, they're looking at the clock and, and, and there's one guy in charge of writing down my symptoms. Another lady is looking at the clock, there's another guy like it was very scary. It was very scary. And so for about an hour, he continued to talk to me and coincidentally kept trying to have me talk about my dog my weimaraner, because I couldn't say the word weimaraner.

Loss of vision stroke

Rachel Miller 8:46

So by the end of the hour, I was able to say Weimaraner again, and as time went on what I did not realize had happened was I had neurological vision impairment.

That was the result and it didn't. I didn't understand what was happening, for a while. I mean a couple of weeks and the doctors couldn't figure out what was going on. I had a headache, had a headache that just wouldn't stop and they kept trying to give me Tylenol they gave me a leave they gave me a Percocet, which sidenote that is very dangerous for an alcoholic somebody who is easily addicted.

Rachel Miller 9:38

I want nothing to work. So I still um, as of a month ago, my headache finally subsided with some migraine injections. So it's been two years that I've had a headache.

Bill Gasiamis 10:00

Wow, is that like a world record?

Rachel Miller 10:04

I think it is. I think it is. Yeah, it was, there's an underlying headache. And then the more my vision is aggravated by movement, for example, I'm looking above my computer instead of adding it. And that's because it causes my head to hurt. It's it's an underlying headache. But the more that I aggravate it becomes like sharp pains in my head, and I'll get nauseous. It's It's terrible. But we've finally found something that's, that's making an impact on it. So hopefully, that'll continue.

Bill Gasiamis 10:43

Yeah. Sounds like a bit of a drama with the screens, because I know what that's like I have a lot above my head here on the right, I have one on the left. I have two monitors in front of me and the third one reporting what is happening. And it's, it is hard to do an hour, and then walk away feeling okay. The head does.

Rachel Miller 11:05

For a normal person.

Bill Gasiamis 11:07

Yeah. And then the head does get overstimulated, the, the lights and all of that stuff that especially fluorescent lights do cause neurological discomfort, I suppose the word is, so that's normal. I was really bad early on after my brain surgery. And it kind of got better over time. I was able to spend more and more time in front of a monitor. To the point where I was doing a normal workday.

Bill Gasiamis 11:35

But it's quite a drama for people who have had a stroke, especially if you have vision impairments. So tell me what the vision impairment is like, compared to normal vision. So how has it changed?

Rachel Miller 11:51

Yeah, so after I had my stroke, when I saw my, primary care physician, she said that my symptoms were very similar to somebody that had a concussion. So she recommended things like sending me to a concussion clinic and also recommended easing me back into work. My job is, was as a marketing director. So it was all digital. And so easy me back into work by working about 15 minutes, taking a two-hour break, working 15 more minutes, taking a two-hour break.

Rachel Miller 12:35

And then over a couple of months that I was on short-term disability, we just kept increasing that by about 15 minutes. And what would happen is I would get this feeling it's the best way I can describe it. It felt like I had rubber bands wrapped around my head like 100 rubber bands, and they were just squeezing my head. I went to an optometrist who diagnosed me with like the inability to track movement, and then also convergence and the ability to converge images. That was the optometrist's diagnosis.

Rachel Miller 13:28

I feel like there's something more happening because I can't even look at a computer screen without getting aggravated at you know, my head getting aggravated whether the, the screen is black with white writing on top, you know, and I'm just looking at a Word document, or it's looking at you while we're talking. I got it no longer. I haven't watched TV and 4 months. Imagine missing Big Bang Theory for 4 months.

Rachel Miller 14:03

I also can't drive a ride in the car, or ride a bike, I have a problem walking long distances because the earth moving in front of me, makes me nauseous and makes me feel a little off-kilter.

Bill Gasiamis 14:21

So the Big Bang Theory, you know, it's in the 10th season of its repeats, right? It doesn't. You're not missing on that?

Rachel Miller 14:32

Every day. I can't do without it. I've even told my boyfriend that we need to just turn it on so I can hear it.

Bill Gasiamis 14:44

Because I just wanted to make sure you weren't concerned that you were missing out on the next episode.

Rachel Miller 14:50

I'm not missing anything new. No, nothing like watching each each episode for the 100th time.

Bill Gasiamis 14:58

Yeah, so it sounds like have you spoken to a neuro-ophthalmologist.

Rachel Miller 15:07

So, the neuro-ophthalmologist, No. I'm going to get a neuropsychiatric exam in December. I've been waiting for that for months. I've gone to a neurologist and an optometrist but not a neurooptometrist. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 15:34

So the neuroophthalmologist will be somebody who deals with vision issues related to neurological deficits. So things that are caused by the brain cause vision issues, because technically the ophthalmologist will look at your eye, it's healthy. My, him, there's nothing wrong with your eye, but it's not doing those things. So we know what it's not doing. And the neuro-ophthalmologist might be able to give you a more detailed understanding of how to rehabilitate it.

Rachel Miller 16:12

Okay. I, you know, one of my challenges, of course, because I stay away from digital as much as possible, I have started learning VoiceOver on my phone and my mat. But researching is slow going, but I did run across what you're talking about. So, neuro optometrists, I think I need to look into that. For sure. And, and have got, have them take a look at me.

Bill Gasiamis 16:42

It's a different level of specialist. Like this. And therefore, it's gonna be probably more in line with what we do with by whom you need to be looked at because the optometrist is not going to is going to say, well, this is what I see. But I don't

know what the underlying causes and then as a result, won't be able to guide it. So with my vision issues, which were based on sensory overload, if I was in crowds, or a bright, sunny day, or even actually an overcast day, I sunglasses and a hat when my best friend for a long, long time. Does it work with the sunglasses? Minimize?

Rachel Miller 17:29

Yeah, to just so what I ended up doing is I have the hat on so I can only see what's in front of me, my sunglasses, and then I do a lot of kind of a softening my gaze. So if I try to focus on something, that's when it hurts, though. I'm walking around kind of dazed as it you know, I mean, I'm not mentally dazed, but kind of have that. Look in, my eyes, if that makes any sense.

Bill Gasiamis 18:07

Yeah, I know the look. I know what you mean. Because it does help because it means that you have more peripheral vision, rather than more narrow vision. And as a result, the muscles are not as tense and tight. And the decreasing of the stimulus.

Rachel Miller 18:27

Yes, it's so nice to have somebody understand.

Bill Gasiamis 18:31

Yeah. Stroke Survivors understand completely what he's saying. There are a ton of people whom I've interviewed who have vision issues after a stroke and several different. Well, I suppose not resolutions but several different techniques to try and make it more comfortable for them, I suppose.

Rachel Miller 18:56

Yeah. One of the things that I've tried twice that was unsuccessful, is vision therapy. So the optometrist tends to recommend vision therapy, which of course is not covered by health insurance. But I tried it anyway, just because I was desperate. But this second time around, my pain was so bad that I couldn't they couldn't even get me into the office. And that's what's interesting, if I may tell you that I started working and getting back to work doing, this program that my doctor set up for me.

Rachel Miller 19:42

And then two years later this past April, my daughter graduated and we drove to

go see her graduate. And it was a lot of driving which I had to keep my eyes shut and the car was a lot of stimulation for graduation and stuff. What ended up happening is I don't know, it's like something broke. And my vision hasn't been the same since then it's not improving, it's back to the way it was right after I had this stroke. And I don't know if I've just pushed myself too hard. But I've had to start this recovery all over again.

Rachel Miller 20:30

And because of that, I've ended up having to leave, my career, which I loved. So that's what's happened recently. So I, I've kind of been going through to recovery starts. One, I thought it was kind of all over, but I pushed myself too hard, it seems like and I had to start all over again, four months ago.

Stroke recovery and cognitive issues



Bill Gasiamis 20:56

That's interesting. So there are a lot of ups and downs with short recovery, but you do get to feel like things are going well. And then there's a lot of setbacks, and then you have to go again, and there's a setback, and so on. So there is a lot of that. I mean, it's probably similar to somebody who is going through sobriety, you have really good times, and then you have bad times and then you kind of keep having to move towards the good times, I suppose or the the positive, I suppose.

Bill Gasiamis 21:32

But it may, it may not be that you push yourself, there might be an underlying

cause there might be something else that's triggered that. And a lot of people will say that fatigue. And overdoing things and pushing us up, sometimes does cause deficits, to play up and to act up and to be worse. So my deficits on my left side, if I overdo things, my left side gets numb. And then it's really difficult to balance properly. And I have to make sure that I rest and sit down. But that usually is transient.

Bill Gasiamis 22:12

So by the next day, if I had a good night's sleep, the deficits kind of go back to normal, whatever that means. They just settle down a lot more. So the fact that it's your vision is kind of getting there. And then it's sort of had a setback, and it's not transient. It's not just a daily setback. And it's long, there might be an underlying cause. And that's why I reckon neuro ophthalmologist will be somebody that might be able to provide some insight provide, Yeah, I mean, what do I know, but maybe they can help?

Rachel Miller 22:58

I appreciate that. I swear tomorrow, I'm gonna give them a call because that's I'm just constantly trying to do whatever the suggestions I hear, not whatever suggestions I hear I get a lot of people like, have you tried Botox? Have you tried? And I'm like, No, this is beyond Botox. I need specialists. So of course, I appreciate everybody's suggestions. But I am this neuroophthalmologist, right? ophthalmologist,

Bill Gasiamis 23:30

Yeah, they're kind of beyond the optometrist level. So and they're, they're a little bit more specialized. So they are, they are people who have a deeper understanding of that space and more, more stroke survivors who perhaps are listening to that have vision issues may not know that that's who they need to speak to. They may not have been told you need to specifically see somebody who handles neurological vision issues, not regular vision issues.

Bill Gasiamis 24:03

Yeah. So for example, I went and saw a neuropsychologist after my stroke. My psychologists suggest that I go and see a neuropsychologist because the neuropsychologist understands how deficits in the brain cause certain symptoms, and they can address them from a neurological perspective, not from a behavioral perspective.

Rachel Miller 24:29

Yeah, yeah. So one of the things that has happened recently in this second time around is I don't know if it's correlated with the pain in my head, having chronic pain I know causes cognitive issues, but I have done over the past three months depending on how bad the pain is. I'll start replacing words, all start forgetting what I'm saying, like a mid-sentence, I'll just, it's like a TV turning off, I'll be talking and then all of a sudden, I'm like, I have no idea what I was saying, which is a normal thing that we start getting when we get older.

Rachel Miller 25:19

This is, this is exponentially happening, you know, I started baking and recovery, because it's, I'm searching constantly for things that I can do, that don't hurt my head. And baking is one thing because it's slow. It's not like cooking, where I've got multiple burners going or something, it's, it's slow, and I had read about it being good for your brain. So I put on some classical music, and I bake, and, but if I have, say, somebody baking with me, and they're talking to me, while I'm baking, I can't do both things at one time, I can't listen to what they're saying.

Rachel Miller 26:10

And, you know, I'll do things like put the butter in the cabinet, I put a measuring cup on top of the baking soda container as a lid, like things that don't make any sense. And it's just from trying to listen and do at the same time. So that's really where the neuropsychiatrist exam is gonna come in, and we'll see what's happening.

Bill Gasiamis 26:40

Okay, it looks like you're on to a problem-solving mindset anyway, like, you're about trying to find solutions, and you're seeing people that's good. That's great because that's ultimately going to get you answers. Okay, that wasn't useful. All right, what's the next thing I can try and just keep going? Yeah. And if it doesn't help, it doesn't mean it didn't help. It means that you have more information and now, you can just go down the next path. Tell me about your baking, what do you bake?

Nutrition and brain health after loss of

vision stroke

Rachel Miller 27:09

So we started weed meaning I invited some friends over because I was afraid to bake by myself. Just, I just couldn't even follow directions on my own. And that seems to be getting a little better. So I invited a couple of friends over and we made pretzels, which turned out to be outstanding. And then I made bagels with my knees. And then I started making bread.

Rachel Miller 27:40

So I've been making all kinds of different bread. I got the sourdough starter that I think everybody names their sourdough starter. So my name is Ricardo. And so I think cupcakes are this weekend, I'm gonna make some Thol cupcakes. So yeah, I am thinking about starting to find some cooking recipes. My boyfriend is Persian. So I'm thinking about maybe getting into cooking some things that don't require you to move quickly. You know, that's kind of one step at a time thing. So I'm gonna look into that also.

Bill Gasiamis 28:25

All right, I'm glad I heard that because what I'm going to do is I'd better burst your bubble a little bit. Not because I'm mean or nasty, but because wheat-based products are not good for brain recovery, and consuming a lot of wheat-based products, you're probably doing your recovery, a disservice. And so that I'm not the one who has to hit you over the knuckles with the wooden spoon. I'll just leave it for Dr. David Perlmutter to do that through his book called Grain Brain. Okay.

Rachel Miller 29:08

So here, yeah, I went to a stroke survivor support group this week, and they said the same thing. So that's two people telling me the same thing. That means I gotta cut back and start making something else.

Bill Gasiamis 29:23

If there's anything I can encourage people to do when they go on a stroke recovery journey is that they need to dial in their nutrition, and one of those things that they need to stop is alcohol. Then they need to stop gluten, then they need to stop sugar, then they need to stop dairy, and then caffeine. All those five foods if they stop those, okay, what happens is you get rid of the inflammatory responses that those foods create in the body.

Bill Gasiamis 29:55

And if you've got a quote-unquote normal brain you're not noticing the inflammatory responses that are occurring, your brain is more resilient, and it can handle that kind of stuff. Some people do notice food comas and brain fog and fatigue and that kind of stuff, and not being able to think straight. And that's a lot of the time related to food. So then when you've got a stroke brain, you're, it's able to be irritated and put into those negative states far easier than it was prior.

Bill Gasiamis 30:31

So when people struggle with fatigue, they just cut out sugar and gluten, they're going to have a massive, improvement in their fatigue scenarios, and their deficits will not be as dramatic. So I noticed that from time to time when I go out to a party, and there's some cake, and I have to have a pace that the sugar and the combination of the ingredients that make an amazing cake, do impact my neurological ability and the way that I feel. And I can also feel the sugar coursing through my veins. I know that's strange and sounds weird.

Rachel Miller 31:17

I know that I do too.

Bill Gasiamis 31:20

Yeah, like I can probably feel it. And it's so bizarre. So that's it from me, as far as lectures go. I don't want to make this about lectures. But yeah, it's just a bit of information that people don't know is important. And like I said, to get in, if you're a curious person like I was and you get the book on audio, if you can't read it with your eyes, get it on audio by Dr. David Perlmutter is a massive, amazing insight into how not consuming those types of foods will improve your neurological health long term.

Rachel Miller 32:03

Great, I'll do that I listened to a lot of audiobooks. That's one thing that I enjoy doing that doesn't hurt my head. So yeah, that's a great recommendation.

Bill Gasiamis 32:13

I make some awesome meals instead, some beautiful, you know, protein-based meals with some veggies on the side and that kind of stuff. And, do that instead, it'd be lovely. So you've got a history of overcoming dramatic situations. Right? Sounds like you're a bit of a fighter. One of those things was alcoholism, but I feel

like the alcoholism probably came from the other condition, that you mentioned, which was mental health challenges. Did I get the order? Right? Is that how it kind of came to be?

Rachel Miller 32:52

The way that I think of it is, you know, I always thought that I drank. I had anxiety. I was depressed because I had a, you know, a bad marriage. But I've realized in sobriety that I drank because I'm an alcoholic. After all, I have a disease. The medication that I was taking for my mental health issues didn't work, when I was trying to drink or, you know, trying to self-medicate with alcohol, my, anxiety medication, and all the other things that I was taking for panic attacks.

Rachel Miller 33:42

None of it was working. And it was, you know, alcohol was my best friend. And it was it was terrible to have to say goodbye. You know, that may sound weird to somebody who's not an alcoholic, but it was, it was devastating. But um, I, you know, they say one day at a time, you know, I had a couple starts on that just like I had a couple starts with the stroke recovery. I had gone to detox for alcoholism in 2015.

Rachel Miller 34:25

And I just couldn't imagine spending the rest of my life without drinking and I ended up drinking again a couple of months later, and I drank for eight months until my daughter, you know, I was hiding it from everybody. Everybody knew that I was drinking 24/7 At that point, my daughter approached me and said it was okay to try again. And it's taken a long time for me to be able to say that line without crying, but so I went back to detox, that time around, I decided I was going to do whatever it took to get sober.

Intro 35:06

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. Like, how long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things. But, if you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 35:31

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up

your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com. Where you can download a guide that will help you it's called Seven Questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 35:50

These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke, they'll not only help you better understand your condition, they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery, head to the website. Now, recoveryafterstroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Rachel Miller 36:09

And I've been able to pull a lot of parallels between my recovery from alcoholism my program. And what I'm trying to do for my stroke. I want the first step of putting alcohol down is recognizing that my life was unmanageable. And I couldn't live like that anymore. And the same thing happened four months ago, when I was trying to keep working, you know, 10 hours a day, sometimes 12-hour days because I wanted to do my job.

Rachel Miller 36:49

And I wanted to be successful. And I had just reached the point where I was doing the thing that I wanted that I had aspired to do. And above, but I couldn't. My head hurts so bad. I couldn't live like that anymore. And I sat out on my front porch. And I just started crying. And I was like, I can't live like this anymore. And I had to walk away. So I've had to do it twice. And like I said, I'm just really grateful that it's like my sobriety was practiced so that I could prepare for how to live with my vision impairments. And in a way that does not reignite all of my mental health issues.

Bill Gasiamis 37:40

Wow, that's an amazing way to get there. So when you're an alcoholic, are you functioning? Are you capable of driving and being at work and being in all sorts of normal places or not?

Rachel Miller 37:59

When I was actively drinking, is that what you mean? Or after?

Bill Gasiamis 38:03

Oh, yeah, but you pardon, Yeah. The terminology I'm not certain with so yeah, when you're actively drinking.

Rachel Miller 38:09

When I was actively drinking, I don't know. I you know, I put people's lives at risk, I put my life at risk, I was drinking 24/7 The only time I wasn't drinking was when I passed out. And if I happen to wake up, I had a leftover glass of wine beside my bed that I would reach over, you know, nasty room temperature and I would throw that down just to relieve any of the the shaking, and I would go back to sleep and the morning I would wake up I was nauseous.

Rachel Miller 38:47

Sometimes I was throwing up and I would drink until I stopped throwing up. And then I would drive myself to work drinking on the way it got to the point where I just stopped showing up. I had a friend who passed away all of a sudden, and that was an excuse for me to just give up entirely on everything. And I didn't go back to work after that. All it took was I ended up drunk reaching out to who ended up being my boss at my job that I just left.

Rachel Miller - Alcoholism, addiction, and recovery



Rachel Miller 39:38

I reached out to him and didn't even know him. reached out to him because I have it and I said I'm an alcoholic and I need help. And my company is amazing, I'm so loyal to them. They, they helped me I, they, they sent me flowers when I got out of detox. You know, like, companies don't do that for people. There are a lot of misunderstandings about, obviously the disease of alcoholism.

Rachel Miller 40:11

And I'm just really fortunate that I had a company that was like a family to me and, and they stood behind me the whole way. And I ended up going from drinking in my cube. Don't tell anybody, too, that I was a director within seven years, so my whole life has changed since I got sober.

Bill Gasiamis 40:40

How does somebody, what? Not how but you're well, yeah, how how do you drink for that long is a slow start? And it's when you're 21, you have one drink? And then by the time you're 22, you're having three? Or how does somebody get to be able to drink? I would imagine gallons of alcohol a day.

Rachel Miller 41:06

Yeah, yeah. I so my drink of choice was Bella Chardonnay, Boxed Wine. And I started you know, I started drinking alcoholicly from the moment I started drinking. One beer was never enough. When I was a teenager, one beer was never enough. I was gonna drink until there was nothing left. I never. As soon as I had alcohol in my system, I was all of a sudden, confident, I felt like I was, you know, the funniest person in the room. I was at the party. And I went, I went to college, and I was drinking every day in college.

Rachel Miller 41:58

I was a math major. I don't know how I did it. I remember my professor reaching out to me about a month before I was supposed to graduate. And she said, Are you supposed to graduate this year? And I said, Yeah, because I'm pretty sure I was failing her class. It was calculus and I never went to that class sober. My sorority at the time said that I was an alcoholic. And I thought that they were just mean girls calling me names. I got married, and I drank every day. I always drank every day. Until I started working at home for the family business.

Rachel Miller 42:41

And that was one thing that started. It was more accessible. I could drink at noon, you know. And then eventually, I was drinking when I woke up. I have that job at home for about 10 years. And I, my mind just went blank. I had that job for like 10 years. And so it took that long for me to start drinking all day long. And I ended up losing that job because when I had a business trip, I had to go to the main office, I would drink so much the night before that I wouldn't get up and show up to work. And so eventually they were like, We cannot have you, you know, you're

a risk.

Rachel Miller 43:38

So they, you know, they said goodbye, which is the comparison to the company that helped me. They said goodbye. This company helped me get sober. And yeah, it's just some people. It's different for everybody. I got sober when I was 42. Some people get sober when they're 21. I, their part of me wish I got sober when I was 21. Because I would have been more present for my kids.

Rachel Miller 44:16

When they were growing up, my kids were off. They've graduated from college, they're off building their own lives now and I, you know, I learned in sobriety that I'm not supposed to have regrets. But if I were to have regrets, it would be that it would be not being present for them. But they say they say I was a great mom anyway.

Bill Gasiamis 44:41

Yeah, fair enough. Well, so do you feel like this has been trying to kind of get my head around what alcoholism is and how and how people get into it? And I know some people who are alcoholics who are in their 50s and have not admitted it and they probably we're alcoholics. When we were 16 and 17, we had just started drinking. I feel like is it a personality trait. That is has an addictive component? And if that's not the case, that's cool, but then do many alcoholics need to switch their addiction to something else, which is more supposedly healthy?

Rachel Miller 45:31

Healthy. It's so funny that you should ask me that, I, you know, what I've learned in my sobriety program is that alcoholics tend to be obsessive about things, and I have an obsessive personality. I wouldn't call it obsessive-compulsive, compulsive. But diagnosed, you know, I just always need to be doing something I need to. That's why it was so devastating to me walking away from my career, because what am I supposed to do? You know, I was working every day, I was even working on the weekends.

Rachel Miller 46:20

What am I supposed to do now? Well, I quickly started my podcast. And, and I started recording every single day. And I, my friends, were asking me, you know, how do you and my family? How do you come up with something to talk about

every day? And as I told you, before we started this podcast. I don't interview anybody. It's just me running my mouth. And it's because recovery is daily. You know it, I have something to talk about every day, because I'm trying to live as a sober alcoholic, who's recovering from a stroke. I mean, of course, I have stuff to talk about every day.

Rachel Miller 47:13

Whether it's, you know, nutrition, like what you're talking about, which I'm epically failing at, or I'm trying to get exercise habit, which I've just started doing Yoga again, I used to do that every day. That's been a challenge to try to figure out what exercise I can do that doesn't hurt my head because I used to run I can't run now because the earth is moving and bouncing. And I can't do that. So yoga is all about getting your drift key, and so I'm doing yoga now.

Rachel Miller 47:52

I started sewing. I grew up with my mom being a sewer. And I thought, well, I can sew that doesn't hurt my head, though, what do I do? I'm, I made a quilt, you know, I made a quilt like right out of the gate, which I'm proud of, but it's just like, I can't stop. I can't slow down. And I feel like that is some sort of like, underlying addictive personality that I have, which can be an asset like at work. I think it was an asset to the point where I always was, you know, I was on fire getting things done. But it can also be negative and I can't stop.

Rachel Miller 48:42

I'm working 10-12 hour days. Yeah, you know, so I've tried to balance. And though I've learned a lot from again, applying my sobriety program, to this stroke recovery, to try to slow down. I'm trying, I just did a podcast on slowing down. And it's a it's a meditation that is a part of my sobriety program. So yoga and meditation slow down, and I have to actively apply those techniques to keep my brain healthy. Take care of my brain.

Stroke recovery and daily habits for well-being

Bill Gasiamis 49:30

Yeah, I relate to your podcast titled Recovery Daily. The stroke is that for me every day, and the reason my podcast exists is because I need to talk about it

more and more and more and more all the time. Because if I don't feel like it kind of builds up and then and then it's not healthy when it's built up. And of course, I can talk about all sorts of things for life and the people that I love. Who around me all the time, but they don't necessarily want to have a stroke conversation every single day of their lives, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 50:08

So, stroke survivors whom I met once on a podcast who don't mind talking about stroke, go, this is a therapy session for me. Every time I get to speak to somebody exactly, you know. So yeah, I can understand how, how recovery daily is the thing that you need to do. And that's small steps. Because you don't have to do a lot of recovery every day, you just have to do a little bit. And then that adds up over the week, over the month over the year.

Bill Gasiamis 50:39

And then you've come a long way, rather than just going and doing sort of bursts of recovery, and then sitting on your laurels and then doing nothing for a little while, I think it is better to do small amounts of daily recovery. And I still feel like I'm in recovery. And I've been doing this since 2012. And it. It's an ongoing thing. It's a lifestyle now, it's how do I go about training and my health and well-being, permanently?

Rachel Miller 51:16

Yeah, that's what you know, that's what I learned in sobriety is that this is a new way of life. And every morning, I wake up and remind myself that I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic. I used to wake up when I first got sober, and thought, I'm an alcoholic. Just like when I first had my stroke, and I woke up and thought, I can't see, you know, I this these days, so ever since COVID. started, I started going to a 7 a.m. sobriety meeting. And I still to this day, do that. So that's four years later, I think we're out day or week.

Rachel Miller 52:08

Sorry, month for sorry, year for whatever. I go every morning at 7 am. During that meeting, I took the time to think about my recovery. Think about what is what is my role in my life. am I carrying the ball? Am I you know, am I engaging in my life today? Or am I sitting back feeling sorry for myself because I'm an alcoholic because I had a stroke? Because I can't take I can't drive my brand-new car. I can't drive it.

Rachel Miller 52:53

Now, I'm not going to do that. Because I know what it felt like when I was active drinking every day I knew what misery felt like. And I don't want to ever feel that way again. And if I don't take care of myself, even having had a stroke, I may drink again. And the reason why I started my podcast was that I woke up in April this past April, having had my symptoms re-engaged, I woke up and thought so much I wanted a muscle relaxer.

Rachel Miller 53:36

That's what I felt like I needed for my head, my head was like, so tight, and in pain, and I wanted a muscle relaxer. I immediately sent a message to my brother and asked him to create a Spotify podcast account for me because I have to share what's happening inside me so that it doesn't destroy me on the inside. And I ended up drinking or taking some sort of mind-altering drug.

Bill Gasiamis 54:11

Is it a way to keep you honest?

Rachel Miller 54:13

That's right.

Sobriety, mental health, and creative coping strategies

Bill Gasiamis 54:14

I like it. Because that's why I had to do the podcast. It's because if I'm telling, I'm getting 8000 downloads a month, and if I'm and it's getting to about 50 countries or something, Rachel, and if I'm telling all of those people every month, not to wait, wait and not to a deary. Well, I have to not wait and deary as well. I can't just tell people to do stuff without doing it myself.

Bill Gasiamis 54:45

That'd be in what wouldn't be authentic. Right? It wouldn't be nice. Yeah. So that's part of the reason why the podcast exists. It's to keep me honest and to keep me focused so that when I have a bad couple of days I record my podcasts on the weekend.

Bill Gasiamis 55:03

I have a few bad days during the week, the podcast kind of breaks the cycle because we have to get here, inspire people, give people hope, encourage people, tell people, what the journey looks like 10 years down the track, how things changing, things get better, and what you can achieve. So it breaks the entire negative cycle from say; going into a fourth fifth or sixth day.

Rachel Miller 55:34

Absolutely, yeah. It's an incredible way to be accountable for what you're saying. Just like four days ago, I was talking about building habits. And I had decided, you know, app in the episode, I'm going to start my habit of daily yoga. So I have to do daily yoga like I am 100% accountable, for doing that. Yeah, it's, uh, there are some days, you know, I do try to mostly be up, I am just naturally kind of a perky person uplift, uplifting kind of personality.

Rachel Miller 56:19

It's because of my sobriety program that I liked that I didn't use to be like that. But there are days that you know, I still have a bad life still have. When we're in sobriety, life still happens after you've had a stroke. And we got to figure out how to navigate it.

Rachel Miller 56:39

And there are ways that I have an episode that I don't rerecord those episodes, because if I'm truly being open and honest about the struggle, I am in sobriety, and in my stroke recovery, I want to show them the city of how hard it is on some days because that being vulnerable like that shows other people that they are not unique, you know, that somebody can relate to how I'm feeling though.

Rachel Miller 57:21

That's what's important to me. That's another reason why I do it. I do it to keep myself sober. And I do it so that if there's anybody out there who can relate to me, maybe I can help them too.

Bill Gasiamis 57:35

Yeah, brilliant. I often tell people who tune in or who are on my podcast, that recovery from stroke is three-pronged. The three main pillars of recovery are the emotional recovery, the mental health, recovery, and the physical recovery. And I noticed that on your podcast is an episode there that talks about getting creative with emotional sobriety. What's What's that? Like? How do you role emotional,

the emotional side of recovery into sobriety had any do that?

Rachel Miller 58:19

Yeah, so I think that was a recent episode about creative coping. If I'm thinking of the same episode that you referenced, I can, I can't remember what it was called. But what I like to do so. So just like you're saying, there's emotional, physical, and mental and it's the same thing in sobriety, you know, we have to take care of our bodies and take away the alcohol. Lots of my nutrition, aside from the bread is a result of taking the alcohol out.

Rachel Miller 58:57

So here's the thing you're gonna cringe but I'm going to show you anyway, I have this whole big bowl of Blow Pops because I took away the alcohol but my sugar intake has skyrocketed, and it's something that, that I don't beat myself up about because I quit drinking massive I would have drinking, I quit smoking. I smoked for I don't even know how long and I entirely quit smoking. I'm like, I can have a Blow Pop if I want Blow Pop, you know? Yeah. So creative coping.

Rachel Miller 59:46

What I've done is I've tried to it's it's kind of building habits. So when I feel angry, I do push-ups. That's my creative coping, it's a way to get the energy out, I tell my daughter all the time is very energetic. When you've got all these emotions and stuff, it's just energy and it needs to get out of you. And so one of the ways I get my energy out is by talking on my podcast, the other way that I get my energy out, is I do push-ups. If I'm feeling like, kind of spun up in my head, like wrapped around the axle.

Rachel Miller 1:00:32

I'll do something like sewing, you know, focus on something or painting or one of these new hobbies that I'm creating. And so just trying to find different ways to attach links and emotion to an activity. Because if I don't link that, then it just spins around up here. And then it goes down into what I call my dark place. And that dark place was full when I was drinking. And today, I like to keep it nice and empty.

Rachel Miller 1:01:11

I also have this thing I call it a god box. And I'm not religious, I never have been, but as part of my program, we are to come up with a higher power of sorts. So I

have my concept of what that is. And I have this box that when you know I've my whole life, my mom used to say, let it go, Rachel, don't let it bother you. And I didn't know what to do. Um, so I needed some sort of action to correlate to letting something go.

Rachel Miller 1:01:49

And otherwise, I didn't know how to do it. So when I get pissed off at somebody, I write their name down on a sticky note, and I put it inside the box, and I shut the box. And that represents me letting things go and because I can't control people, places, and things. So everything I do is tied to an action and that keeps me mentally healthy, at least to a point.

Rachel Miller - Overcoming stroke and mental health challenges



Bill Gasiamis 1:02:21

I love that. It's extremely useful what you said not only did you tell me how useful it is, and describe it, you are physically placing it out of the realm of your head into an external realm and away from you. And it's kind of done that, therefore it's been sort of dealt with, it's been taken out of your head in that moment. And then do that enough times and then the habit becomes something that you do even if you're not near the god box, so to speak. And you're, you're doing it imaginatively, you're using your mind to do it, and you're imagining yourself.

Rachel Miller 1:02:58

I've learned how to let something go, and sometimes I just picture myself putting it in a box.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:06

Yeah, I could do I could do with a box like that. I'm gonna take that and see how I can adapt it for my use because sometimes I do get stuck on the things that are just dumb, and they're not worth getting stuck on and then it takes too long to unstuck from them and then they just take up too much time and energy and effort and aggression and anger and all that sort of can come up.

Rachel Miller 1:03:35

Yeah, it's all about me it's all about not picking up a drink not finding an excuse to drink.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:43

Yeah. As we come to the end of the episode, I'd love to ask you about what you feel was the hardest thing about a stroke.

Rachel Miller 1:04:02

I think the hardest thing you know I still tend to feel sorry for myself. When they you know in these last four months that I've had to leave my career, figure out what it is that I can do that makes me happy that doesn't hurt my head I mentioned I just bought a new car and since April I can't drive anymore. It's the hardest part is dealing with what's happening here and here.

Rachel Miller 1:04:52

That's the hardest part. I'm one thing that I've encountered by going owing to different strokes, support groups, which I've tried to tackle the way that I tackle my sobriety fellowship, which is trying to put myself in a position where I can talk to like-minded people, the exact reason why I reached out to you because I wanted to be able to, you know, the more that I can get engaged with people in the community, community, the better I can grow here and here.

Rachel Miller 1:05:31

What I've learned is that there are so many people who have had a stroke that don't look like they had a stroke, I didn't know that before I had the stroke, I thought everybody who had a stroke, could tell they had a stroke. But the more that I get involved in the community, community, I'm learning that I don't know what the ratio is, but so many people have impairments to have had impairments

that nobody can see. And it's so similar to our mental health, to the illnesses that we hold inside us that nobody can see.

Rachel Miller 1:06:21

That's been my battle my whole life. And, so I don't know that it's, it's going to change my life and that I have to work harder at my mental health, it's just that I'm going uphill right now. And I'm climbing another mountain to figure out how to navigate my life. This new way of life, you know, this, I can't do the things I used to be able to do. And I find myself feeling very sorry for myself that if I keep talking to you and other people in the community keep doing my podcast. I don't get stuck there.

Rachel Miller 1:07:14

You know, I find that there's opportunity in our lives no matter what, no matter what we're up against, you know, I get choked up about it because I'm because I keep fighting. You know, I just keep fighting and I've lost a lot of friends who couldn't fight anymore. For that reason, I'm fighting harder so that I can share their story, share my story, and do the best I can to add value to the world as both a recovering alcoholic and a stroke survivor.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:03

What has stroke taught you?

Rachel Miller 1:08:16

It's taught me that no matter what's in front of me, I'm going to look for a solution. I didn't know that I had that in me. But I've, I've learned a lot about how freakin strong I am. I didn't I had no idea that I was strong. Some people come to me and they're like, how are you doing it? I kind of know.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:42

Even though you've been through sobriety and all the things that you've had to overcome, you didn't realize that you were strong. Until recently.

Rachel Miller 1:08:58

No, you know, I have to keep telling myself that might be part of my mental illness. You know, I have to keep telling myself that I'm strong.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:15

You are, well, the final question is about other people. What do you want to tell

somebody else who might be a long listen to one of these episodes comes across your one and is kind of hoping to find out something new and encouraging? What do you want to tell them about what the future holds or what what's important?

Rachel Miller 1:09:44

Yeah. I would want to tell whoever is listening that you know, life can seem like there's no way out That's, that's how I felt when when I reached my bottom, when I was drinking, I felt like there was no way I couldn't live my life. Without alcohol, I felt like life was no longer gonna be fun without alcohol. And, and I found out that life is more fun. When you're present, you can remember conversations and you have more energy to enjoy the world.

Rachel Miller 1:10:38

You know, today I, I can take a walk with my dog around the block and I'll see a squirrel. And I'm like, my face lights up because that's what the world does to me now. And it didn't look like that the world didn't look like that when I was drinking. And what's interesting is that as a stroke survivor I have a harder time looking at the world, you know, I have a harder I can't watching a squirrel run across the grass.

Rachel Miller 1:11:18

But I have all of these snapshots that I've recorded over the past seven years of sobriety. And, so today, I do a lot of looking inside, to find joy, you know, because we spend a lot of our lives searching for joy. And what is it that brings me joy? Should I get married? Should I you know, get a dog? Should I have a kid you know, what I have found is is the joy is found inside. It's not found out there. It's found inside. And by going through all of these, this stroke recovery and all of that stuff, I've been able to get rid of all the trash and find it and find that joy.

Rachel Miller 1:12:14

And I would just love for anybody who feels hopeless to know that. It's in there. You just have to, you just have to dig and get it out, you know, uncover it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:28

Wow. Well, on that note, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Rachel Miller 1:12:34

Thank you so much. I appreciate you having me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:37

Now, just before we do go though, why don't you share with everybody where they can find you, especially your podcast?

Rachel Miller 1:12:46

Yeah, thank you so much. My podcast is available on iTunes and YouTube and all the platforms and it's called Recovery Daily podcast. I also have a website recoverydailypodcast.com. And I've got social media, LinkedIn, and Facebook. So you can find me in all of those places. And it's me, it's just me. So if you reach out to me, I'd love to talk to you about your experiences and share mine, and we can continue to grow this community that keeps us all healthy.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:30

Thanks for joining us on today's episode, remember to grab your copy of chapter one of the book *The Unexpected Way that a Stroke Became the Best Thing That Happened*, by visiting recoveryafterstroke.com/book. Take a look around and discover what the book is all about and click the download free chapter button. As always, to learn more about my guests, including links to their social media, and other pages, and to download a full transcript of the entire interview.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:57

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Bill Gasiamis 1:14:25

If you're watching on YouTube, definitely comment below the video. I love seeing your comments. I will respond to all of the comments on the YouTube channel. So please do that. Like this episode and to get notifications of future episodes. Subscribe to the show on the platform of your choice. Thank you once again for being here and listening. I appreciate you and see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:14:51

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Intro 1:15:20

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Intro 1:15:45

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Intro 1:16:12

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