

Monica's Story - Brain AVM Recovery - Monica Azevedo

Comprehensive Guide to Brain Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) Recovery and Outlook

Understanding Brain Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM)

Brain Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) is a rare condition characterized by abnormal connections between arteries and veins within the brain, bypassing the normal capillary system. This condition poses unique challenges due to its location in a critical organ like the brain, leading to potential complications such as hemorrhage, seizures, and neurological deficits.

Initial Stages of Brain AVM Recovery

Post-Treatment Care for Brain AVM

Following treatment for brain AVM, meticulous post-treatment care becomes paramount. Patients must strictly adhere to medical recommendations, including prescribed medications, lifestyle modifications, and regular follow-up appointments to monitor recovery progress and address any emerging issues promptly.

Physical Rehabilitation for Brain AVM Patients

Physical therapy plays a crucial role in aiding brain AVM patients during recovery. Rehabilitation programs tailored to the specific needs of each patient focus on restoring mobility, coordination, and strength. These programs are designed to address any neurological deficits and improve overall functional abilities.

Factors Influencing Brain AVM Recovery

Location and Size of Brain AVM

The location and size of a brain AVM significantly influence recovery outcomes. AVMs situated in critical areas of the brain may present greater challenges and require specialized treatment approaches to mitigate risks and optimize recovery.

Treatment Modalities for Brain AVM

The choice of treatment modality for brain AVM, whether it's surgical resection, embolization, or radiosurgery, plays a pivotal role in determining recovery prospects. Each treatment option carries its own set of risks and benefits, and the selection depends on factors such as the size, location, and characteristics of the brain AVM, as well as the patient's overall health and preferences.

Long-Term Outlook and Prognosis for Brain AVM Patients

Risk of Recurrence in Brain AVM Recovery

Despite successful treatment, there remains a risk of recurrence in brain AVM cases. Regular monitoring through imaging studies is essential to detect any signs of recurrence early and intervene promptly to prevent potential complications.

Quality of Life After Brain AVM Recovery

The quality of life post-treatment for brain AVM patients varies depending on various factors, including the success of treatment, the extent of neurological deficits, and overall functional recovery. Many individuals can resume their normal activities with minimal limitations, while others may require ongoing support and rehabilitation to manage persistent symptoms and optimize their quality of life.

Importance of Psychological Support in Brain AVM Recovery

In addition to physical rehabilitation, psychological support services such as counseling and support groups play a vital role in brain AVM recovery. Coping with the emotional and psychological impact of living with a brain AVM and undergoing treatment requires comprehensive support to address anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges.

Conclusion: Optimizing Brain AVM Recovery

In conclusion, optimizing recovery and outlook for individuals with brain Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) necessitates a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the unique challenges posed by this condition. By prioritizing post-treatment care, physical rehabilitation, and psychological support, brain AVM patients can achieve optimal recovery outcomes and lead fulfilling lives post-diagnosis and treatment.

The Interview

Monica Azevedo was 29 when she experienced a brain hemorrhage because of an AVM that required gamma knife surgery to resolve.

Instagram

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Transcript:

Bill Gasiamis 0:00

Hello, everybody. My book about stroke recovery tells the story of 10 stroke survivors and the steps that they took that got them to the stage in their recovery. Where from a personal growth perspective, stroke transformed into one of those life experiences that on reflection was filled with many opportunities for growth and personal transformation.

Bill Gasiamis 0:22

In the book, there are chapters on nutrition, sleep, exercise, how to deal with the emotional side of stroke, tips and tools for mental well-being, and much, much more to find out more and to get your copy, go to recoveryafterstroke.com/book.

Introduction - Monica Azevedo

Bill Gasiamis 0:37

This is episode 296. My guest today is on the road to recovery after a brain AVM bled into her brain when she was age, just 29 Monica as Aveda. Welcome to the podcast.

Monica Azevedo 0:51

Thank you. Thanks for having

Bill Gasiamis 0:55

Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

The Brain AVM and symptoms

Monica Azevedo 0:59

Yeah, so long story short, I had a stroke on February 2 of last year 2023. And it changed my life and I'm doing a lot better now. But I'm still recovering. So essentially I had a hemorrhage stroke, where I had a bleed in my brain. And we found out it was because of an AVM in the brain that ruptured. So yeah, I'm not

sure how far back and how many details.

Bill Gasiamis 2:03

Let me guide you don't worry about it. So you have an AVM you find out the first time when it bleeds. Looking back now did you have any symptoms? Any idea that maybe there was something not right, something a bit weird about your head? Did you get strange headaches before? Did you have any inkling whatsoever that something was a little bit off?

Monica Azevedo 2:28

Not at all, complete shock. And it's funny because I've had a couple of concussions in high school. And that didn't do anything or at least, you know, let me know that I had potentially this AVM in my brain. So I consider myself lucky because all the symptoms were fairly, you know, quick and I got help fairly quickly as well.

Monica Azevedo 3:07

So I was working a lot and I had just finished my shift, it was a Thursday. And I left work, I went to grab my car. And I went I pulled up in front of the office, my boss and I were unloading my car because we just had done it at a trade show for the company. And I said goodbye and hopped into my car.

Monica Azevedo 3:48

As soon as I pulled out and started driving I got this sudden, headache, very sharp pain at the very front of my head and I was like whoa, like kind of taken aback because this kind of came out of nowhere. And then within seconds, my vision becomes blurry.

Monica Azevedo 4:14

And I figured okay, this isn't good. So I think to myself, pull over immediately. I put all my hazard lights on I put my car in park and funny enough I'm from Toronto, and there are billboards up around and I remember always reading this one that had the acronym FAST. I think it's like if your face is drooping. A like your arms and S for speech and then time to call.

Monica Azevedo 4:57

So I instantly thought to myself can you raise your arms and I couldn't even like, raise my arms more than halfway. So I knew something like I needed help. So the first thing I did was think I was going to call my boss because he's probably the

one person who can get to me the quickest.

Monica Azevedo 5:25

And figure out what's going on, I call him. I said, Hey, I'm not feeling good please come get me. And then, you know, from here on now, this is what I've been told, because as soon as I called him, he said he was coming. I blacked out. And then I remember coming to again for a second and I see him in my vehicle calling I guess, 911. And then blackout again. And I don't remember anything for two weeks.

Monica Azevedo 6:04

I was in the ICU, they found out that I had a bleed in the brain almost immediately. And yeah, I had a breathing tube. And I, apparently had thrown up all over myself when this first had happened. And yeah, it was I was rushed to the hospital. So I was I'm very, very grateful that he was there to jump in and call 911 for me. Because, again, the symptoms were so sudden and so powerful. And it happened so fast. I barely had time to react. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 7:03

You're you've got sort of this two-week period of time where everything's lost, I imagine you would have been in some kind of an induced coma that would have been trying to stabilize the bleed, trying to sort it out, etc. Did you have family notified Was anyone by your side during that time to remember who was there when you woke up?

Monica Azevedo 7:26

Yeah, so my boss said, his name is Jamie. And he called, I believe, my parents and one of my girlfriends. And it was the two numbers he had, I think, and I'm not sure maybe he called my partner but he called who he could. And so, one of my good friends, Tara, she was the first one to get to the hospital and see me and she thought, you know, okay, well, this is a little bit more serious than I thought.

Monica Azevedo 8:14

She told my parents like, no, like, you need to come to the hospital. So all my close girlfriends, my parents, my brother. You know, bless their hearts. I have a great support team, and they're all there. And yeah, I guess it's still not clear to me exactly what had happened. You know, during when I was in ICU.

Bill Gasiamis 8:47

Are they all living locally, and are they all near you?

Monica Azevedo 8:51

Yeah, they are.

Deficits after the brain AVM

Bill Gasiamis 8:53

And it's been 12 months, the anniversary of this time has just passed, right? So in those 12 months, what did you have to overcome? What deficits Did you wake up with after the surgery? After the hospitalization?

Monica Azevedo 9:10

Yeah, so I had like, a tube out of my head. So we ended up putting a shunt in because, during my hospital stay, I was at the hospital for about three to half weeks in total. I moved into a rehab center which helped a lot but during my hospital stay I guess they were trying to drain or let my body drain the fluid out of my brain on its own, but I couldn't and whenever they I guess tried to let me do it on my own.

Monica Azevedo 9:56

Like those were times I kind of recall some of them. And some of them I don't. But like, I would talk crazy like I was not making sense. The stories I hear from my family and friends are pretty funny. Scary, but funny. Now that I look back at it.

Bill Gasiamis 10:22

Did you have problems walking or using any side of your body or anything like that?

Monica Azevedo 10:26

The right side of my body was quite numb, tingling, and hard to use, I had to walk and learn how to walk again, so I used one of those walkers. And I had like my shoulders up to my ears I was so frigid. It affected my left eye. So I have what you call a strabismus or lazy eye.

Monica Azevedo 10:53

And it's also affected the pupil. So the brain is amazing. But at first, it was like I had a double vision I am I couldn't see anything, everything was messy. And then

I just kind of adapt because essentially, what the brain is trying to do is, is create like, there's two images, and they're trying to blend those images. So it's just one.

Monica Azevedo 11:31

So, I can see a lot better. But I've had to adapt. I had to learn how to walk again, I had to kind of gain strength on my right side. So physiotherapy was a big help.

Stroke recovery with aphasia and cognitive difficulties

Bill Gasiamis 11:49

How are you functioning verbally? And how you're thinking? My assumption is, I've never met you before. So I'm assuming that everything is the way it's always been. But are you having any difficulty with developing thoughts, finishing sentences, or starting a conversation? Do you have any of those dramas, things that are different than the way that you used to communicate before?

Monica Azevedo 12:14

Um, in the beginning, it was fairly difficult. I was kind of lost for words. But I've improved quite a lot. I have little trouble with short-term memory. But you know, I'm trying to work on my vocabulary. Again, I'm trying to talk more, read more, and challenge myself. So, you know, I've seen a couple of speech therapists. And luckily, that hasn't been the case for me. I haven't had a deficit in that regard.

Bill Gasiamis 12:59

And how about your energy levels? What about the way that you feel throughout the day? How energetic you can be how many things you can get done? How was that? These days? A

Monica Azevedo 13:11

a lot, a lot better now, a lot better now. So something that I struggled I was a lot mentally. My mental health was I was in a dark place for sure. Physically, now I gained 40 pounds. And within six months, I had to shave my head. So because they shaved half of my head for the shunt and this drain there they put in I had a little bit of an identity crisis because I didn't recognize who I was in the mirror. Like I've gained weight my eyes weird to me. I'm I've shaved my head. And I forgot the original question. I don't know where I'm going with this.

Bill Gasiamis 14:16

It was about it was about like how else you've been impacted? And you've answered the question beautifully said so fine. Yes, I was gonna say about your mental health. So were you somebody that perhaps had mental health challenges in the past, for example, my major, A minor, you don't have to talk about any of this stuff. If you're not comfortable, major or minor in that. Did you have baby anxiety or anything like that? Or was this all-new, or onset after your brain injury after this traumatic injury?

Monica Azevedo 14:48

I've always dealt with things with anxiety. So that wasn't, you know, new for me, but yeah, a lot of it was new to me, I guess I guess. Like I have never, you know, experienced depression the way that I did last year. When I think back, I get emotional sometimes. Because I think I've come so far, you know, I'm, I'm doing so well. Considering I had a stroke a year ago, and I'm damn proud of myself, but it was hard.

Intro 15:42

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

Intro 16:07

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. 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. Download the guide. It's free.

Monica Azevedo 16:45

It's really hard. And I think mentally is where I had the biggest challenge because and you know, because physically I couldn't do the things I wanted to do. And

whatnot.

Bill Gasiamis 17:03

Physically is where the effort goes, people see that immediately. They see you can't walk, and they put you into therapy and you're supposed to improve or you're walking. And I think it's a really important part of recovery. And then if you can regain some of your movement that might support your mental health a little bit, your emotional health.

The importance of emotional and mental recovery

Bill Gasiamis 17:28

But then the Emotional Health and Mental Health still require a lot of time and effort as well, just like the physical recovery, but very rarely do as a medical professional, you should go into six months of counseling or six months of therapy, they don't do that unless somebody is proactive, says that to you. And then you have the idea that maybe psychological counseling, or emotional counseling is something that you need to do.

Bill Gasiamis 17:58

But a lot of stroke survivors don't go down that path. They don't think about it. Because they also look at the physical side of it. And then they go, Well, if only I could walk or if only I could use my arm or and then they put all their energy and focus into that, which makes sense. It's logical. But strokes are a three-pronged recovery, you can't just recover the physical and not pay attention to the emotional and then not pay attention to the mental. Because your, your thinking gets clouded. I know for me, it got clouded.

Bill Gasiamis 18:30

I'm thinking thoughts I had never thought before. Which, on reflection, it all makes complete sense. It's logical that somebody who was perfectly healthy for 37 years, and now seems not to be and doesn't know what the future holds, is going to have new thoughts about life and new thoughts about the world and new thoughts about work and the family and what it means to be alive and all that stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 18:57

So it's pretty standard and obvious that you might initially after the stroke, have depressive type of thoughts and feel a sense of doom and gloom and and then get depressed, right? It's pretty logical because something bad has happened. The thing about it is to help you to help you get through that is to observe it and to try and understand why you're thinking those thoughts.

Bill Gasiamis 19:24

And to come to terms with the fact that you're thinking of them and that it's okay that you're thinking of them and under the circumstances is understandable that you might be thinking of them. And then it's about how you tried and transform those thoughts and get a little bit of what is it. I would say a little bit of control back because I felt out of control when it happened to me.

Bill Gasiamis 19:48

Everybody else was in control of my life. The doctors. You know the bleed was in control of my life. I mean, maybe God was in control of it. I had no idea what was happening, I was just along for the ride. But then I start making some small decisions and take back a little bit of their control where I can. And it's usually in areas like, like what I'm going to address like, what is it that I'm going to address?

Bill Gasiamis 20:14

Like, Ah, okay, I'm going to address my mental health, I'm gonna go see a counselor, I am going to address my emotional problem, where I'm crying all the time, and I don't know why. And then it's like, I have I had also put on weight. So okay, I'm going to address my weight issue. And we're going to stop consuming sodas or stop consuming sugar, for example.

Bill Gasiamis 20:38

And then as you do that, even though other things are out of your control, what happens is you take a little bit of control, and then you start to feel better about the fact that you're playing an active role in keeping yourself healthier and avoiding another incident. But of course, I know that with ABMS often, the situation doesn't just resolve when you get sent home, the AVM is still there often if they haven't operated immediately.

Bill Gasiamis 21:08

So for me, it was there for three years almost after the first bleed, and played three times in total. And then we had surgery. So the first year I was in the kind of feeling better mode, things are getting better, but there's still this unresolved matter. What situation are you in with your AVM?

Monica Azevedo 21:32

Yeah, so I still have my AVM which kind of scares me a little bit because there's always that risk factor. Right, that is a potential re-rupture. And so yeah, it's inoperable because it's located at the back of the brain, but like, the way they describe it's almost in the center of the brain because it's very deep inside would be difficult for them to operate.

Monica Azevedo 22:09

So we did the gamma knife radiation treatment that the students experienced. And that was done about nine months ago. I have my MRI, then of this month, finally, to see how she's doing. I call it Felicia, because it's like, you know, Bye, Felicia. Like, you're not welcome here anymore. Like, please, go.

Bill Gasiamis 22:51

Humor is so important.

Monica Azevedo 22:54

Yeah. So try to keep things light, right? I'm hoping for good news.

Bill Gasiamis 23:03

Okay, so a friend of mine, who I went to school with, who I harassed for his entire life. I've known him for 44 years. He went to school with me, I did the best I could to keep him out of studying to keep him out of doing well, to get him to be an idiot like me as much as possible, you know. And he went to university and I didn't because University wasn't for me, I had learned everything by the time I was in year nine or something like that.

Bill Gasiamis 23:40

So he went to university and became a radiographer. And the type of guy who when you go to a hospital and get a scan of your head, he's the type of guy that does those scans. So when I was unwell, he was at the hospital that I was going to, and he was the guy that was scanning my head, and he would see me at every appointment. And I've known this guy my entire life, we've kept in touch, like since school finished.

Bill Gasiamis 24:08

And we went through this together and he would speak to my wife and he would reassure us but for three years, you know, he was on the case for me. And then he was the person who introduced me to my neurosurgeon who eventually did the operation. And then he was there. When I was recovering. He was all over the place like he was just amazing to have around is awesome.

Bill Gasiamis 24:10

And then I think 12 months ago, roughly about 12 months ago, a similar time to you. His daughter had an AVM she's 17 years old and bleeding in the brain. Really difficult spot to get to the draining of the fluid. I go and visit him. I'm in the ICU with him. She's on ventilators the whole lot. And now she's up and about and she has some left side deficits that are kind of still impacting her, but it was touch and go just like you.

Bill Gasiamis 25:06

And she had the gamma knife surgery as well, the procedure. And what I understood that the gamma knife does is that it kind of zaps that area where the AVM exists. And it alters the DNA of the AVM. And the whole purpose of it is once it alters that DNA, it kind of stops it from working properly, and it shrivels it up. And then Felicia is no more.

Bill Gasiamis 25:35

And that's the time that they're in now. They're also in that waiting zone, they're waiting for the next MRI to have a look and see what happens. Hopefully, the results are in their favor and then they move on and go to the next stage. But it's a difficult time for everybody who's had an AVM to go through that. And I appreciate what you're going through.

Bill Gasiamis 26:00

It's just so ridiculously crazy that I had to go through what I went through, my friend had to help me, and his daughter had to go through that. And now together we're going through this. And we can empathize with people who have had a stroke bit from a brain injury, bit from an AVM break from a blood clot. It's a lot of waiting around and being patient, I imagine that it's not something that you had practiced too much before being this patient about something that you're that sort of motivated to get the right outcome for how is that new experience to deal with?

Transforming life after a brain AVM

Bill Gasiamis 26:44

How do you stay calm and relaxed and chilled the way you are? Because you appear very level-headed. You know, you've contacted me to be on the show. You're presenting yourself as calm and calculated. Are you? Is that a facade? Because people listening who are going through what we've been through will be curious, like, are you not human? How do you do that? How do you live with that?

Monica Azevedo 27:16

I am cool, calm, and collected. And I'm kind of an introvert. But I know how to turn it on if I have to. Yeah, I've just always kind of been like the quiet more reserved, and observe-the-situation type of gal and yeah, it's training yourself to have more positive self-talk as well, right? It's so easy for me and for I'm sure anybody to kind of look at themselves and easily say, Oh, I don't like my hair today.

Monica Azevedo 27:29

Or oh, I don't like this outfit on me or, whatever it is, right? But yet, it's not easy for us to tell ourselves. I am. You know, I'm smart. I'm courageous. I'm creative. And the list goes on. Right. So I just tried to practice gratitude. I tried to give, say daily affirmations. So sometimes it'll be different every week. And yeah, and I just kind of say to myself, I've also journaled too.

Monica Azevedo 28:49

I think that's helped quite a bit with processing this, but um, patients patients. It's something that I've had to learn. I think you know, I know like you're the I think the title of your book is like it stroke was the best thing that's ever happened to me something along those lines and it's interesting to say that only now I can say that yeah, I think I can agree because it you know, I quit some really poor habits that weren't serving me anymore.

Monica Azevedo 29:33

I have more confidence in myself now and I truly see how short life can ultimately be I want to enjoy it and I don't want to be miserable. I want to be happy and not allow things to bother me as much as they once had before.

Bill Gasiamis 30:00

Yeah, I love that. See, that's the thing about my book title. It's unexpected, it caught me off guard by surprise, as if the worst thing that ever happened to me, could become the best thing that ever happened to me, let's face it. Now, I know people will say that some things are way worse than stroke that they've had happened to them.

Bill Gasiamis 30:23

Therefore, stroke doesn't even mention it. So it just depends on your life, and what your experiences have been so far, and all that type of thing. And it just depends on how well I considered myself pretty dumb before the stroke. And I say that in the most caring and loving possible way.

Bill Gasiamis 30:43

Because I was not wise to the world, I had a way of doing things that was, in my mind, the only way of doing things and it was so not aligned with my way of being it was just like somebody else's rules, I was implementing somebody else's strategies and, and things and I was getting a lot of pushback, and I didn't like it.

Bill Gasiamis 31:08

And it was really difficult to be myself. And then I've had this stroke, and then it stops and pauses everything. And I've got to change everything because I'm a completely different version of myself. And I need new tools. So I go and seek them out. I find tools that serve me are not difficult to implement and are enjoyable to do.

Bill Gasiamis 31:31

And I get a lot back from them, like gratitude, and like public speaking and all that kind of stuff. And then I'm like, I never would have discovered this stuff, if it wasn't for all this health scare that I experienced and all the challenges that I'm facing, and I have to overcome. So its growth has happened, it had to get to this dark place, it had to get to rock bottom.

Bill Gasiamis 32:00

But then, it was just growth because I knew that I didn't want to get to rock bottom ever again. Which meant that I couldn't go about life the way I was going about life before you just if I did, if I did, that would get me the wrong outcome. And I'm not particularly happy with that outcome.

Bill Gasiamis 32:19

And now that I've had a taste of this new version, even though I'm living with deficits, even though my left side has been in pain for about three or four days now, even though you know, it's bugging me, and I'm noticing it more and my balance is off. I have a podcast, I've met all these people, and I'm doing a book launch in a few weeks. It's like, how can it not be the best thing that happened to me?

Bill Gasiamis 32:47

And I expect people will not be at that stage yet. And I'm perfectly comfortable with that. What I'm doing is trying to say to you, like if strokes, the worst thing that happened to you? How can you despite that, transform it regardless of how bad your deficits are, regardless of how bad your vision is, your memories, or that kind of stuff, how can you transform it into something that enables you to experience a part of life you had never experienced before? That's amazing. Like you nearly died. So pretend you're already dead, like fuck it, like and just go for it and do something that the old you who was supposedly alive, never would have done.

Being at the right place at the right time to have a stroke

Monica Azevedo 33:36

Amen. Yeah. 100%. Because it's kind of strange to say, to say that, you know, you almost didn't make it because, to me, I'm thinking like, I'm here. What do you mean, and I didn't make it, but it's true if I hadn't gotten the help right away, like, who knows what the outcome would have been if you know, I say I had a guardian angel watching me because everything almost fell in place.

Monica Azevedo 34:14

Almost too perfect to help my situation. It was like it was it was gonna happen regardless. But you know, like, again, my my, my symptoms happen quickly and continuously and I didn't have a moment to react right? Where some people I know you know, started stirring in the morning and then they go throughout the whole day and they may be been having this mini-stroke throughout the day and they weren't even aware of it and it caused so much damage.

Monica Azevedo 34:53

And again, depending on where the AVM is located on the brain, it affects different parts of your body. It's just, that there's so much depth to all of this and everyone's experience is not like any other. You know, I tried to seek out, you know, anyone else who had their eye affected from stroke, or AVM or what have you and, and it's I find it so difficult to find anyone else who had an issue with their eye specifically, you know, I've had people I could relate with the shunt and, and some parts of my experience.

Bill Gasiamis 35:40

Well, on my Instagram page, there are a ton of people who have had me make posts specifically about vision, and people have responded. So if you go there and you scroll through, and you see the posts that are about vision, you'll see there are people there. And anyway, if you wanted me to I could ask, and I can let the people following on Instagram know that Monica wants to connect with some people who have had vision problems after a stroke. Would you guys be willing to connect? And let me tell you there's gonna be a few.

Monica Azevedo 36:17

Yeah, yeah. I would love that. I would, I would love to, you know, connect with anyone else who? Yeah, cuz I feel like that's kind of like the missing piece a little bit up. I just haven't come across anyone who talked about their eye being affected.

Bill Gasiamis 36:41

I was just gonna say how much does it bug you that your eye is affected in that way? What does it stop you from doing? Or what does it do to you?

Monica Azevedo 36:56

Now it doesn't stop me from doing anything. So that's great. It's been an adjustment. It caused a lot of headaches, balance issues, and almost not knowing where you are in space, almost. It's just a weird experience. And confidence-wise, you know, just looking at my reflection in a mirror and not seeing my eyes, you know, being the way they used to be.

Monica Azevedo 37:34

And yeah, so I was supposed to have the eye surgery. strabismus surgery. So it's been going to help kind of align my eyes again. So the physical part of it will be fixed. But the visit again because my pupil was affected. I don't know if it's gonna

fix the vision aspect. But we'll see I have it rescheduled for next month. So I have a lot of things coming up, right, like the MRI, and eye surgery. And we'll see what the next steps are for me.

Bill Gasiamis 38:19

Do you need to go and grab some tissues? Do you need to get some water? You seem like you're a little bit runny? Yeah,

Monica Azevedo 38:32

I get emotional silly. So I I'll tear up here and there.

Bill Gasiamis 38:39

Yeah. Understand I've been there. Most people listening have been there. So have you been to a neuroophthalmologist, or you're going to just the regular eye doctor, a neuroophthalmologist usually deals with eye challenges related to neurological issues. Who have you been seeing for your eye? What kind of a?

Monica Azevedo 39:05

Yeah, so I was I saw a couple of ophthalmologists. This specific ophthalmologist focuses on strabismus. So a lot of these patients are typically children. But he said he's had, you know, a couple of a few adults in his career and, and, and it was due to like a neural neurological issue. So, yeah, he's confident that he can help me and because I made it very clear that you know, I don't want to go into this surgery if you don't think there's going to be a significant difference or improvement.

Monica Azevedo 39:58

Because that like I think I've adapted to what it is now. And I'm not, you know, half-b, but I can deal with it. You know, like the headaches, the daily headaches are gone. I balance is great. I'm back to the gym. I'm, you know, I'm doing all the things that I love doing again. So if it's not going to improve what I'm at right now, like I, this is the baseline. I'm backward backwards. I'm going forward.

Bill Gasiamis 40:44

That makes sense. 12 months just passed. Is that 12 months? Was it? Anniversary? Was it a celebration? Was it a time of reflection? Did you either put sort of did it into your mind? How did you guys do that?

Monica Azevedo 41:04

Yeah, you know, the first anniversary was definitely on my mind, I did reflect. And it was very emotional. And my girlfriend, you know, had had us over for dinner. We had low dinner together and kind of celebrated, you know, recovery for the last year. And then yeah, it was, it was a special day. And I just want to kind of create new and better memories for that day, because, mind you before the stroke, February 2 never meant anything to me. Okay, now, like, well, kind of needs something, right? So you make your what it is right?

Bill Gasiamis 41:56

So weird that we do that. I mean, if a calendar didn't exist, we wouldn't have a clue that a year had passed Exactly. That it was that they were just so strange. You know, we've been, I think we've been trained to mark anniversaries for some reason. Like, whether it's, you know, wedding or getting together anniversaries, or whether it's birthday anniversaries, or whether it's the anniversary of somebody passing or whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 42:25

And, you know, we've been trained to remember that, this day, 12 months ago, this thing happened. And like, we now have to remember it for some reason and do something about it. And I feel a bit weird about marking anniversaries, but in a positive way, like you're trying to bring, like a positive spin on it and say.

Bill Gasiamis 42:50

Well, if I am going to mark the 12-month anniversary, I'm going to mark it and say, look how far I've come, or this is what I've learned, or this is how I've grown, or this is how I'm better or different or whatever rather than re-traumatizing myself with what happened on that day. And then, you know, it being something that I have to get over again and over common, I don't know. I do wonder why it is that humans have to mark anniversaries.

Monica Azevedo 43:34

Yeah, it's interesting. You know, because you can't expect everyone to remember, you know, this day, this happened to me. And why do we do it?

Bill Gasiamis 43:51

And why 12 months and not 13 or 11?

Monica Azevedo 43:54

Yeah. Because, again, it's the calendar year, right? The calendar years for 12

months? Yeah. I guess it's something it's something to, you know, you can have a great debate on because you know, why celebrate your birthday every year, right? It's because you get older, right? But it's something I think of positively. No, it's a way to celebrate and create new memories. And if you want to celebrate the damn thing, go ahead, you know, and if you don't, you know, it's your choice at the end of the day.

Bill Gasiamis 44:30

Yeah, I love what your friend did. For you. That's a really lovely thing to do to sort of bring you guys together and make you feel cared for and looked after and thought of.

Career growth, overcoming obstacles, and finding gratitude

Monica Azevedo 44:44

Yeah, I have very special friends. They're very, very close and dear to my heart. I've known them forever, basically, and my partner and my pair of friends and my family, just everyone close to me, has been so supportive and so amazing. And I truly, you know, recognize that friends and family are so important. And I, I anytime that I have, you know, again, because I'm an introvert, I like some alone time, because that's how I recharge my batteries. But otherwise, my free is being spent with my friends, and family, my career that I'm trying to build.

Bill Gasiamis 45:39

Yeah. Tell me about your career. What are you trying to build?

Monica Azevedo 45:47

I don't know if I want to go into it in depth, but I've been working for this company. And they've been so supportive during this entire journey. Because, you know, when the show happened, I wasn't working for a little bit there. But they, you know, they were like, Nope, we understand we see what's going on, come back when you're ready. And I came part-time a part-time basis, to kind of ease my way back into it.

Monica Azevedo 46:24

I did that in August, so six later. Anen I liworkedlowly work my full-time full time.

And, it's nice to, you know, to have a sense of routine back again, you know, and wake up before I would wake up for work and be like, Oh, I hate this, I was so miserable. But now like, Oh, I get to wake up and I get to go to work. And then I get to go to the gym after and do all these other things. And, you know, make the best of it. Some days are harder than others it changed my perspective on a lot of things.

Bill Gasiamis 47:15

You were like every other normal person who hates waking up in the morning and going to damn work.

Monica Azevedo 47:22

Yeah, you know? I mean, if you're waking up miserable going to work, then maybe you need to change your career.

Bill Gasiamis 47:31

Yeah, for sure. That was me. I mean, going to work. miserable. As my boss, I was creating two my pain and suffering because I was like I said, I was quite thick and dumb about the way I went about things. And I remember whinging and moaning about how hard it was to be me and to run my business and to get the guys to do what I needed them to do.

Bill Gasiamis 47:56

And my customers needed me to be there all the time. And if they didn't see me, they wouldn't want to work with me. And it was all these bullshit stories that are created in my head about why I couldn't grow my business and why I couldn't do this. And I couldn't do that. My office, I didn't have one home, I was working from home.

Bill Gasiamis 48:17

And who would have known that you know, 12 years later, working from home is the thing?to do. Right? And I was just so, so oblivious to the fact that I was working from home, but it was working. I thought that I needed to work from some other location to make our work better or some ridiculous thing. And then and then I found myself working from my hospital bed.

Bill Gasiamis the 48:46

So first time the I was in the hospital for seals, I got a laptop, I got a photo of the laptop on the food tray broughtthey bring out. And I'm sending quotes, sending

invoices, receiving emailing, email, emailing my clients, My guys are going to work. They're doing the work the way that they need to do it. The clients are happy the clients are paying. Everyone steps up. It's like, what just happened?

Bill Gasiamis 49:16

I went literally from one week before where everything was a problem. I was whinging to my wife about it. Everything was so hard. Because the business was prosperous and working well, and we were making money and I was busy. What I wasn't doing was delegating putting new people on and taking some of the pressure off me. I was just taking it all on board.

Bill Gasiamis 49:39

And then here I am, literally a week later with a brain injury and I'm working from my hospital bed. It just blew all of my preconceived ideas and all of my thoughts about what success looks like. It just blew that blew it out of the water and it was the most obvious that would hit Me, harder than the stroke hit me the blood in the brain hit me when I was in the hospital, probably on day three or four with my laptop and working away, I just couldn't believe it.

Bill Gasiamis 50:11

And that was what sort of started this whole turn for the better this growth, this opportunity to sort of see things differently, to reach out to new people to learn new skills, new ways of thinking, new ways of applying myself. It was just, it's just crazy that, that that's how I got there, right. So my career became something that I got to do. And I've got to be at work, and I got to meet new clients, and I got to find new ways to solve problems. And then gratitude kicks in and it's like, wow, look at me, like, this is so cool. And I can relate to what you're saying a lot.

Monica Azevedo 50:51

Yeah, 100%. And, you know, it seems like you're doing great, you know, after having, AVM ruptured three times and then have to go through surgery. And I couldn't imagine what that is like, you know, once is enough.

Bill's lessons and hindsight from the stroke

Bill Gasiamis 51:14

It is but it was easier. Monica, the reason why it was easier was because I had learned the lesson quickly, early on. And as I was healing and getting better, the next time it bled. What I had to do was overcome my illness, my brain issues, you know, with the blood in there, and all the stuff that was happening in there. Once I overcame that again and sort of started to get healthier and get better. Those lessons were still there, and I was able to capitalize on them again.

Bill Gasiamis 51:47

So the second time I capitalized on it again. And then the third time, it was like, Okay, I've had 18 months, I had nearly I think it was two and a half years by then of two bleeds recovery, and then played and then brain surgery. But I had two and a half years of putting new things into place new strategies, new brand procedures, and new ways of living my life. So it was kind of easier because I had new tools already developed. And that was what was good about it.

Monica Azevedo 52:26

Yeah, I'm sure that helped a lot because it still doesn't make it easy.

Bill Gasiamis 52:34

It's a bloody setback, blood-brain ain bled again. And now you have to have brain surgery. Now you have to learn how to walk. It's a setback. And it takes a long time. And that's one of the things I'm trying to demonstrate I don't want to gloss over the fact that it took me more than seven years to get full-time time work, a long time.

Bill Gasiamis 52:55

And in that time, there were a lot of setbacks, a lot of setbacks, and I had thyroid surgery in that time as well. So 18 months after my brain surgery, had thyroid surgery because I had massive growth on one of my thyroid glands. So half of it's gone. And then the adjustment that that does to your body and the hormones and your recovery from that.

Monica Azevedo 53:20

Yeah, because the AVM is not the only thing For most people I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, I think in 2019. And that was, you know, the symptoms I had it affected my foot and my knees and I couldn't walk at one time, it was so inflamed, we had to drain out fluid and fit, find out which biologics work the best for my body.

Monica Azevedo 53:47

And so there's, of course, you're dealing with, you know, you're dealing with recovery after stroke, and this AVM that, you know, may or may be existing in your body, and then you have other health issues to just put on top of that, right. So it's just, that it can change again, like your perspective, and it provides the tools to better deal with those situations when they come.

Bill Gasiamis 54:23

Do you feel like you're more resilient than you were? Have you always been resilient? How has your resilience level changed? Or the depth of it how is it sort of developed?

Monica Azevedo 54:40

Yeah, I think it changed since the stroke. To be honest. I was kind of carefree but didn't think about it. Some of my actions I guess, I don't know, I I'm just far more grateful and just truly see the value of life and I just want to enjoy a while in here.

Bill Gasiamis 55:23

That's profound. And that's pretty cool.

Monica Azevedo 55:27

That doesn't man. Like that's, that's all I can ask for. And, I mean, there's like this quote that says, you know, when you die, people are gonna forget at after six months, and then after a year, like, no one mentions your name and you know, what's left of you that people are gonna remember, you know, it's going to be the memories that they have with you. So create those fun, amazing memories of the people you care about. And forget everything else forgetting forget other opinions. Like everyone has one, right?

Monica Azevedo 56:05

Just like assholes.

Monica Azevedo 56:12

Exactly. I'm like, I don't know if I can swear.

Bill Gasiamis 56:16

A little.

Monica Azevedo 56:18

But, yeah, it's been a roller coaster. But definitely, I feel like I've become stronger and more resilient. And just trying to do my best here.

The hardest thing about stroke for Monica Azevedo

Bill Gasiamis 56:45

That's it? Why not? What has been the hardest thing about stroke?

Monica Azevedo 56:54

I guess, change in general changes uncomfortable. And I'm, I've never been a big fan of. So I think that's been the hardest, just having to deal with the changes constantly.

Bill Gasiamis 57:15

Change thrust upon you. What is it about change that you're not comfortable with? Is it just because of your personality? Or is it just because, you know, you like the status quo? What is it with change? Because I feel like I was similar. And now I'm not like, I don't mind things changing on me now and being different all the time. What do you think was a difficult thing about change for you?

Monica Azevedo 57:44

I think some of the changes that I didn't expect, like, I didn't expect to have to shave my head, you know, I had long beautiful blonde hair. And, then I had to shave my hair. I was like, oh, that's, that's not a change. I was expecting it, though. That wasn't something I wanted to do. But like it made the most sense. So I think it has a lot to do with that cuz I know, change is inevitable and changes. Good. That's how we grow. And I understand that now. Right? But it's still uncomfortable sometimes.

Bill Gasiamis 58:36

Yeah. You kind of want it to be a little bit on your terms. Good time to deal with the decision that you're going to make, for example, and understand how you could sort of be in charge of the change that it's carrying, rather than it thrust the point it's like resigning from a job rather than somebody. Second a similar outcome. Both of you end up without a job, but one of them is a decision you become comfortable with and you implement and the other one, someone just sort

of pulls the rug out under your feet. And just says, say, you're out here. What has stroke taught you?

What Monica Azevedo learned from her stroke

Monica Azevedo 59:28

It's taught me to not take things for granted and just really live life for yourself and not for anyone else. Don't hesitate. Just do it.

Bill Gasiamis 59:47

Do you reckon you were living your life if not for somebody else, but through the filter of somebody else? I felt like I was doing that. As you know, people had told me how supposed to approach my work, but how was I supposed to deal with my family what was going to come next? When you get to that stage, this is what you do. And this is how you do. And, you know, I did everything they told me to do. It never resonated with me much. And then I found myself doing things that they didn't like doing. And then I stopped doing those things. After all of my health challenges, how were you living your life? Do you feel like it was designed through somebody else's filter?

Monica Azevedo 1:00:30

To a degree, yes, I think also, I was just very, like, not scared, but I, it took me a lot to take the next step forward, you know, I would hesitate a lot and, and to, you know, I didn't see myself worth a lot of the times. And I would just keep everything the way it was because, you know, I didn't want to disturb anyone or anything. And now I'm like, Screw it, like screw that, like, I'm gonna do what I want, you know, like to, you know, there's a degree of everything, right? You're not just going to do as you please. Because of course, your actions can affect other people or things around you. But in general, I just feel like, I do things for myself, and I'm proud of that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:41

Good. How long have you been with your partner?

Monica Azevedo 1:01:47

It's going to be almost two years. So I've known him for quite some time. But

when this all happened, you know hadn't even been together for a year. And we live kind of far apart. So when he found out he was out of everyone, lived very close, but didn't buy he dropped everything and came to Toronto stayed stay with me by my side, during the entire process. It's posed some challenges to our relationship. But man, we're in a great place right now. And I am glad to have him. And I'm sure he is just as happy and lucky to have me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:44

He better be. Yeah, I asked him that. And because of that, I had a sense that, you know, change all these things do impact relationships. And I don't know whether they have to impact them for the better or the worse, it doesn't matter. But I know that there's an impact.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:02

Because then this person's dealing with all the things that you're dealing with, plus the way that he's also processing what's happening in his world because his world has had this upheaval as well. And maybe he's thinking about things you never thought about before, you know, mortality and ill health and all the stuff you know, so I know that I you know, I challenged my wife a lot because I was a completely different version of myself after the stroke and still am, you, you would recognize my personality and all that stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:40

That's all kind of the same. But I think the way I talk, and the way I implement things is completely different. And I became a little bit of a preacher after the stroke, and I busted everyone's chops for quite a while with, well, you shouldn't do this. And you shouldn't do that it was probably terrible to be around for a little while.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:00

And now I'm kind of calmer about the way I pass on my knowledge to other people, I su, purpose and what they should or shouldn't be doing. I engage in conversations if somebody asks me, but I tend not to instigate that this is what you should do with your life from now on. Take it from the Almighty Bill. That's kind of ended.

Monica Azevedo 1:04:24

I've had the same approach too I would give my two cents all the time. But no, it's

like they didn't ask you. So just take a step back, and close your mouth a little bit, right? ht. And if they ask you for your opinion, and your thoughts then you know of course share.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:48

That's what I wanted to demonstrate that you can still go about being your new version of yourself and living your new self and your new way of going about life and your nutrients, whatever you want to call it. And you can do without busting the chops of your partner and everybody around you, because, you know, I can't influence my wife to do anything that I feel like she should do unless she wants to do that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:15

And then she asks me, how do I go about that? I can tell her exactly how to go about something. But up until that time, you know, why should she stop consuming the foods that I can't eat anymore? Like, she doesn't have to, if she doesn't want to? Yeah, maybe she is not at that stage in her life and all that type of thing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:35

And I used to just give my whole family a hard time about food, you know, and all that type of stuff and what they should or shouldn't indulge in. And yeah, I've become like a, like a cleaner eater and a more mindful eater, and all that type of thing. And my family is still the way they've always been. And it's worked well for some of them because they're in their 80s.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:58Somee Some of them are seven-year-olds, and some of them are young, where it doesn't matter what you eat, so they continue to be themselves and be them. And they are all generally healthy, I can't say that they are unhealthy, and they are terrible with their eating habits, or any of that none of them are like that. But I felt like I needed to improve everyone's eating habits.

The importance of having a proper diet in recovery

Monica Azevedo 1:06:24

Yeah food could be our poison, or food can be our medicine. And this is something

that I've been educating myself about a little bit more recently, too. Because, you know, I, we all enjoy, you know, highly palatable foods, like chips and cookies, and, and all those things, right?. And when it comes to whole foods, like vegetables and meat, and what have you, it doesn't seem to be the top thing on people's minds.

Monica Azevedo 1:07:07

Buy, you know, I think food can improve your mood, it can improve your physical health as well. It can help in so many different ways. And I think, yeah, if we just educate ourselves more, we can see that and, maybe it might not have the, you know, instant reaction or effect on you, but down the line, you know, it could cause diabetes, it could cause heart failure, or you know, X, Y, and Zed. So maybe right now, it's not an issue, but maybe down the road, it will be so yeah, I'm sure that's a conversation for another day.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:56

It was, and that was the idea I wanted to because I had experienced ill health, I wanted to avoid my family experiencing ill health. And I just became so urgent, and I had to be obnoxious and rude about it, thinking that I was going to stop them from getting where I got, yeah. Yeah. And it was through that, that I was doing it right.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:16

But yeah, food is really important after a stroke, you need to avoid certain foods, and you need to add certain foods into your diet, because you can either get in the way of your recovery, or you can support your recovery. And that's kind of where I was coming from. Well, thankfully, they're all doing well and they're all healthy. So, you know, I've settled down and I've just become an example of that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:41

Not that I lead by example in my food, or I don't eat amazingly. But we will go somewhere and I won't get sucked into the just have one routine like I won't get sucked into just have one glass of alcohol routine. I'm very comfortable saying not on a drink. Like there's no need for me to have one you guys have one and then that makes it don't let that bother you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:07

And that was a conversation for a long time. But it's not anymore. Now people

just know that I don't drink and what Bill What are you having soda water, and they'll give me a soda water. And the job's done. So yeah, so good. people are listening and going through what you and I have been through still in their process just happened to them. What's a little piece of advice I suppose that you would like to leave them with or encouragement or something positive they'd like to leave them with about the journey that they're on.

Monica Azevedo 1:09:47

I don't want to get emotional because I don't know just keep trying, man. Like it's it's, you know, today A might be your really hard day. So I never thought I would be here, right here right now being this confident in myself. So soon i It was such it was so far fetched. So, you know, my advice is, yeah, just don't give up. Keep trying. And practice gratitude, practice positive self-talk, you know, write down daily affirmations, whatever you have to do to help that become a regular habit. You know, it takes repetition to create habits. And I think that's a habit to create positive self-talk. It goes a long way.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:56

Beautiful. On that note, thanks for reaching out and requesting to be on the podcast, I appreciate the fact that you did that. And that you were, I'm gonna use brave because I don't know which other word to use that you were brave enough to get on 12 months out, while still going through the challenges that AVMs pose, and sharing your story in the hope that it helps other people I appreciate that.

Monica Azevedo 1:11:25

Yeah, I hope, if you can, you know, help maybe one person, at the end of the day, that's all that matters. And my friend showed me your podcast shortly after I experienced my stroke. Because I was so lost and listening to your story and all these guests, amazing people that you've had on your podcast.

Monica Azevedo 1:11:56

You know, there's so many people that you can relate to and understand. And, again, everyone's story is so different, right? But there's something to take away from each of them. And yeah, thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:14

You're welcome. Now, for those people who are listening, and who heard us chat

about Monica wanting to connect with people regarding vision issues, I will have some links in the show notes where you can go and connect with Monica, and maybe reach out or if you don't want to do that, you can just send me an email via recoveryafterstroke.com/contact by my contact form.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:41

And then I'll reach out to Monica and connect you guys. If you want to chat. Most of my listeners are in the United States. So there'll be a better time difference between people in the United States and Canada. Whereas I'm in Australia, but still then even though I am we've still been able to connect at a reasonable hour for both of us. So thanks again for being on the podcast. And I wish you all the best.

Monica Azevedo 1:13:11

Thanks, Bill, I wish you all the best as well. Thank you for having me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:52

Thanks again for joining us on today's episode to get a copy of my book Go to Recoveryafterstroke.com/book. To learn more about my guests, including links to this social media, and to download a transcript of the entire interview, go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:52

Thank you to everyone who has already left a review. It means the world to me, that podcasts live and thrive because of reviews. And when you leave a review, you're helping others in need of this type of information to find it easier, and that is making a difference to their recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:08

If you haven't left a review or you'd like to do one, please just go to Spotify, Amazon, or iTunes and leave a few words about what the show means to you. If you're watching on YouTube, comment below the videos. Some videos are starting to get more comments than they used to, which is fantastic. That means we're creating a conversation. And we're creating a space for people to come and find more information rather than just the video.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:35

And also that creates a situation where YouTube makes their video available for more people like you and me to find it easier. If you're a stroke survivor with a

story to share about your experience. Come and join me on the show. You do not have to do anything you don't have to plan for them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:52

All you need to do is be a stroke survivor who wants to share your story in the hope that you will help somebody else who's going through something similar if you have a commercial product that you would like to promote that is related to supporting stroke survivors to recover.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:05

There is also a path for you to join me on the show for a sponsored episode. Go to recovery after stroke Contact, fill out the form explaining which category you belong to and I will respond with more details about how we can connect via Zoom. Thanks again for being here and listening. I deeply appreciate you see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:17:25

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

Intro 1:17:42

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Intro 1:18:05

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Intro 1:18:27

If you have any questions or concerns about your health or medical condition, please seek guidance from a doctor or other medical professional if you are experiencing a health emergency or think you might be called triple zero if in Australia or your local emergency number immediately for emergency assistance or go to the nearest hospital emergency department medical information changes constantly.

Intro 1:18:47

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