

Neck Trauma And Stroke - Suzzane E.

Neck Trauma And Stroke - Suzzane E. was involved in a motor vehicle collision that caused a carotid artery dissection that was initially described as a sprained neck.

Instagram

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Suzzane E. 0:00

I think the areas that I'm still working on improving, you know, I think that they've made me a more empathetic person, It's made me more open, It's made me less judgmental, It's made me more caring, it's made me more loving I think towards other people. I feel like I think sometimes after traumatic experiences people can harden and I felt like my heart just turned to mush.

Intro 0:31

This is the Recovery after Stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Introduction - Suzanne



Bill Gasiamis 0:44

Hello, and welcome to episode 251. On the recovery after stroke podcast, my guest today is Suzanne who was in a motor vehicle collision that caused a trauma to her neck, which was missed during the post-accident medical checkup that later resulted in an ischemic stroke. Suzanne, welcome to the podcast.

Suzzane E. 1:07

Thank you for having me, Bill.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10

Thank you for being here. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Neck trauma and stroke

Suzzane E. 1:13

So I had an ischemic stroke, a little less than a year ago. So the reason I had the stroke was because I was in a car accident. And the car accident caused some trauma to my neck. And I had gone to the emergency center after the car accident and they did a CT scan.

Suzzane E. 1:37

And they didn't find anything. They just said to come home and rest. They said I sprained my neck, and that I'd be pretty sore. But that was it. And then three days later, that's when I had a stroke. And it was. I mean, the car accident in itself was

intense having the stroke three days later was a surprise. I didn't see that coming. And it completely changed my life.

Bill Gasiamis 2:04

You're not you're a person who's told me this about the collision. And then later on down the track, sometimes six months, a feather, there's a tear in one of the vertebral arteries.

Suzzane E. 2:22

Mine was my carotid artery.

Bill Gasiamis 2:24

Okay, right. So it was a carotid artery dissection. Was it an internal dissection? They did it ? create a flap to and therefore, they created a clot. And then that moved forward? Or is it a block at the site of the dissection?

Suzzane E. 2:42

My understanding was the dissection caused a clot. So the clot formed affirmed the accident, and then the clot fully for three days after the accident. And that's when I had the ischemic stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 2:58

Okay, so the clot formed and then traveled up ttravelede head somewhere.

Suzzane E. 3:04

So I was, I mean, my memory of when the actual stroke happened is patchy. ad the car accident, and I was pretty sad ore afterward. Thafterwardhad a spring in my neck. But that was it. I was honestly really frustrated about my car.

Suzzane E. 3:23

But I wasn't thinking that much about my health. I was like, Okay, I'm alive, great. I felt like I walked away with like, without a scratch. And I felt really lucky. And then, three days later, I had gone back to work that day, because I took the first two days off.

Suzzane E. 3:40

And then I went back to work that day. And I was home. And I live with my roommate. And so she found me when I was having the stroke, and she called the ambulance. And then I went to the hospital, and then they performed away. So I

felt like, it all happened so fast. I felt like one felt I was fine. And then the next second I wasn't.

Bill Gasiamis 4:05

It's just amazing that I'm so pleased to hear that it all happened so fast. And that meant that you were in the right place at the right time, like you in health in a good place where they would support you care for you make you better, and make it possible for you to be here a year later. Nearly.

Suzzane E. 4:24

It was, you stroke happened when I was like mid-conversation mid-conversationing she was in the room right next to me. And I went to my room to grab something. And it felt like it was just you know, when you power down a computer. That's what it felt like in my brain.

Suzzane E. 4:43

It just felt like everything was just shutting off. And then she found me and she didn't know what was going on. I couldn't move the right side of my body and I wasn't talking. So she called the ambulance right away and she suspected it was a stroke right away too.

The importance of getting immediate treatment

Suzzane E. 5:02

So the ambulance got there. And then they administered. I forget what it's called.

Bill Gasiamis 5:08

TPA?

Suzzane E. 5:09

Yes, they administered that at my house. They admit right where I'm sitting right now because I'm sitting on my bed, but they administered it at my house. And then they took me to the hospital, and the hospital is only a few miles from where I live. So I was hospitalized, and they got me in surgery right away. So I have a stent placed in my neck.

Bill Gasiamis 5:36

To support the tear inside your carotid arteries so that it strengthens it. And then you've got a clear passage so that blood can continue to flow. Oh, my gosh, it's overwhelming to hear how quickly it all happened to you. And I went through it.

Bill Gasiamis 5:55

I've been through my version. Ay, one was very long, drawn out extended three years brain surgery as so many things happened over a long period period very short amount of time. And I imagine that well, like so much needed. I didn't get it at all.

Suzzane E. 6:17

Me neither I feel incredibly unlucky for having it. And then I feel incredibly lucky for the recovery and access to like health care that I had, I feel both where it's like, on one hand, you know, it's really unlikely that I had a stroke in the first place. But then it's also really unlikely that I had all these things line up to where I could get care right away.

Suzzane E. 6:39

So, you know, I feel really lucky that I'm here and then I'm alive. And that, you know, because I got care so quickly, and I got rushed to the hospital so quickly. You know, I think that that had such a big impact on my recovery because I had surgery right away. I hear a lot of stories where people you know, don't get for like 12 hours or a day or multiple days.

Bill Gasiamis 7:02

Go roomie! High five to your roomie.

Suzzane E. 7:08

I know I owe her my life literally.

Bill Gasiamis 7:12

Wow, you can say tan it to her. That's fabulous.

Suzzane E. 7:18

She's my best friend too. We've been best friends since we were like 12 or 13 years old.

Bill Gasiamis 7:24

You chose well.

Suzzane E. 7:26

I did, this wasn't in our plan. But yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 7:29

Yeah. Wow. So then you're through all this stuff, family, and notifying, people. How do you go from perfectly healthy today so I've got to tell people, I've had a stroke and I'm in the hospital? Did you navigate that? Did that happen at the same time? Was your friend involved?

Suzzane E. 7:51

That's a great question. I didn't navigate any of it because I wasn't verbal for the first little bit after my stroke. And I couldn't talk and my brain was processing what was happening. Like I couldn't process it. I had a stroke for the first couple of days.

Suzzane E. 8:10

People kept telling me and I kept asking again, what happened? I didn't like didn't could sit there asking what happened. So when it happened, my best friend who I live with still currently. And I live with them at the time of the stroke. So she's close with my family, we grew up together.

Suzzane E. 8:31

So she was in charge of notifying and contacting everyone. I Austin, Texas, and my family is in Washington State. So they all got on a plane immediately. And they flew to Austin that same night. So they were there within 24 hours of when I had the surgery. So my memories, me waking up and my parents and my sister being there.

Bill Gasiamis 8:59

When your brain was shutting down in that zone, did you have any concerns about yourself or or any fear? Any or thoughts about what was happening? I know a lot of stroke survivors commented that they commented no idea what was happening. They didn't feel concerned or worried or anything like that after they woke up when all that stuff started to come back. How do you navigate that moment?

Suzzane E. 9:31

It's a good question. You know, I wish and I don't wish that I remembered it more but it's very patchy. It's kind of put the story together in my mind, but I

remember you know, I just remember I was standing and I was gonna grab something from my room. I don't remember what I was grabbing. And then I remember getting dizzy.

Suzzane E. 9:56

And I just remember falling over and then there was this big patch where I don't have any memories. And then I remember patches have been in the ambulance. And I remember thinking I was dying. And that was terrifying. I felt like all my memories were also only werethe cars, the right side of my body went offline. So the stroke was on the left side of my brain. So all of my first memories are on the left of the room, which is interesoo. But I just remember, like looking at the EMT that was in the ambulance, and I was like, I'm dead. I'm dying.

Bill Gasiamis 10:46

Yeah, that's fine. Yeah.

Suzzane E. 10:49

But then I got to the hospital. And I felt like, I have so few memories in the hospital. I feel like, I remember that I couldn't talk. I remember people were alking around me and rushing around me. And I remember lights. And I remember this flashing light from my CT scan that they did at the hospital.

Suzzane E. 11:11

And I remember not knowing what was going on. I was terrified. I was really confused. But at the same time, like, I think, because I don't remember so much. It was kind of like a blessing and a curse. Because I think that you know, it was it was traumad I don't have a lot of memory of it.

Bill Gasiamis 11:36

Yeah, I was completely cognitively away the first time I presented the hospital with a blade in my head, and I knew exactly what was going on. And I was even acting like nothing was happening. And the doctors and nurses were concerned that I wasn't staying in my bed and that I ws walking around and meeting people for coffee downstairs and all this stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 11:58

The secondThe was spacedelt likitwas in a different dimension. Everything was just kind of I felt like I was moving through this dimension without knowing exactly where I was and how to interact with it. And it was just kind of like a

floaty. Whoo, we kind of thing. It was strange. And I didn't know how to interact with the people around me. Do you recall interacting with the people who came to visit you who flew in? And having them there? And did that? Was it comforting to have people around you? Do you know how you interacted with him?

Suzzane E. 12:39

Yeah, I remember. When I first got to the hospital, it felt like everyone was talking around me. But I couldn't understand what anyone was saying. I could that they were talking to me, I could tell it. They wanted me to say something. But I couldn't talk and I didn't understand what they were asking. I just felt that there was commotionchaos aroe.

Suzzane E. 13:00

But I didn't know it was going on. And then. But I remember my best friend being there. I remember knowing that she was there. And I remember knowing who she was. And then I remember waking up at some point, and my parents were there. And I think I just start crying when I saw them because it was just like, I was so scared. I didn't know it was happening to me and I couldn't move the right side of my body.

Suzzane E. 13:31

And I just I was so scared. And I couldn't talk then either. I think all I said was hi because that was like the speech that I could form. And, but I was comforted that they were there. You know, I remember I felt safe when they were there. But I also was like, Oh, something really bad happened for them to be here for them to be in another state, and for me t,o, wake up at a hospital. I knew something was reallyn't know what happened.

Life before the stroke for Suzzane E.



Bill Gasiamis 14:02

What stage of life were you in a lot of young people will tell me about having a stroke and they're in the middle of something major usually it's university or something vehicle. Even something minor even moving out and living on your own with a roommate they're roommateing time. times in our lives. No one's going tan I wasn't doing much. There wasn't anything. What stage of life were you in?

Suzzane E. 14:28

Yeah, well, I graduated college a few years ago, kind of early on in the pandemic. And I started working full-time in Wfull-time State for a whStateAnd I felt like I was just burnt out. I was kind of at a dead-end job tdead-endally liked mkers but I wasn't using me in the way that I wanted to. But I did I enjoyed and I wanted to change so, I had recently moved to Austin, Texas right before the stroke.

Suzzane E. 15:02

I moved in June of 2022. And I had my stroke in August. So I had just moved to a new city. I didn't know that many people. You know, I had my best friend that was here. And I knew a couple of people, my coworkers, but I didn't have a support system here yet. And yeah, it was really scary, like doing it away from, you know, home and having it happen away from home because I didn't have anything set up here yet.

Suzzane E. 15:34

I felt like I was, I felt like when I first moved here, I wanted just to be young and new city. And I, I started working when I moved here. And so I just felt like I was getting into the groove of things. I was working. I was starting to meet people. I

was starting to make friends. I was starting to like, explore a new city, and then just like, bam, that happened.

Bill Gasiamis 15:54

Yeah. How, long did you end up in the hospital? Well,

Suzzane E. 15:58

I was in the ICU for five days. And then I was in. Like, I was at the hospital for another two days. And then I was transferred to an inpatient rehab center.

Bill Gasiamis 16:13

What? What was that? Like I interrupted, did you finish what you were saying?

Suzzane E. 16:19

Oh, and then I went to an inpatient rehab center. And then I did outpatient rehab for a long time.

Bill Gasiamis 16:25

Yeah. What deficits were you dealing with that you had to recover from?

Early deficits Suzzane E. had to recover from

Suzzane E. 16:30

Early on? Well, things were changing so quickly. So early on, I couldn't move the right side of my body. Everything was I couldn't feel anything. And I was talking at first, but it was just, it was really small sentences, I was getting really confused. I felt like my processing, still, I felt like I was struggling but I felt like I couldn't process things, my memory was affected.

Suzzane E. 17:02

The stroke was located on the left side of my brain. So they said that the parts of my brain that dealt with language, and fine motor control, were affected. So I had to do a lot of physical therapy, and a lot of occupational therapy and speech therapy. So when I was in the hospital, I kind of started to save some words.

Suzzane E. 17:31

And I was able to kind of regain some of the feeling in my body. But once I got to

the inpatient rehab center, that's when I like worked on like, walking again, and moving around again, and trying to hold a pencil again, and like, sign my name again. And just like all those things that you never think you're going to have to relearn.

Intro 17:55

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 obviously, you've never had a stroke before, and you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 18:19

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 18:39

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.

Bill Gasiamis 18:58

Yeah, you're right-handed. Obviously.

Suzzane E. 19:01

I'm right-handed.

Bill Gasiamis 19:04

That would be interesting. You're young, 25 years young. So you've got a lot of things going for you when people are young, and they have a stroke, they've got a lot more things going for them than if you were older, for example, in your seven years or whatever, there's less potential for recovery which is something that I hear that I don't believe in any way that I tend not to like to say to people.

Bill Gasiamis 19:29

But you're also in this phase where your identity is what it is, and you're just shifting and changing your identity because you have moved from home. You move to another state of move into a place with a friend. You know, there's all these things that you're doing.

Bill Gasiamis 19:48

You're already going through a lot of upheaval changes and that type of thing. And now you're dealing with being in another state as well as the changes that are caused by this stroke or thing that you haven't you went up for that part of it you weren't interested in, going down that part of it.

Suzzane E. 20:08

No, I wasn't.

Bill Gasiamis 20:10

How are you reflecting on yourself? And how is your identity being impacted when you've moved into that phase with that with that, oh, my gosh, I've got to learn how to write again. And I've got to learn how to walk again, and all those things. How do you comprehend that?

Suzzane E. 20:29

I mean, it was terrifying. I think I didn't know what my future was gonna look like at that point. Because like, previously, I'd been fully independent. And I, you know, could move around, and I could drive and I could go to work. And I had a really like, relatively, "normal life".

Suzzane E. 20:52

But after the stroke, when it first happened, I didn't know what my future was going to look like, I didn't know if I was going to be able to work full time again, I didn't know if I was going to be able to drive again, I didn't know if I was going to need, like, at home care for a long time, or indefinitely, I just didn't know what that was going to be like. I was really like fortunate though, my family, flew down immediately after it happened.

Suzzane E. 21:24

But then, even after the immediate stay in the hospital, they were by my side, like, my mom would fly down. And then she would go back, and then my dad would fly down. And then he would go back, and then my sister would fly down. And then I would have friends that would take care of me.

Suzzane E. 21:39

My best friend, who I live with and who found me when this happened, stepped in so much as my caretaker. I had an outpatient care team that helped me too. So I was fortunate, I had a lot of help, but it was still scary, just not knowing. You know, like, I had this idea of what my life was going to look like before the stroke. And all of a sudden, none of that was certain.

Bill Gasiamis 22:08

Yeah, stroke tends to do that, you're going along perfectly fine, one day, and then you're dealing with the most dramatic upheaval, the next day, and then from then on. And even though, you know, you're brave, I'm gonna say it's brave because I've never done it before, you're brave, and you left your home and you went to another state and you set up shop again, you know, without any resources, of local knowledge or anything like that.

Bill Gasiamis 22:41

You've just gone blind to this new way of doing things. You have a certain amount of skills to do that don't you? You know, how to interact with people, you know, how to get a job, you know how to pay a bill, you know how to do all the things that you need to do to sort of stay on your feet, you know that you've got that.

Bill Gasiamis 23:04

But then you've got to deal with stroke recovery. And you've never done that before, you don't know how to do any of that stuff. It's foreign to you. You might have heard about the term stroke. But you may not know what it means. And even though you've seen somebody who's had a stroke, you don't know what they're going through, you've got no idea.

Bill Gasiamis 23:23

So how did you go about discovering? How do you do that? How do you transition into I've got to recover from something I've got no idea about, and I've never heard about and I am unaware of, other than the fact that I'm living in it? How do you do it internally, I know that other people are helping you, but how did you grapple with it?

How the stroke has changed life for Suzzane E.

Suzzane E. 23:52

I mean, it was terrifying. And I had questions about everything the whole time, I was going through it, like, you know, where I was just like, I'm not strong enough to do this. Like, I felt sorry for myself for a long time. You know, and I would just like, I wanted to just, like, throw in the towel and be like, That's it. I'm done. Like, you know, because of everything that I was facing at the time, it just didn't seem I feel really lucky because right now, I feel like I've made a really good recovery.

Suzzane E. 24:28

I am not 100% back to where I was before, but, you know, I've been able to gain a lot of my independence back, but early on in the stroke like that just wasn't a possibility. And that was terrifying. I think I don't know how to say this. I think that the stroke did change my life for the better in some ways, though, because I think I created a new meaning in my life afterward.

Suzzane E. 24:57

You know, I think my relationship with my family got a lot closer. I felt like before the stroke, There were so many things that were just like, superficial that didn't matter that I was so wrapped up in or just, you know, I think I was just kind of lost before this all happened and I was lost when it happened didn't help. But I think because of the nature of stress, you have to rebuild your life. And I'm proud of how I've rebuilt mine.

Bill Gasiamis 25:31

Yeah, I would be too. And you've said something that a lot of stroke survivors say. But what's interesting is I said that at 37 that before my life. Before stroke, my life was a little bit weird, strange, and different, but it's normal. It's the way most people go about their life, I can reflect on it now because I've had this kind of, we'll call it. My gosh, I don't even know what the word is. But I think what I'll call it is growth, or I call it growth, post-traumatic growth maybe that's better.

Bill Gasiamis 26:09

Before that, I hadn't had any experiences that were my experiences physically happening to me, which made me have to dig deep and find other ways forward.

So I just went about doing things the way that I used to, and it was the way most people did it. And I thought it was okay, and I thought it was serving me well, but it wasn't 25 to have that insight, I think that's an amazing insight to have.

Bill Gasiamis 26:39

Because now that I'm 48 I reflect on when I was 25. And I don't think that even though you know, 25, I didn't know as much as I know now and I wasn't as aware. as knowledgeable as I am now. I didn't know if I was that aware, aware enough to be able to make the distinction that you have made, which is I was focusing on superficial things. Now I know what's important. I was focusing on all these things that didn't matter, now I know what matters.

Suzzane E. 27:14

I don't think I would have gotten there unless this happened. I think that that's the nature of like, when things happen that are so unexpected, and traumatic. You know, I think it just, like fundamentally it kind of tears everything down. And you kind of have this, you know, I felt like even before the stroke, I struggled with my mental health.

Suzzane E. 27:44

And I wasn't always like, I didn't always have the most healthy relationship with substances. And then after the stroke, it was just, I was so clearly not okay, that I felt like I had to be so vulnerable, I had to ask for so much help. And I, you know, I had to, like address a lot of things that I didn't address like pre-stroke that I had just been putting off and like numbing for years.

Suzzane E. 28:12

But it was all of a sudden, like, you know, I just felt like it was like a scorched earth. And I felt like there was just there was myself before the stroke. And then there was myself now and I just like there wasn't any other option. Like I couldn't go back to that version of myself, or that version of me wasn't there anymore.

Bill Gasiamis 28:32

What a blessing.

Suzzane E. 28:33

Yeah, I mean, I think I've created meaning from the experience. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. But you know, I'm grateful to be here.

Bill Gasiamis 28:44

Yeah, I wouldn't wish it on anyone either. But if you're gonna get such a good thing out of a terrible situation, then bloody hell, why not? And of course, I never want to see anyone, and well don't get me wrong. That's not it. It's just that that ability to shift your perspective is never going I mean, it's exactly what I said it's scorched earth. What a start, like a fresh slate everything new rebuild, however you want.

Bill Gasiamis 29:18

Yeah, sure, you're going to take some of your old life into that new version. But you have the opportunity to just let everything that didn't serve you go. And I love what you said about I love what you said about what I got out of what you said about your mental health. You were using substances to numb it right? And then you had to deal with it. Do you feel like the reason that you had had substances in your life and you had mental health issues? Was it because you didn't reach out for the help that all you had to do was reach out for?

Why Suzzane E. didn't reach out for help after the stroke



Suzzane E. 29:51

Most likely. I mean, I think there was a variety of reasons but definitely because of my pride. You know, I think I just felt like it was Ever bad enough or that like, because I was still going to work or because I was still, you know, like functional that, like, I didn't need help. And I was just kind of like living this like muted

version of my life where, you know, I wasn't happy or fulfilled, but I was just like getting by.

Suzzane E. 30:20

So it felt like I never really like needed to. I mean, I sought out therapy before the stroke, which ended up being such a huge resource after the stroke. I feel like I couldn't have gotten through this without, you know, all of those resources. But yeah, there was just a sense where it was like, I couldn't pretend that I was okay.

Bill Gasiamis 30:45

Because you definitely would. Yeah. I love that. That was me, as well, I got to that point where everything that I was doing before stripe was kind of tending to my challenges, but not solving them. And I think what was lacking was my taking responsibility for the solution. So I was going to counseling, but I was kind of making it their responsibility to make me better.

Suzzane E. 31:09

Yeah, I was doing it. So like, half-assed. I don't know if I can swear on this. But yeah, I wasn't fully invested in it. And I, you know, didn't take it that seriously before this. And also, when I was, I was 26. Now, but when I was 25, right before it happened. In some ways, I felt invincible.

Suzzane E. 31:30

I felt like the things that we're doing, were never going to catch up to me in terms of like, how much I was drinking, or just like, I never thoof the impacts of it. This is so naive to say, but I feel like a lot of younger people feel that way. And then something with their health happens. And it's like, oh, I don't want that life that I had before.

Bill Gasiamis 31:55

Yeah, look, I'm 48. But 25 was only a couple of blinks of the eye away. It was, it's that quick. I mean, you just get to 48. And you look back and you go, Oh, my gosh, I was 25 just two blinks ago. You know, like, It's ridiculous how quickly you get to 48. Now, there's a lot that happens between 25 and 48. So it's not like you haven't got a lot of additional stuff that's occurred. But time just seems to just go right. So when you're saying when I was 25. And then I'm 26. Even there feels like just a moment. Like, let's events. It's a bit a quicker moment. But

Suzzane E. 32:35

yeah, this has been the fastest and longest year of my life. Yeah, right.

Bill Gasiamis 32:39

So it's a time that distorts in weird ways, and changes. And the fastest because all of a sudden, you're a year out of what happened. And that's like, oh my gosh, I've made it a year out. But then it's like, oh, my gosh, that was like, just a year ago.

Suzzane E. 32:56

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I don't know, even now like, I still don't know what my future looks like post-stroke. I feel like I am still in very much active recovery in a lot of ways. But I have been grateful. I've gotten back to work recently. So I'm working again. And I have recently started driving again, which was huge for me.

Suzzane E. 33:24

That was a big goal after everything, so yeah, I think it's, I still have so many questions, I still don't know what I'm doing. I still have like, really bad days where I just, I think sometimes I feel broken because of what happened. And then other times, I'm proud of myself, but it's just, it's so many highs and lows.

Bill Gasiamis 33:48

Yeah, I love that term broken. So some people are broken from stroke, they are typically specifically in a spot broken, it just depends on how you want to use that if you want to use that as an analogy that's going to support you or discourage you. And if you're using it as a discouragement, then I would refrain from using that kind of language, right?

Bill Gasiamis 34:10

But it's kind of accurate in a way because something is missing now, that's something missing. That's what makes you unique. In my mind, now I can interact with people from all around the world at every single age stuff that you and I would never have had in common before. No reason for us to other than that you're an amazing person and a great guy.

And we would chat because we're just good people, right? Other than that, we would not have any reason to get together and interact. But here we are. And I think that's kind of our injuries are what have given us this insight into this other way of doing life. And that is something that I am grateful for, and that part that's broken if it wasn't broken wouldn't have allowed me to interact this way with 250 other stroke survivors around the world since the podcast started.

So it just depends on when you're using those words, how you're using them, and how you're making them, impact you. And if they're, and I use it as a way to empower me to say, okay, that little bit that's missing makes it possible for me to have really meaningful and deep conversations with other people that are going through the same thing. And what I'm doing is making a difference to them. And they're making a difference to me by chatting to me.

And together, we're gonna get through this. But we're also going to bring awareness, I suppose, or, or accept the down days as being part of the life of any person, quote, unquote, normal or not. Because even before your stroke, you had really bad days that you couldn't get up, and you were even doing it to yourself, right, where you were drinking too much. And then you'd have to deal with a hangover the next day. We do that to ourselves, regardless of whether or not we've had a stroke. So you're just doing now your, quote, unquote, bad days is just happening through a different source or cause or that makes sense?

Suzzane E. 36:26

Yeah, I think it's interesting. Like I think I'm trying to think how to word this. I think the areas that I'm still working on improving. You know, I think that they've made me a more empathetic person. It's made me more open. It's made me less judgmental, it's made me more caring. It's made me more loving, I think, towards other people. I feel like, I think sometimes after traumatic experiences, people can harden. And I felt like my heart just turned to mush. Like, I felt so emotional. I felt like I couldn't. Yeah, I didn't, I didn't. I didn't expect to feel that way. To everything around me, you know, it just felt like, yeah, everything was so intense.

Bill Gasiamis 37:19

You can't ignore it anymore. You could have put it on the shelf before ignoring it, pretending it wasn't talking to you. It wasn't giving you any feedback, you know, you could consciously block out what the heart was saying and what it was doing. Whereas now, the head is offline. So the hearts going, huh, here's my opportunity. I'm coming up, and I'm going to tell you what you need to hear baby.

Suzzane E. 37:42

Yeah. And I was also like, you know, I had to, like, learn how to sit with the sadness and the grief of having a stroke and what that you know, meant for me at the time, but I think you can't like you can't selectively numb emotion emotions, like you can't shut off grief without also shutting off like joy and love in your life.

So I think for a while I just been like, doing that I just been shutting it off, just kind of going about my day to day. And then after this happened, like I finally had to process a lot of the sadness from the stroke, but also from stuff that happened prior. And I think it allowed me to also like, feel joy in my life in a deeper sense, I feel like I have a different appreciation for things. Now.

Bill Gasiamis 38:31

That's probably one of the most profound statements I've heard in all the podcast interviews that I've done. That's the statement that you made, that you can't just independently shut off different emotions and not impact other ones.

Suzzane E. 38:47

I heard it on I heard it somewhere. I didn't create it myself.

Bill Gasiamis 38:50

That's okay. Everything we've ever said, we've heard somewhere else, it's all good. But it's just a profound statement that you've made. I completely agree with that. Because that's what a lot of people do, is they might have an emotional, hurt or pain or suffering from the rest of parts of their life that is in the past. And what they do is they try to compartmentalize it, put it aside, try and push it away instead of dealing with it.

And then it takes away everything else from their life. And it makes them unhappy. And it makes them unable to experience joy and happiness and all these other things. Because joy and happiness is an emotion of the heart as well. It's if you can't access it you if you put a wall around your heart, well then you can't access all the other stuff that's in there that's going to make life worth living.

And that's kind of that leads to one of my things that I say forever, which is that stroke recovery is a three-pronged approach. It's a head, heart and physical recovery. You have to do the emotional work. You have to do this psychological work and you have to do the physical work. And do you feel now that you have this ability to understand that you've got to attend to your emotions, that that's supporting your stroke recovery, your physical recovery, and your mental recovery?

Suzzane E. 40:19

Absolutely, yeah. I mean, I feel like I feel like without, like, tending to, like the emotional recovery, you know, it just felt like I was just like, still living in that

moment of fear when everything happened. You know, because I, sorry, I lost my train of thought.

Bill Gasiamis 40:46

I was asking about how tending to your emotional recovery and being able to go there has helped you with your physical and mental recovery after the stroke.

Suzzane E. 40:59

Yeah, 100%. You know, I think that once I was able to start like processing what had happened, I was able to, I think, put the energy that I was putting into just like, just trying to get by, I was able to put that energy back into my recovery, whether it was like a physical aspect or like cognitive aspect, I felt like on the physical side of it, I was pretty fortunate to not have that many physical deficits after the stroke, but I had a lot of cognitive things that I was struggling with, like my ability to use language, and writing and reading. And I felt like that was hard. And I, in some ways, like, felt like at times, I was only focusing on one, but I wasn't being that successful at it. And it wasn't until I would like, to look at all three aspects together that I was able to see improvement.

Bill Gasiamis 42:06

Yeah, it's really important to focus on your wins and see what you've done. Either, even if it's minor, because it's uplifting and helps you feel better about yourself. And it just shows there is progress. And that you're getting to the other side, whatever the other side is, or wherever it is, and whatever it looks like. But I think movement in any direction, kind of forward, whether you have to take a back movement, or a side movement, all movement, and that's the key here is this the keep going and every bump as it comes along.

Suzzane E. 42:44

It hasn't been linear. I feel like there are some days where I have some symptoms that are like, they're worse than others. Like if I get really tired, I notice that things kind of come back and resurface. Or if I'm fatigued, or like after I exert myself too much. It's like, it's just not linear. For me, it's been, you know, where it's like, I'll have a really good day, and then I'll have, you know, a day where I'm not able to do that. Or I have to take a break. Yeah, I feel like the fatigue has been really hard.

Bill Gasiamis 43:22

When do you notice the fatigue gets worse? Have you seen a pattern that kind of, you'll become aware of? And then if so, are you starting to get in front of that to know what to do before the fatigue kicks in?

Dealing with post-stroke fatigue

Suzzane E. 43:36

I felt like going at first when I first got home from the inpatient center, everything was so exhausting. I remember that taking a shower would be exhausting. And I would want to take a nap afterward. Or like just basic self-care tasks were exhausting. Or like making myself a meal was exhausting.

Suzzane E. 44:04

Going to the grocery store was exhausting. And then that started to get a little bit more manageable. And then things kind of like I was able to increase my tolerance for things. But going back to work was the biggest challenge for me. I felt like I wasn't able to. I needed a lot more rest than I think I was able to get so when I had to go back to work. I went back to work full-time.

Suzzane E. 44:36

I wish I had gone back part-time and then increased to full-time. But I didn't have that option because of my health insurance. And I wish that I'd had the option to go part-time and then full-time because just jumping into full-time. I was so exhausted. I feel like after work I wouldn't be able to talk to anyone. I would just like to sleep.

Bill Gasiamis 44:59

Yeah, that's a common thing that happens, I'm going to say, I'm going to use the word mistake. But don't take it a bad way. The mistake is, that you've given it one take. And then you have to do another take. And I did the same thing. I went back to work full-time. But I never, I didn't go back to my work. So I had a property maintenance business.

Bill Gasiamis 45:26

And that fell by the wayside, and it was kind of bubbling away, but I couldn't do any work. So I just walked away from everybody, my clients, and everybody, and I just said, Look, I'm done for now. And then I went and worked in an office job. And I hadn't done an office job for many, many years. And I didn't realize what an

impact monitors noise, people around me lighting, traveling to work and back, I didn't realize what an impact that would have on me.

Bill Gasiamis 45:55

And I was wasted. And I wasn't useful even at work. And the only reason I stayed there was because I had a friend of mine, who gave me the job. He was the general manager there who supported me. But nobody else understood why I was so flaky. And even though they knew or had a stroke, they couldn't understand how it was so unproductive.

Suzzane E. 46:21

Yeah, I felt like, so a little background about what I do for work. I am a medical receptionist at an urgent care. And I've been a medical receptionist for like, a few years now. So it was the job, I had pre-stroke. And then that's the job I returned to. And, you know, I felt pretty competent at my job before this.

Suzzane E. 46:45

And I had been doing it for a while I kind of knew what to expect. And then afterward, it was just like, everything was hard like typing was hard looking at screens was hard. I remember my coworkers were understanding a lot of them knew what happened. And were supportive and had luckily, like a lot of them some knowledge about the effects of stroke.

Suzzane E. 47:12

Because I worked in a medical setting. But I felt like when patients would come in because I don't look like I had a stroke. No one would know unless I told them patients would get impatient with me when I would ask them to repeat something. Or if I would make a mistake, it was really hard. I felt like people, my co-workers were patient and supportive. But I felt like any customer-facing job. People are kind of ruthless, sometimes.

Bill Gasiamis 47:47

Customer service is so important. You have to be on your game all the time. Even though I know I've been in customer service roles before and I know what it's about. And sometimes you're not on your game. But we've created such a customer service-focused world where it's all about the customer experience. That the customer has high expectations.

Suzzane E. 48:14

Yeah. And also, to be fair, like, there's been so many people that came into where I work that was so nice. And so patient with me. And I had like a lovely time talking to them, and it's far and between that people would be really impatient and sometimes upset with me. But yeah it did stick out to me.

Bill Gasiamis 48:36

They're probably having one of the worst days of their life as well. They're probably sick, they're coming to a medical facility. You know, they just need stuff done, and they need to be fixed and they need to feel better. And they probably got work to go back to who knows what's going on? It's legitimate, that they're impatient. It's not nice when you're on the receiving end of it.

Suzzane E. 48:58

Yeah, that's the thing is like I understood, you know, I understand that it's like people wanted you know, I think in some ways, I was ready to go back to work. But in other ways, I wasn't at first now I feel like I've gotten a better handle on things. But at first I just didn't feel competent at my job.

Knowing your limits

Bill Gasiamis 49:21

Was even though you kind of overdid it by going back full time and it wasn't necessarily in your control. Do you feel like pushing yourself a little further than where your comfort zone was helped you kind of get better than you were? You know that little push ourselves and can go beyond where we go beyond our limit. And then we can go ah, oh my gosh, I'm crashing but I know now where my limit is and I know how to approach it more gingerly. Did you experience that?

Suzzane E. 50:00

Yeah, I noticed really big improvements with my typing, and my processing speed, like right away because I was just, it was this repetitive tasks that I was doing every day. And I feel like before going back to work, I would work on it with like the occupational therapists that I was with, and we would do it but like, you know, it wasn't the whole day, it would be like an hour that we would work on something together.

Suzzane E. 50:28

And then all of a sudden, when you're kind of thrown in, it's like, you have to, you

don't have another choice. So I felt like I do, you know, I felt like I saw a big improvement in my recovery after going back to work, even if it was exhausting.

Bill Gasiamis 50:48

So it sounds like a little bit of intense therapy at the same time.

Suzzane E. 50:51

Yeah, it felt like a boot camp for recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 50:55

Yeah. Okay. So not necessarily fully competent at work, but doing a good job in recovering motor skills, and increasing your tolerance to fatigue and all that kind of stuff.

Suzzane E. 51:08

And now I feel fully competent. And now I feel like I've gotten like a good handle on things. And I feel like I'm way more capable of doing my job the way I want to do it. But yeah, it was really hard to go back at first.

Bill Gasiamis 51:26

Yeah. You know, the days when you're feeling a little bit down, low fatigue, etc. What, what's kind of the, how does that come about? So for me, having a bad night's sleep, even now, 11 years out, will mean that my morning is a lot harder than than it needs to be.

Bill Gasiamis 51:50

But sometimes I didn't cause the lack of sleep that particular night, something happened and I woke up, I couldn't get back to sleep. So what do you feel contributes to you having a bad day? Do you have any things that you know, definitely contribute to you having a bad day, the next day, or the day after?

Suzzane E. 52:11

Yeah, I felt like, when I would over-exert myself, I would notice like the next day, it was just so much fatigue, I felt like I wanted to push myself to kind of go back to like, my old life before this, and I would still want to hang out with my friends. And I would, I would want to go out and I would want to go do things.

Suzzane E. 52:34

And I remember like the first time I tried to go to a concert, post-stroke, and I was

so tired. The next day, it took me about two days to just like lay in bed and recover because I was so exhausted. Or like I would want to go out with my friends and I just, I couldn't keep up or I would just be so exhausted, I'd have to go home early or so I noticed that was a big trigger for like me feeling low the next day.

Suzzane E. 53:04

Even though I think like emotionally, it's good to connect with other people. I had to adjust the settings I was able to do it in. And then if I have like days at work where I'm working days in a row, I'll notice that like I need a day off to recover. If I don't sleep well, I notice that too.

Bill Gasiamis 53:26

Yeah, the concert thing's interesting because I had a couple of opportunities to attend some concerts. And I didn't go on purpose. Because I felt like as much as I'd love to go to the concert, I'd be paying the price for a couple of days later.

Suzzane E. 53:43

That's exactly how I felt.

Dealing with sensory overload



Bill Gasiamis 53:45

But then I felt at some stage I got to the point well, I'm prepared to pay the price to go and see that particular artist for example, because I'm gonna have a great time there. Even though when I leave there, I'll be tired and overwhelmed. Because there'll be too much noise too much light, you know, and, and I'll have sensory overload it'll still be worth the experience because I can at least say I saw my favorite artists live one time, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 54:15

So there was that and then that also meant that I was finding ways to get out of going to the football when people would invite me or to other sports and you'd be probably in this two hours of sitting and screaming at the umpire or the referee about a decision they made is going to be difficult for me to come away from feeling okay about and you know, it's never watching sport on TV, for example, is you sit on your couch, you watch TV, and then you're at home magically when the game's over.

Suzzane E. 54:50

Yeah, and you can kind of remove any sensory information when you feel comfortable with it. I had so many issues with like sensory overload and overwhelm I still do.

Bill Gasiamis 55:01

You guys at your place share the space with regards to the lighting, television, and all that kind of thing because with my wife, we are now this we're in two different worlds, I've got to have no lights overhead on pretty much all at night, I've got to just put on lamps.

Bill Gasiamis 55:21

And she likes to have a brightly lit room. So she's got to deal with my lack of lighting. And the volume is a weird thing because she doesn't mind having the volume a little bit loud. And I tried to have it a little bit lower because it overwhelmed me. So do you guys navigate that sort of stuff in your place?

Suzzane E. 55:42

Yeah, I mean, it was it was hard at first, I feel like early on, like I couldn't tolerate bright lights at all. So I would always want to turn off all the lights in the house, where I'd want to have dim lighting. And I would want to be quiet. And I would want to, you know, close the blinds all the time. And I remember sometimes where it'd be like, I can't see it so dark in here.

Suzzane E. 56:05

Like, can we just turn on one light, and it's but she was she was a really good sport. I feel like she compromised on my behalf when it came to like the lighting and the sound. But yeah, it was it was it was a big adjustment. I felt like I had my own space in the house that we live in, like I have my room and I have privacy.

Suzzane E. 56:30

So it was really important for me just to have like, a space where I could go, and there wouldn't be anything overwhelming. And so that was my room, where it's like I could go to my room, I wouldn't have any noise in my room, I could turn off the lights, or I could make the lights dim. And like if anything was stressful in the outside world. Like I needed a place where I could go, where it wasn't.

Bill Gasiamis 56:53

Where you can retreat.

Suzzane E. 56:55

And recharge yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 56:58

That's me. At night, in the, in my bedroom, there's the dumbest of dim lights, where you can hardly see in there, but it's enough to it's enough, it's enough to be lit. So that it's not, I mean, they need sleep time, it's that, that moment when you're in your bedroom, getting ready for bed, but you don't want it to be dark, you need a little bit of lighting around there.

Bill Gasiamis 57:30

Whatever you're doing, you know, so there's this the dimmest of dim lights. And it's a really quiet room. I'll just go down there and lay for about sometimes 30 minutes an hour before I switch the light off and roll over and doze off.

Bill Gasiamis 57:46

My wife usually comes to bed a little later than me. Or maybe I go to bed a little earlier than I used to. And therefore I get to have that one half an hour to one hour time to kind of unwind before bed. Does that make sense?

Suzzane E. 58:05

Yeah, yeah, I feel like that's important for me, too. It's funny that we're talking about lighting because I have an overhead light in my room right now. And I like rarely turn it on. But I turned it on for this podcast, so you could see the screen. But I always have a lamp on instead.

Bill Gasiamis 58:23

Yeah, I appreciate that. And me too so in front of me, there's a light right on top of my monitor. Two monitors are a light right in front of me. And as you can see,

as I do that it's shining right into my eyeballs there. And then there's another one to my left. And you can see that when I do that, it's which part of me it's lighting.

Bill Gasiamis 58:46

But if you look on, if you look on YouTube, the best way to light, a recording studio, or a room when you're doing a podcast, this is how they tell you to do it and if you don't do like this, you're not doing it properly. So it's, I recorded another podcast episode just before this an hour before our recording I recorded another one.

Bill Gasiamis 59:08

So this is going to be our two in three hours that I'm recording two episodes, and it's too much and I can feel that like I'm burning and etching something into my brain. I could feel it. And I can feel this one. And I don't know if that's weird. But I experience life differently. I experience it physically, I can feel the light. And that's not a warm light. That's like an LED the most pathetic little excuse for a light you've ever seen but I can feel its impact as if I was outside and the sun was shining on my body.

Suzzane E. 59:52

I feel like I hit a wall sometimes like with the sensory input. Just where like if things are too loud or too bright? Or, like I just feel like I shut down sometimes still.

The hardest thing about stroke - Suzzane E.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:05

Yeah. As we come to the end of this episode, I want to ask you a couple of questions. Maybe you can answer maybe you can't, but I just want to get your thoughts on it. What's the hardest thing about the stroke?

Suzzane E. 1:00:19

I think the hardest thing, which also, I think you can look at it two different ways, the hardest thing, I think I felt so alone and isolated. And I'll circle back to the other part of what I was gonna say here, but I didn't know anyone that was my age that had a stroke.

Suzzane E. 1:00:42

I felt like all of the recovery information I heard about was typically at people in different stages of life than me and I didn't know how to adapt it for my own life. And it was just, it was terrifying. It felt lonely and isolating.

Suzzane E. 1:00:59

And, you know, I think, for me, that was the hardest part to grapple with, like immense sadness, that like I was just alone in this experience. But then on the flip side, I think because I've had a stroke, I've been able to find so many experiences, like talking to other people that have had experiences like mine.

Suzzane E. 1:01:24

You know, I found your podcast through my endless Google searches about young stroke survivors, stroke survivors podcasts, and stroke survivor books, I try to find just any information I can about it, because I think I felt so alone and isolated, and I didn't find any information at first.

Suzzane E. 1:01:49

But the more I've kind of gone through this recovery process, the more I found a connection through this experience, just like with what you were saying, how we get the chance to talk to each other.

Suzzane E. 1:02:02

I've been able to talk to other people who have had traumatic brain injuries that are around my age and share those experiences. And I think that's also a gift. And then I hope that like me sharing my experience, someone will feel less alone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:19

Yeah, that's great. Tell me about it. So you might have kind of alluded to this in the last answer. But what has stroke taught you?

Suzzane E. 1:02:32

Taught me, that I'm resilient.

Suzzane E. 1:02:40

It's taught me that a lot of the things I thought mattered, didn't matter. And a lot of the things I wasn't giving enough time and energy to, how important they are. I think I took a lot of people in my life for granted, and things in my life for granted because I just thought that they were always going to be there.

Suzzane E. 1:03:00

And I feel like a really big level of appreciation for my loved ones, and my life. And I feel like if I go on a walk, and it's sunny outside, and just like being able to walk is fantastic, phenomenal. And I feel so lucky to be able to do that. You know that that feels like a gift now.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:24

Yeah, I have a coaching client who is just being able to go to his favorite beach location, even in his wheelchair, which he hasn't been able to do for four months, because he had a terrible experience with a stroke. And then he's in recovery, and they've just got home, but he felt isolated and stuck inside the house, right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:45

Just being able to work with him and his partner to just get them to work out how they could get to the beach, even if it was for just half an hour or whatever, was a big win. It made a big difference to how he felt emotionally, just being able to experience some simple joys, right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:08

That's kind of what you're saying. The final question is, what would you like to tell other people who are listening that are going through what we've been through? Would you like to leave them with maybe a word of wisdom, thoughts of wisdom, or just anything at all? What would you like to tell them?

Suzzane E. 1:04:31

I think for people that have gone through something similar, just that it does get better. You know, recovery looks different for everyone.

Suzzane E. 1:04:45

I know that there are so many different forms of recovery that you can have post-stroke, but if you keep giving it time, it felt hopeless at first for me, but it gets better.

Suzzane E. 1:05:01

I think that's something I would want to tell people, that's something I would want to hear myself. And then for people that maybe haven't experienced the stroke, you never know what someone else is experiencing.

Suzzane E. 1:05:17

And that goes way beyond just a traumatic brain injury or stroke. Like we don't know other people's lives. We don't know what they've experienced, what they've been through. So I think just having patience with people and empathy.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:31

Yeah, really lovely words, I think I agree with that. One of the things I'm grateful for is the fact that now I know what other people are going through. And I've said it before, in a few episodes, that when I saw somebody in a wheelchair, I just assumed they were sitting down. And that didn't mean much to me. But it's just, I got to spend, say, three or four weeks in a wheelchair.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:58

And I learned deeply and very, very rapidly that I wasn't just sitting down, that I was dealing with a whole bunch of shit that I had to come to terms with as well as the fact that I had to be in a wheelchair, that I couldn't walk anymore, and somebody had to help me get around in the beginning.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:19

And, yeah, that ability to empathize and see what's going on for other people because of my experience, has been probably one of the more eye-opening parts of this, and I'm so glad I'm not that ignorant anymore.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:45

I'm not as ignorant as I was, and I'm okay with the fact that I was ignorant in that. You've never been through it. So how can you possibly know? But the fact that I've learned that, I can relate to what you're saying. It's really helpful.

Suzzane E. 1:07:02

Yeah, that's a gift I've taken from this experience as well.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:10

Suzanne, thank you so much for reaching out. And being on the show. I appreciated our chat and I think a lot of people will get a lot out of listening to your story.

Suzzane E. 1:07:20

Thank you for having me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:22

Thanks for joining us on today's episode. To learn more about Suzanne and to download a full transcript of the entire interview, please go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes. If you'd like to try the course Five Foods to Avoid after Stroke, go to recoveryafterstroke.com/courses to get on board now.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:43

If you have been listening for a while and love this podcast, please help the podcast reach more stroke survivors by leaving the show, a five-star review, and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes and Spotify. If you're watching on YouTube, comment below the video. Like this episode and to get notifications of future episodes, subscribe to the show on the platform of your choice.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:07

Any interaction with the show boosts the show's ranking on search engines and that means that more people who need to find the show will and that might make them feel better about their recovery. If you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience, come and join me on the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:32

All you need to do to qualify is be a stroke survivor. Care for someone who is a stroke survivor or you're one of the fabulous people who help stroke survivors go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact and fill out the contact form.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:47

As soon as I receive your request I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over Zoom. Thanks again for being here and listening. I truly appreciate you see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:09:03

Importantly, we present many podcasts designed to give you an insight and understanding into the experiences of other individuals' 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 1:09:20

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Intro 1:09:36

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Intro 1:09:48

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Intro 1:09:57

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Intro 1:10:11

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Intro 1:10:27

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