

# Recovery from A Type A Aortic Dissection - Theo Koutalos

Theo Koutalos author of the book **Loshi and The Battle of The God Stones** joined me for this lovely chat about the two dissections he has had to recover from, one at age 38 and the most recent at 45.

Instagram

Loshi and The Battle For The God Stones

Highlights:

00:52 Introduction  
04:53 Ignoring The High Blood Pressure  
08:14 Ischemic Attack Experience  
15:35 Blood Pressure Spike  
21:16 The Open Heart Surgery  
29:41 Recovery At Home  
36:44 Living With Life-Long Deficits  
44:51 Loshi and The Battle Of The God Stones  
50:11 Learning About Empathy  
57:03 Being A Dad After A Stroke  
1:05:50 Pay It Forward  
1:17:34 Publishing The Book  
1:30:49 Rebelling Against The Culture

Transcription

Bill Gasiamis 0:00

Survivor's guilt. Did you get that?

Theo Koutalos 0:01

Yeah. A little bit, I was kind of in between of not understanding what happened and trying to realize, "Am I alive because of the surgeons or am I alive because my wife, and her mom in Africa have like 1000 people praying for me." Like, is there a reason? I'm alive right now.

Intro 0:39

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

## Introduction - Theo Koutalos



Bill Gasiamis 0:52

Hello, and welcome to episode 209 of the recovery after stroke podcast, if you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience with stroke, and you've been thinking about reaching out to be a guest on the show, but were waiting for the right time to reach out. Well, this is it. If you go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/contact](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/contact), you'll find a form that you can fill out to apply to be a guest on the show.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16

As soon as I receive it. I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you. For us to meet over zoom. Now my guest today is Theo Koutalos and author of the book *Loshi and the Battle for the God Stones*, and a two-time stroke survivor who experienced his health scares seven years apart. One at age 38 and one at age 45 Theo Koutalos. Fellow greek welcome to the podcast.

Theo Koutalos 1:16

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:37

How long has the family been in Canada? And when did they immigrate to

Canada?

Theo Koutalos 2:02

My mom and dad roughly came around the early 50s. My dad fought in the Greek civil war right after Germany left. The civil war broke out and he ended up fighting. And then, after the war was finished, my dad moved to Canada. And my mom. I believe she came in 56. And they met at church, they met at a greek church.

Bill Gasiamis 2:36

The perfect place to meet back then.

Theo Koutalos 2:39

Back then. That's how they met.

Bill Gasiamis 2:41

Fantastic. And which part of Greece are they from?

Theo Koutalos 2:46

My mom's from Rhodes. And my dad is from Tyrnavos much close to Olympia. He was from the villages out there.

Bill Gasiamis 3:02

Yeah. Awesome, man. Have you been back?

Theo Koutalos 3:04

You know what we went in, like the late 80s, I believe. And it was very "village" still. And I think it's very different now. I think everything's paved. And there's a lot of stores and a lot of tourists. When we went there wasn't very much tourism there. Now, I don't think you can go anywhere without being bombarded by tourism.

Bill Gasiamis 3:31

Fair, you got to get there. Go back to Greece, and enjoy it, man because I go back to Greece as often as I can, which is not that often. But at one point, we were going back every two years for about six or seven years. And it was so much fun. We had an amazing time. And you get to see where the family is from, my wife's family is also from Greece.

Bill Gasiamis 4:00

So we had a really amazing experience learning about our ancestors and getting a better feel for all of the stuff that they went through. They put up with they had to do, it's very different to having the experience with my parents when they're in Australia. And then going back there with them and then seeing them interact in their old villages with the people that are still there, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 4:33

So it was such an awesome experience. And then of course, we did the touristy things, and then we sat on a beach for as long as we could, in Greece, it's full of them.

Theo Koutalos 4:43

Yeah, absolutely.

Bill Gasiamis 4:45

But tell me a little bit about you man and what happened to you?

## **Ignoring The High Blood Pressure**

Theo Koutalos 4:53

I think before the 2015 stroke I had, I was battling with the blood pressure for about four years. And I think my doctor, I was going to what we call here a family practice. So what it is, is my doctor is a doctor who trains students to become GPs, general practitioners. So every time I would go to the family practice, I would have a different doctor.

Theo Koutalos 5:30

And I think they had a hard time keeping track of my blood pressure. And I was not really taking it as seriously as I should have. Because they tell you the same thing. I feel like everybody kind of hears the same thing. Don't eat too much salt. You know, don't be too stressed out, try to exercise, and I was on, I don't know if you guys have the same meds in the UK or Australia. But we were using Ramipril.

Theo Koutalos 6:04

That's what they had for me, and it wasn't really doing anything for me. So I think the blood pressure thing being as old as I was and not taking it in a mature way, it got me. I got bit like you would get bit by a shark or something.

Bill Gasiamis 6:04

Yeah. 38 years old at the time. And what was the onset like? Firstly, did you have any feelings that you had high blood pressure? Was there anything that happened in your body that suggested it?

Theo Koutalos 6:46

Nothing. It was literally out of nowhere, I woke up in the morning, I went to the bathroom. And it just happened like that. My whole left side just went dead. And I almost felt like I had like a glass box over my head. It was very muffled. Like that sound if you were to cover your ears, that's what everything sounded like even my own voice.

Theo Koutalos 7:20

So I remember banging on the bathroom door, and I couldn't talk. And I was just like, kinda yelling. And my wife jumped out of bed, saw me and she was in utter shock. And she called 911 right away. But I didn't know what a carotid arterio dissection was. I had no idea.

Bill Gasiamis 7:44

You didn't know what a carotid artery was. You didn't know anything.

Theo Koutalos 7:48

And, I really didn't think anything like that would have ever happened. It was really scary.

Bill Gasiamis 7:55

No. So you're in the bathroom? In the middle of doing your business?

Theo Koutalos 8:02

Yeah, like in the middle of urinating, and it just happened, like that.

Bill Gasiamis 8:08

And then were you able to get out of the bathroom? Most of the bathrooms I imagined are small.

## **Ischemic Attack Experience**

Theo Koutalos 8:14

I pretty much. So the day before I had what they call an ischemic attack. I was on my computer, and my left arm just went dead. I went to move my mouse on the

computer, and I couldn't. And my brain was saying move the mouse. And then it picked up my hand and it just went dead. And I'm like, "what?" So I ended up getting up, falling.

Theo Koutalos 8:48

And then about, I would say 15 minutes, everything kind of came back. And I got up I took a shower. And I went to the family clinic. And the doctor was just like gets nothing, don't worry. So then the next day, I woke up in the morning and I had my stroke. And my wife helped me get to the bed, put on clothes. And the ambulance was here.

Theo Koutalos 9:19

I live actually very close to a hospital. So I was very lucky. They got me to the hospital right away. And they put IVs in me. They brought my blood pressure down. And it was a two week experience of fragment. It's a blood clot

Theo Koutalos 9:41

Thinner. Had to do that for two weeks and just a lot of doctor's appointments. And it was interesting. It was an interesting experience.

Bill Gasiamis 9:56

Did your family lose this shit like my family?

Theo Koutalos 10:01

Oh yeah. My mom was freaking out. She's Greek. And she was like, "Oh my God, my son and my son, what are we going to do with my son?" And my sister was a little bit nervous and scared. And yeah, it was my brother in law was like crying. He's like, "what's going on?" So it was kind of scary. Greek mothers, man. They take things very hard.

Intro 10:32

They take things to the next level of seriousness. My biggest job when I was unwell, was trying to keep my family calm, trying to keep them all calm. I'll tell you. It's not only is it hard, it's impossible. So I was in hospital, the first bleed. And I'm in there for seven days, and the family is coming to visit me. And I'm supposed to be in my bed lying down and doing all the tests and all that stuff, which I am.

Bill Gasiamis 11:01

And then this one particular date. And I'm not supposed to be walking anywhere or getting out of the ward. And there's one particular day my mom comes up to the ward. And I said to her "Where's Dad?". And she said, "Well", "What do you mean? Well, where is he?" "Well he's downstairs" "What's he doing downstairs?" "Well, he collapsed at home, as we were leaving to come to see you. And the ambulance picked him up and brought him here."

Bill Gasiamis 11:30

"What are you talking about? Where's my dad?", and she goes, "I think he forgot to take his medication. Or he took it on an empty stomach. He did something wrong in the morning." And my dad is six foot and beyond. And he's massive, right? Wide shouldered like overweight a little bit. There was no picking him up. So when he hits the ground, like he hits the ground hard, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 12:01

So the ambulance picked him up, they took him to emergency. And I go downstairs to visit my dad in emergency in the same hospital that I'm at, when he was supposed to be there to come and visit me, right. So that was my dad. Now. I had another blade six weeks later. And then I had another one in 2014. So move forward almost three years. At brain surgery, I'm in recovery in brain surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 12:38

And a couple of days later, they're pushing me around in the wheelchair because I can't walk. And I met lunch in the cafe of the emergency ward of the hospital. And my wife starts to go gray, and she's kind of like passing out. And I'm like, "are you alright? What's wrong with you?" You know, we're trying to get her roused up and get her going and everything and we can't.

Bill Gasiamis 13:07

So, we take her to emergency. There were some people with me think we took her to emergency. They got her checked out. And then they've taken it into a bed and they've connected her up to all the monitors and everything. So here's me now, I'm downstairs with a scar on my head, fresh out of surgery, sitting next to my wife in the hospital. All the machines.

Bill Gasiamis 13:36

And my surgeon, one of the guys that was on the team on my surgery, he walks past and then he stops and he does a double take and he looks. And he goes

“What are you two doing here?” I don’t know. “Something’s wrong with my wife.” Can you guys do me a favor and like look into it for me or something? That’s what we went through amongst all the other shit.

Bill Gasiamis 14:05

So I get what you’re saying about dramatic. And basically both of them weren’t looking after themselves. During that time. My wife was dehydrated. And my dad didn’t do the right thing about his medication.

Theo Koutalos 14:21

To be honest with you. My wife was really the only one who wasn’t worried. She is probably the most positive person I know. And she’s extremely faithful in her religion, her Christianity. And she was praying and praying and she’s like, “You’re gonna be fine. Don’t worry about it.” And on my mind, I’m like, “Are you sure you want to get married?”

Theo Koutalos 14:47

I’m like, I don’t know if I’m gonna die young, you know, you have your whole life ahead of you and she goes “Don’t worry, buddy. You’ll be fine.” It was pretty funny. She’s got a funny outlook on the severity of my condition. And, you know, she’s kind of like my soldier. She’s the one that’s making sure I don’t eat any salt.

Theo Koutalos 15:12

She’s the one that is very strict on how she cooks. And I’m pretty lucky, I’m pretty lucky because I don’t know if I would have been as healthy afterwards. If she wasn’t like so militant on the way I was supposed to eat, in the way I was supposed to exercise.

## **Blood Pressure Spike**

Bill Gasiamis 15:35

What do you think’s behind that Theo?

Theo Koutalos 15:38

I don’t know, they don’t know, either. They’re a little bit shocked, especially with what just happened a couple months ago, they’re a little bit not understanding of my condition. They keep on saying that it’ll probably be smart for them to kind of log everything that I’ve been going through, because they can’t really pinpoint a cause for the blood pressure.



Theo Koutalos 16:11

Especially right now, my blood pressure is the best it's ever been, ever. And they don't know whether it's because they fixed whatever the problem was. Or it could be a lot of things. I'm not the type of person to be stressed out. I'm not that kind of person. And I don't know if it was really my diet, I think a lot of it might have been my cannabis use.

Theo Koutalos 16:41

In some cases. I know, smoking does raise your blood pressure. I was trying the DASH diet and all these diets, and it wasn't really going down. I even quit smoking and it wasn't going down. And they were kind of confused, from 2015 post stroke, to 2018, I was on seven or eight different drugs, trying to figure out how to lower the blood pressure. Because my average was 189 over, 88. And that was my average for years.

Bill Gasiamis 17:29

Wow, which means it's so much higher a long time.

Theo Koutalos 17:32

And I'm like, I felt great. I feel fine. They were like, "You shouldn't feel fine." And I'm like, "I feel great." And they're like, "oh, man, something's gonna happen." They're worried, right? They're like, it's too high. And especially with what happened four months ago, my blood pressure was over 200 over 99. And they were like, "what's going on?" So it's really weird.

Bill Gasiamis 18:00

Yeah. You come across as mild-mannered, pretty calm, pretty chill.

Theo Koutalos 18:08

I have the Greek anger. Don't get me wrong. We all have it, It's inside. Right? It doesn't come out very often, but when it does, people are like, "Oh, he's Greek."

Bill Gasiamis 18:18

The fury.

Theo Koutalos 18:20

Yeah, but honestly, I have a good outlook on life. I don't worry about anything. I don't know. I don't have anxiety. I don't have depression. They're really after my incident. They're really worried. You're like, "you might need to talk to

somebody.” And I’m like, “no no, I’m good.” I’m not worried about that.

Bill Gasiamis 18:43

So are you really good, though? Really?

Theo Koutalos 18:46

Pretty good. Especially with what just happened? I’ve never been that close to death. And I didn’t have the feeling I was gonna die, even though I think they were expecting me to die. I should have been more nervous because well, might as well talk about it. So four months ago, I had a Type A dissection. So I was watching TV. And my dog started barking at me for no reason.

Theo Koutalos 19:31

And she started nipping on my arm. And I’m like, “whoa, whoa, whoa, what’s going on here” and then I suddenly got a crazy pain in my neck. And then I felt it shoot to my leg. My thigh started aching, and my leg just went dead. My foot started turning blue. And I called my wife. I’m like, I think I’m having a stroke. I’m not sure, I’m in a lot of pain. She rushed home. She looked at me and I was sweating. And she’s like, “we got to call 911.”

Intro 20:13

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 actually recover? What things should I avoid in case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things. But obviously, you’ve never had a stroke before, you probably don’t know what questions to ask.

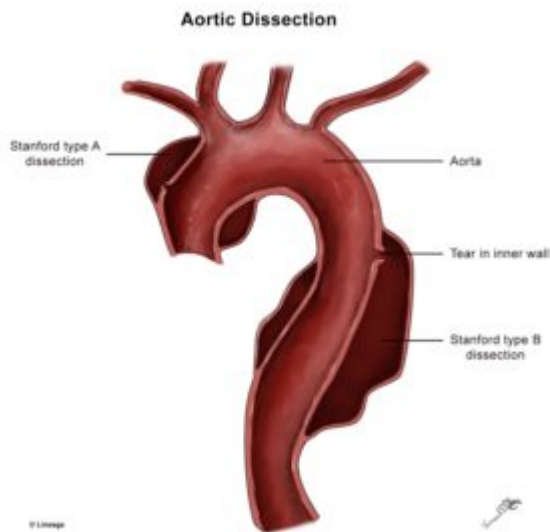
Intro 20:38

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](http://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 20:57

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](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide. It’s free.

# The Open Heart Surgery



(CLICK THE IMAGE FOR MORE INFORMATION)

Theo Koutalos 21:16

Called 911. They came. The second they looked at me, they picked me up and like ran downstairs and got me into the ambulance. Because they're like we don't have time. So, brought me to the hospital, straight down to CT scan, did the scan, brought me back up to the cardiac unit, and they did put IVs on both arms, which I'm like I've had hundreds of these by now.

Theo Koutalos 21:46

So yeah, go ahead. And they shot me with Fragmin again. And they got my blood pressure. So my blood pressure was 201 over 103 or something like that. They brought it down. And I think by the time it got to 174 over, I think 82 something like that.

Theo Koutalos 21:46

A nurse came in she's like, "you're gonna need open heart surgery." And I'm like, "what? I thought it was my leg." She said "No, no, no, no. Right now we have two surgeons on their way. They're going to be here any minute. And they're going to come talk to you and you. You are going to have surgery in about 20 minutes." And I'm like, "whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on here?"

Theo Koutalos 22:44

And so the surgeons came, they're two young guys, really nice guys. And suddenly I had forms on my chest. And they're like, "sign these right now. We don't have

time.” And I’m like “what’s going on?” And the one guy pretty much said you’re aortic valves peeling like an onion. And he’s like, “if we don’t open you up right now it’s going to burst.” So I signed them, they left the nurse, looked at me like grave.

Theo Koutalos 23:16

I was so nervous for a second. I’m like, “am I going to die?” And all she said was “you should call your family.” And I’m like, Oh my God. And I’m thinking, what am I going to do here? I can’t call my mom, she’ll just die. I can’t call my mom, so I called my sister. My wife is freaking out because she thought it was my leg. She’s like, “what’s going on?” And I kind of explained everything, and I called a couple of friends.

Theo Koutalos 23:49

I’m like, “watch my mom, if anything happens.” And then before I knew it, I was moving towards the hallway into the elevator. They were cutting my clothes off in the elevator. And I got to the surgical room. They strapped my arms. And they covered me in pink stuff. And I woke up six hours later, or no actually, apparently I woke up six hours later, like bursting and moving. They brought me back down, the kept my chest open for another four hours in case of stroke.

Theo Koutalos 24:26

And they pretty much told my wife that if I stroked I would have died. And I think after that I woke up and I looked like Frankenstein. I have like a massive incision. I have an incision going this way and then had a hole in my stomach with wires poking out. And that was it. And I was like wow, I didn’t see a light so I’m pretty good. So I wasn’t that nervous because I didn’t see the light.

Bill Gasiamis 25:03

Isn’t it amazing what the human body can endure. But to think that you know that dissection, which is bloody minor that is so small. It’s not a very big thing that puts your life at risk. But these guys can open the chest up, open your arm up, open all these things, do all these things, and then the body’s going I can deal with that no problem.

Theo Koutalos 25:28

And honestly, these two young guys, they’re looking at me like, I was like a roast beef dinner, they couldn’t wait to get me open, I can see it in their eyes they were

so excited you know, and I'm like, I think I made their day.

Bill Gasiamis 25:47

They're the kind of surgeons you want on your team.

Theo Koutalos 25:51

They were so excited.

Bill Gasiamis 25:53

They're ready to go on the field to do a touchdown to do whatever or score goal.

Theo Koutalos 25:58

Oh, they were like the champions of the day. They conquered a huge, mountain that day. Especially everybody that I've talked to since I've had to go to the Vein Clinic. I've had a million doctor's appointments in four months. And everybody's so surprised I'm alive.

Theo Koutalos 26:22

I get treated so differently by doctors. Don't know if I'm a ghost. They don't know if it's like a sixth sense, like a Bruce Willis thing where like, Are you dead or alive? I don't know. Because you're looking at my paperwork. And they're like, holy shit. You know, like, I can't believe you survived this. And I'm like, Yeah, I think I have really good surgeons.

Bill Gasiamis 26:47

You have amazing surgeons. I mean, modern medicine is next-level amazing. Forget it, none of us would be here.

Theo Koutalos 26:54

20 years ago, RIP, gone, both of us 30 years ago, we both probably wouldn't be here.

Bill Gasiamis 27:04

100%. And then we've got 200 or more people on my podcast that would not have made a podcast. If, this was happening years ago, you know, when my parents arrived from Greece, for example. That's unbelievable. So I've actually Googled what a type A dissection looks like.

Bill Gasiamis 27:30

And the it's not a big deal. When you look at the amount of the artery that gets

damaged, like it's a small amount. But yeah, that being said, that's a small amount creates a catastrophic leak out of the artery. And therefore there's no proper circulation, and then all sorts of issues. So the fact that they got that sorted, that's amazing. So how long did it take for you to get out of hospital after that second surgery? Four days?

Theo Koutalos 28:10

Because the COVID they're worrying, I tested positive the day after my surgery, but I had COVID a month prior. And I also had my second vaccine a month prior as well. And in Canada, they kind of let go all the nurses that didn't want to get vaccine. So the amount of nurses working in that ward, were I think it was four nurses for like 50 or 60 patients, something like that.

Theo Koutalos 28:49

And those nurses were run ragged. They were exhausted. You can tell you can just see it in them that they were they were so tired. And they're trying to take care of everybody. And like, honestly, those four days were brutal. They had me on hydromorphone. I was seeing spiders molding out of the walls, I was high. And I pretty much said I need to get out of here. Like, I'm afraid I'm gonna get sick.

Theo Koutalos 29:21

And they're like, You need to get out of here. So they said pretty much if I do physiotherapy, as long as I can get in and out of my bed by myself they'll kick me out. So I started physiotherapy right away. I'm like, I gotta get out of here. I didn't like the food. They wouldn't let me shower.

## **Recovery At Home**



Theo Koutalos 29:41

And hydromorphone makes you sweat. And I had people coughing everywhere. And I'm like, I gotta get out of here. So like four days, and then recovery at home was an absolute horror show. It was brutal.

Bill Gasiamis 30:07

Were you dealing with pain?

Theo Koutalos 30:11

The pain was actually not good. And especially with a surgery like that they kind of remove your lungs and then they put them back. So I had to deal with a collapsed lung on the left the first week, and then collapsed lung on the right. And there's this fluid that comes out and they make you cough. So you have to hold a pillow and cough. The cough feels like somebody is kicking you in the lungs with a boot made out of razor blades.

Theo Koutalos 30:47

It's horrible. And, I thought that was bad that I think that was one of the worst was the coughing was terrible. I couldn't sleep. The second that would lay down like we bought pillows to to help us and go myself a certain way nothing really worked. I had to sleep sitting up. And it was just a nightmare. For like two weeks. It was a nightmare. I couldn't eat. I was pretty much just eating like bananas and oranges. And then the painkillers, they bind you up. So you have a hard time going to the washroom. It was just the first two weeks were really bad.

Bill Gasiamis 31:31

Hardest two weeks of your life.

Theo Koutalos 31:34

I think so. It slowly started getting better. I think after the first month, everything started getting better. I had to stop taking the pain meds because they put me on Tylenol threes. And I had to poop. Blake, I'm like, I can't take these drugs anymore.

Theo Koutalos 31:55

And then I finally went to the washroom. But it was like I gave birth to like a farmer's boot. It was just a nightmare. So I'm taking these drugs anymore. I'll take my protozole and everything they need me to take for my blood pressure, but I'm not taking the pain meds. So I just toughed it out.

Bill Gasiamis 32:21

Yeah, that's what I did. I stopped taking pain medication. And I don't recommend anyone does anything that I say or do. I started taking pain medication the second day after brain surgery. And they were telling me you should take it. I'm like, no, no, I want to know what I'm feeling. I want to feel what I'm feeling I don't want to not feel. And I did it Because I wanted to be connected to my body.

Bill Gasiamis 32:52

So if something was happening, I could say hang on a sec, this is not pain of surgery or anything like that, this is what it is. And even now, I'll come home, I'll have a headache every once in a while or really bad migraine. And my wife's going to say take something for it and I go nah don't think I'm going to take anything, I'm just going to wait it out. See what it is.

Bill Gasiamis 33:15

Because I feel like if I take pain medication, it disguise as the made disguise, something that I don't know is happening. And I don't want to do that. I want to just be aware of it. So I do what we're supposed to have done. And what people 1000s for 1000s of years before us did. They probably went and rested, they did less they lie down. You know, they go into a dark room.

Bill Gasiamis 33:41

They do all these things, and they just get through it. That's how I deal with it. I don't put up with it. However, I do know that it is important for a lot of people. That's why I'm saying don't do what I do. It's important for a lot of people to take



medication especially pain medication, because when you're in excruciating, say debilitating pain for some people, it can cause high blood pressure and then other issues and decrease the recovery rate and make the person worse. So that's why I say don't do what I do.

Theo Koutalos 34:16

Honestly, coughing was giving me PTS to be honest with you, I was so scared to cough that I would hold it in and my body would be trembling. Because I'm like, if I cough, I know what it's gonna feel like and it's just terrible. And I just had to like tough it out. And I'm like, That's it. I'm just going to cough my brains out and try to get it all out. Get all the fun that I can get and eventually the time came when like the coughing just stopped.

Theo Koutalos 34:50

But a month. But they don't really explain like the recovery to you. They kind of tell you a little bit, but they don't tell you the amount of like torture, that it is on your body, and especially like the torture that it has on my wife. Because she had a hard time. Honestly, after surgery like that I had to be showered, I had to be fed, I was not able to take care of myself. And it really makes you wonder how people that are alone are capable of taking care of themselves after an incident. Like what I had, I don't know how they would do it. And I felt so thankful that I had her.

Bill Gasiamis 35:52

Look out for you.

Theo Koutalos 35:54

Yeah, I don't know how you would do it on your own. It's impossible.

Bill Gasiamis 35:59

You know, I know a lot of people who become caregivers, also they don't get, a rule book, or they don't get trained, or they don't get support. And think about it. You know, there's stroke survivors who become incapacitated permanently. And then they're sent home to a loved one. And then their loved ones got to do what your wife did for years. And then no one thinks to check in on that loved one and go, Hey, how are you going? How you doing? Do you need some support? It's I know, some family and friends do that from time to time, but then they go back to life that they've got to get back to. And the caregivers do it really tough, they do

really tough, sometimes harder.

## **Living With Life-Long Deficits**

Theo Koutalos 36:44

I have a lot of respect for people who do that for a living. Because I think you're you have to be a very special person to take care of people like that. You know, it's a hard job and it's tough. I feel bad for people who have long-lasting effects. You've always known growing up people who have had strokes, and they have a little bit of a drop, I think a friend of mine has her dad lost the use of his left arm or right arm.

Theo Koutalos 37:26

And he was never the same. He couldn't do the smallest tasks at home and more burden was on his wife. And I think he eventually passed, but I think he passed almost in the sense that like he almost passed with broken heart in a weird way. Because he lost the life that he was so used to living. And he just became such a miserable old guy.

Bill Gasiamis 37:57

It is tough. I mean, most of the people that come on this podcast have their life has changed dramatically. It's completely different. And they do have the ability to redirect the identity does evolve, and it emerges into something new. But the people that I've found that have struggled the most other people who have been a certain way, say for 80 years.

Bill Gasiamis 38:25

And they feel like or they believe that their near death or there's not a lot of time left. So they don't try. They don't put any effort in and they get depressed about this is how my life is going to end or whatever. And I think it's just a mindset that people have, because sometimes you'll come across older people who are in their 70s and 80s. Who go stuff this, you know, my leg doesn't work, my arm doesn't work, let's jump out of a plane.

Bill Gasiamis 38:49

And it's like, they have the same idea that, you know, they might not be around for a long time. But instead of sitting at home wallowing for no reason, they decided, well stuff it. Let's jump out of a plane if the plane doesn't kill me, then

it's a bonus. So I get it. I get some people really get down. I remember seeing my dad had knee surgery. My dad's probably going to be 80 next year.

Bill Gasiamis 39:20

And it was about three or four years ago. And for the first time in his life, he was really unable to be mobile, just because he had knee surgery had to rest six weeks, 10 weeks, whatever it was gonna be. He was so depressed. He became instantly depressed and he was a shadow of himself just because he couldn't walk and drive the car. And it's like, dude, just let it rest and heal and sit on your bum for a little bit.

Bill Gasiamis 39:49

In in your 75 years, you've had awesome health, everything's fine. You got a knee that's worn out. That's all it's done. It's just worn out. They're gonna replace it. And you'd be back on your feet, try get him to see the positive in that and that six weeks is going to fly by or 10 weeks is gonna fly by and then he'll be okay. Absolutely some people, you just can't get him out of it.

Bill Gasiamis 40:16

And he's so used to being well, that surgery that he did, which was his choice to do it. Because it was painful to not do it, I still he wasn't able to grasp the concept of this is short term. That's what what it was. And he was thinking that this is how it's going to be forever, I won't be able to walk. Every other person that's had knee surgery, knee replacement surgery, they've all walked. That's what happens. That's the next stage. He was mess.

Theo Koutalos 41:00

My dad worked at Ford Motor Car Company, and he ended up getting injured at work. And he broke his wrist, but it was a type of break that they couldn't really fix and operate on at that time. So he ended up retiring early getting disability, and he kind of lost the use of some of his hand. So he just did everything with the other hand. He's like, I got two.

Theo Koutalos 41:32

My dad was very positive and he's like, Yeah, I got this one, I'm okay, I could do everything with this arm. So I kind of grew up with my dad kind of being in a positive state, anytime he would ever hurt himself and he hurt himself a lot, trust me. I've seen my dad trying to fix a fan and it fly across the room and come at him

and slice his arm. My dad passed a year ago at 95. And he died with tools in his hands. He just never stopped. It's just the mindset.

Bill Gasiamis 42:10

That's it, that's what my dad is and to make him stop was a hard thing, but also stroke, you know what stroke does Theo? It actually interferes with people's ability to have positivity sometimes, sometimes it also interferes with the brain to the point where they can't be happy or positive. So depends on where it gets you. So you can understand it as well as it's difficult to see.

Bill Gasiamis 42:38

But you know, sometimes you can understand it, it's the people around the person who's unwell, that's a sign that they need to step up, and, and grow personally, and develop a different understanding a different way of approaching things. And being devastated is not helpful for anybody, it's not helpful for the person who's unwell. It's not helpful for the person who's caring. And that's what I love what you said about your wife, it's like, you'll be right, everything will be fine, we'll work it out.

Theo Koutalos 43:18

I think some people may not know that they're depressed, or that they're down, they might just, you know, not notice the change in them. My wife did notice a little bit with me after the surgery, and she's like, don't worry about it. Everything's gonna be okay. Because not working after a surgery like that, and like in Canada, if you're self-employed, you don't get help from the government.

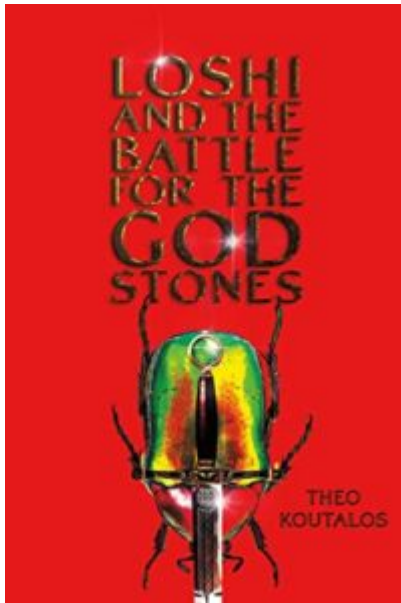
Theo Koutalos 43:52

So, we're lucky because she works. So I was able to, take time off and not really worry too much really, really fortunate. But it happened at such a weird point because like, I wrote a book and it was getting published. And my type A dissection happened a week before my publishing day.

Theo Koutalos 44:23

And I'm like, Oh, my God, I'm like, there's all this stuff I need to do with Instagram and Facebook, I got to promote my book, and I couldn't do anything. So the book came out worldwide, every single bookstore, like Amazon, everything, and I was not able to do anything. So things happen.

# Loshi and The Battle Of The God Stones



Bill Gasiamis 44:51

Tell me about the lead-up to that. Therefore, it's taken you some years to get to the point of writing the book.

Theo Koutalos 45:00

Yeah, it's (inaudible) process for me to write the book. It's a it's like a preteen coming of age story about a princess, whose kingdom gets overthrown by underground like slave king. And it's kinda like Lord of the Rings meets like, Mean Girls in a weird way.

Theo Koutalos 45:23

But all my characters are insects. And it's my way of kind of talking about, classism and racism. There's like white beetles and black beetles. And there's magic and there's these magic stones and there's brutal villains, and there's war scenes. And, so I wanted to do something kind of epic.

Theo Koutalos 46:02

Loshi and The Battle For The God Stones. I think the ring light is making a ring on the cover.

Bill Gasiamis 46:09

Yeah, it looks awesome. The cover is awesome.

Theo Koutalos 46:13

Thank you. So I don't know, I think life just throws you curveballs. And, my wife,

just like don't worry about it. You know, she's like, the books gonna do well, because this is the most original thing anybody's ever seen. Nobody's ever made something like this. And people will get attracted to it. And her positivity just made me kind of not so nervous about everything.

Theo Koutalos 46:43

And I'm like, yeah, what am I gonna do? I have to recover. But I'm sure there's times when like, I was down, there's no way you can go through something like that and be happy. I have a lot going on. My dad was a hoarder. So before all that I was trying to clean up my mom's house. And as hard for my sister to take care of my mom completely without me because we do everything 50-50. And it was just timing is never good for anything, health-wise, right?

Bill Gasiamis 47:24

And life, just goes on around you, no matter what you're not gonna pause it, and then get back to the stuff you need to get back to, people's lives go on, everything happens.

Theo Koutalos 47:35

I was really lucky. I feel really lucky. I have amazing friends, I had people bringing us food. You know, I had friends bringing jello, because it's the only thing I can eat at the hospital because of lactose, and they kept on bringing me milk.

Theo Koutalos 47:52

But honestly, I was very fortunate, I had friends constantly coming and visiting and, if anything, in a small way, I feel like this incident kind of made me feel better about living in a small way. I don't feel like I take things for granted as much. I'm more cautious about making sure that I talk to certain people more often. I don't know, it makes you think a lot.

Bill Gasiamis 48:36

I can relate to that man, I have this thing I can relate to how easily things could have gotten a lot worse for me. And I could have been on the other side because I was on the other side for a little bit the part where, you can't walk, you can't do this, you can't talk, you can't think, you can't remember, I went through all of the things temporarily the majority of those things temporarily that some people go through for a lot longer or permanently.

Bill Gasiamis 49:05

And I see people in the street asking for money and all that kind of thing. And I can relate to them. I was so close to being in a position where I was that desperate, you know, that my normal world would have changed whatever that was, you know, like so completely and totally, that it's not unfathomable that you could end up in that situation. A lot of people that are on the street end up being there because of you know, mental health issues or all sorts of things.

Bill Gasiamis 49:41

So one of the things that I do now is I speak to people that I never would have spoken to before, especially people on the street every once in a while. I'll stop, have a chat, whatever. Just give them a bit of an opportunity to talk to somebody under normal conditions or I don't know what amongst other people that I know that I love, who I make sure I reach out to and that are on my mind and all that I just ring and if they're on my mind, I just go and see them and that type of thing.

## **Learning About Empathy**

Bill Gasiamis 50:11

So it has made me more aware of the other humans on the planet that are around me. And it's not just about me. And it does feel good to acknowledge somebody who gets no acknowledgement all day, who gets walked past all day, every day, and is just hoping for a few dollars or somebody to say hello, or whatever, it feels good to just do that hoping, in my mind thinking that I don't want to be, say I find myself in that situation in the future, I don't want to be looking back and going shit, I should have spoken to all those people when I had the chance. And now look at me, no one's speaking to me, etc. So I get what you're saying most people listening to this have a massive shift in their perspective about what's important and what's not important in life. You know?

Theo Koutalos 51:02

How can you not? Especially like, when I was in the hospital, I think it was the day after my surgery. And I believe somebody actually had passed in the ward I was in from the exact same thing like type A. And I could kind of see the nurse talking to the wife, and she was bawling her eyes out. And I'm like, that could have been me.

Theo Koutalos 51:40

And it's just, it's weird how there's no aura or anything that happens before something like that incident happens. I didn't have like a weird feeling in my head. I didn't have anything. It just happened. There's no warning. So I'm sure they were just living their normal life. And then maybe he collapsed, or he started feeling his arm went dead or who knows. I felt so bad for her.

Bill Gasiamis 52:19

I have a friend of mine who passed away last three months. And he was in his late 50s. And he's a pretty healthy guy, tall, strong, fit healthy. All that stuff, you know, doing all the things we always did. And then and then I find out that he's in hospital. And they didn't explain it like you did. They didn't say it was a dissection. They might not have known the words yet.

Bill Gasiamis 52:52

But they said that he had a tear in one of his arteries leading to the heart. And it caused a heart attack. And the heart attack was what got him to hospital. And when he got to hospital, they brought him back they've sight they've saved him, but his heart was really injured as a result of the heart attack. So it was not working optimally, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 53:18

So I found out that he was unwell. And I sent him a message saying, Hey, mate, you know, video message. Hey, it's Billy. And everything's just ringing to say, just sending a message, say hello, the rest of it. And I want you back. And when you get back, you know, we're going to have some to eat. And we'll talk about stuff and whatever. It's a guy that I used to see a couple times a year. And because of a painting company, we had just finished painting his house maybe a couple of months earlier.

Bill Gasiamis 53:48

And then it sends me a message back saying, Yeah, we definitely have to talk about some things, you know, my heart, whatever. And he says, it's been really beat up, you know, it's been really beat up. I'm afraid I may have damaged it what he said in his message. And I said, you'll be right. You know, we'll see you in a little while. Three days later, his partner posts on Facebook that he's passed away.

Bill Gasiamis 54:17



And it was something like that. There was no sign there was no idea that there was something going wrong. And he passed away. So that's exactly what you're saying. You know, you're the guy who didn't, which is fantastic. And then you're thinking about the other people who did. And I don't know about you, but I did go through a fair long amount of time where I was like, Why did I survive? Like what's so special about me? Survivor's guilt. Did you get that?

Theo Koutalos 54:49

Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, I was kind of in between, of like, not understanding what happened, and trying to like realize, like, am I alive because of the surgeons? Or am I alive because my wife, and like her mom in Africa had like 1000 people praying for me? Like, is there a reason I'm alive right now? Almost like, is there something I'm supposed to do now?

Bill Gasiamis 55:29

That's a great question, man.

Theo Koutalos 55:31

You know, like, is there something? Am I supposed to keep on writing books? Am I supposed to change a career and go into like nursing? Like, what am I supposed to do? And I still don't know, to be honest with you. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. But I think if anything, it's given me a better idea of faith.

Theo Koutalos 55:59

And I'm learning a bit more about faith. And we grew up Greek Orthodox. So like, we're very traditional were my wife is like a more modern version of Christianity. And they really believe in the power of prayer. And, I think, in the back of my mind, I just feel like there's got to be something I'm supposed to do. I just don't know what it is.

Bill Gasiamis 56:27

I think I know, I think you need to write a trilogy. There's got to be more to the story of the Loshi and The Battle For The God Stones and then, at some point, some directors gonna go, maybe we can make this into a movie, you know? Animated version. So I think that's what you're supposed to do now.

Theo Koutalos 56:54

To be honest with you, like, I think three months after my surgery, my wife got pregnant.

Bill Gasiamis 57:00

Yeah, there you go.

## Theo Koutalos Being A Dad After A Stroke

Theo Koutalos 57:03

So I think that's kind of a miracle, too, because we were trying for a really long time. And then it just worked. We're doing IVF and it just wasn't working. And we were spending a lot of money on IVF. And then I had my incident, and fertility doctors like, trauma and hormones make magic. I'm like, oh my God, I'm gonna be a dad now. And I'm 45. And we're planning our life to not have kids. Like, I spent all my money on records. She's in Rwanda right now. We travel all the time. And, now I'm having a baby.

Bill Gasiamis 57:54

It doesn't change much, man. My son's are 26 and 22. I'm 48. So I was a young dad, I was 22.

Theo Koutalos 58:08

You look great.

Bill Gasiamis 58:10

It's the greek genes, man. It doesn't change much. Having kids doesn't change much. There is a routine that you have to get into, especially when they go to school, and maybe preschool. And there's a little bit of work. But we took them everywhere. We dragged them to parties, they were sleeping in the corner, on a chair, underneath table. Like, you know, we just took them they were full of energy we were as well, because we were so young.

Bill Gasiamis 58:42

And it's like, let's just go, let's just not miss out on stuff. And the kids are resilient. They survived. You know, we had a routine 99% of the time, but when it came to doing stuff, we just went and did it. Like if you guys need to travel, there's nothing better than traveling with a little kid. The plane ride might be terrible, but after that it's fine.

Bill Gasiamis 59:07

It's okay after that. It's not a big deal and the child becomes so well adjusted so well rounded, they get to see things that you never saw when you were growing

up, you know, you haven't been to all these places with your parents. Like I never went anywhere with my parents that wasn't local. You know, so I think you'll be fine you know, it doesn't really change your life. It changes your priorities and how you think about things but the order in which you're doing things I think is cool.

Bill Gasiamis 59:44

Because you've got so much life experience, you know what's important about life, you've had that lesson the hard way. I got it the other way around. So I worked like a donkey for decades and too much and too hard and too fast and not enough sleep and not enough looking after myself and missed out on those younger years with my kids.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:07

And when I was sick, one of my biggest regrets is that I was sick in their teenage years where they were in the zone for camping, fishing, all that stuff, and I was too sick to go. And I can't get them back to do that with me now, because they are in that phase anymore. Your way of doing it not that there's a perfect way to get well and become better, but your way of doing it, I think is okay, because you have the really wise lessons that you've gained from your experiences, and so does your wife, and you guys know what's important. And what a great place to take a child, you know, to Rwanda. Is that where your wife's from?

Theo Koutalos 1:00:55

Yeah. They were there when everything went really bad in 94, came to Canada through refugee status. Brought up here, and now they go there. And it's remarkable there. I have to tell you, it's such a great place to travel. I haven't had so much fun. Like, I go to Hawaii, I go surfing in Hawaii once a while. Rwanda's just so friendly, and it's so it's so futuristic thinking. Their leaders are always thinking about how can we make things better. So everybody can have jobs. They have Volkswagen there, they have beer factories there, they have malls of stores, everything's evolving so quickly. Very impressive. I have to be honest, going there so much fun.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:03

And then experiencing a new culture as well, the way they do things a bit different, and it's a bit quirkier, and you're not used to it. And that's why it's going to be awesome, you're gonna have a kid and it's going to be like, what a

great thing, you know, to be able to have those massive cultural differences and to expose your child to the vast range of all that stuff from the Greek background and Rwanda background. Man, it's huge. It's awesome and the thing is, you're never ready for kids. There's no such thing as I will be ready. In 2015. No, you're never ready for it.

Theo Koutalos 1:02:42

I feel that

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:44

They come along, and they mess up everything. So you've got to really just go with the flow. And you've got to be really comfortable with, being about somebody else, and not about you.

Theo Koutalos 1:02:57

I'm more excited than anything. I feel like, you know, this is like a new chapter. You know, I'm ready. My dad was 50 when I was born. So my mom was 40. And, so like, I don't even remember my dad not having white hair, to be honest with you. So I'm on my way. But, both of us lost her dad's within three months last year. And we both have our values from our parents, but more of our dads, my dad was like, very strict.

Theo Koutalos 1:03:42

And he was always the first to make everything good. If something wasn't good. If somebody needed help, my dad was the one that helped them. If somebody needed food, my dad was the one that always went grocery shopping and bought that family food.

Theo Koutalos 1:03:58

My dad was always that guy just like her dad, her dad. I think he's paid for so many people's University. He's just one of those guys. You know, and they have a foundation in his name in Africa. And that giving aspect that's what I want to be like, I really want my book to do really well. So I can create an education fund for people to like go to school, because without school, life's hard. You need education.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:33

There you go, man your "What am I supposed to do with my life" is starting to evolve. There's a child that you need to be responsible for and grow and give good

values and pass down those values that you've been raised on and that your wife has been raised on.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:49

And then you've got this way to speak to the world, the community, the population, through books in your story, writing You're telling of stories that, as you know, you know, like through books like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings, it just drives creativity for the entire planet. And it's such a massive way to reach so many people. And that's what we need. We need creativity, and imagination.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:25

And that comes out of a book that somebody, you know, JK Rowling wrote when she was in hard times, and she didn't know how it was going to go, and she puts this book out and then captures the whole entire world's imagination. And that's what you're supposed to do, man. If that's what you're good at, do that. There's no better way but through a book.

## Pay It Forward



Theo Koutalos 1:05:52

Very true. I just feel like you're, you're put into life situations for a reason. And eventually, things just kind of smack you in the face. Like, everything you've been through, and with your podcast, I'm sure you've helped more people than you probably know.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:22

It's impossible to know. And it's so good that I can't even contemplate how, big it is, because I never intended it. Let me tell you, I was like you like, what am I going to do with my time now and all that stuff. And I did the podcast for selfish reasons in a nice way. As in, I didn't have enough of a community around me. And I needed to create one. And I didn't know how.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:48

But I do love the sound of my own voice. I love talking. So what I thought was I'll meet people all over the world, there's got to be more than one stroke survivor, that will talk to me. So I did that. And then I thought, I'll just keep going. And at the beginning, it was really hard. 2015 is when it started. And I didn't put a lot of episodes in, I didn't have the health, the energy levels or anything like that I wasn't organized enough.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:19

I'm still recovering a year out of my brain surgery, you know, so it wasn't, it wasn't that spectacular back then. But it was just one thing after another one little step after the other. And this is how I be creative. This is what enabled me to be creative. But what I didn't know Theo was that it was going to lead to other things that I had no idea about, I couldn't have imagined that I would A. have 200 episodes, B that I would be getting invited to speak on podcasts, from people all around the world.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:53

And also didn't realize that it was going to spawn a book, which is the book that I'm writing now, which is the work I talk about almost on every episode now, because it's coming closer. I'm at chapter seven now out of 10. The book's, working title is Stroke Is The Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me. And how could I possibly have imagined a book title like that before the stroke? Like, how is that even possible?

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:25

And then to find that the book actually came to be because when I was saying that some people sent it back to me. And I reached out to the Instagram community. And people came back to me and said, Yeah, that's me, too. And I was like, Well, let me interview you. And then I found out that we had these things in common. All of us had these 10 things in common, and that's gonna make the 10 chapters.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:49

And I'm not an author of any kind. But I've got this thing that's emerged from something else that I've done. And it feels like my purpose now. But I wasn't setting out to find my purpose. I was just doing amazing things and going, what the hell, I'm here for a short time. I may as well do it.

Theo Koutalos 1:09:12

I think when it's meant to come out, it spills out. And to be honest with you writing this book. I don't even read books, so for me to write this book that is so different than anything I've ever done. It just came out like it was meant to be. It's probably what you're going through. It's just meant to come out. It's meant to be on paper, and it's meant to be read. That's all it is. I feel like most things happen that way. Where if it's meant to be it just happens.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:56

I'm going with it. I don't mind it. It's the hardest thing I've ever done is write this book, it messes with my brain every single day. And when I'm not writing about it, it's the only thing I'm thinking about. Far out, it just occupies so much of my brain and I need to get it done. You know, and I do do it as much as I can.

Theo Koutalos 1:10:17

I keep a notepad, like piece of paper in my pocket. And I'm always running down ideas, because I'll forget so quickly. And, it's funny how things happen, right? I really believe when something's meant to be, you'd almost don't have control in it. It's just gonna come out. I felt that way with some of the art that I've created, especially with Loshi It's just meant to be.

Theo Koutalos 1:10:20

I was meant to write the story. And it's weird I found myself diving into something that I had to do almost six months of insectology. To understand insects, all my characters are so many different insects. And I had to figure out like, names, create a language. And I wanted the language to represent certain insects and like names have to represent certain insects. And I was very influenced by my wife's African family. So I copied a lot of like African names. But there's a connection to everything. My book is like a big quilt of ideas, and connections, you know, and it's just meant to be, it just came out.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:34

Books tend to be there, they grab things from everywhere, and they reorder them in a way that's unique to your version of it. And then they create this thing with words, that's never been created before. Because there's an infinite number of ways to reorder words and to tell the story. And that's what you need. You need life experience to bring them all together, or you need an amazing imagination and creativity. I never had any of that. But now I've got life experience.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:50

Like a door has been open inside of you. And it's all coming out. It's like a gust of wind of ideas that just kind of get blown through a window. And you're just trapping it somehow. That's how I felt when I was writing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:43

And with your art. Is that your cover then? Is that your artistic work on the cover?

Theo Koutalos 1:12:49

Yeah I have a bunch of different stuff scattered. I have nowhere to put it. So it has to go on my walls until I sell stuff. I have separation anxiety. So I have a hard time selling my art.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:02

Wow. So you create it. You love it? And then you can't sell it? Because you love it. I want it.

Theo Koutalos 1:13:08

Yeah, yeah. Pretty bad for that. But my wife's made me sell some stuff. She's just like, we're running out of room. So I have, we have a university in our city McMaster University, and they have an Innovation Park. So I have a big piece there. And think it's there till October. And I'll probably sell that, unfortunately. But it's good to have the money.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:38

So you look sad about it?

Theo Koutalos 1:13:41

Yeah, I don't like selling my art. I get very attached to my art.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:47

Some people have a problem selling their art because they think it's no good or



who would want to buy it?

Theo Koutalos 1:13:54

Also having people have my art because I've sold about maybe 150 pieces. And I guess my biggest fear might be that it's going to be in somebody's closet. And not on a wall. I've always had that fear. But like, I see people posting pictures on Instagram and in the background. I see my painting and I'm like, okay, it's okay, it's good.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:29

Maybe you have to have terms and conditions with the sale of your art, if it ends up in a wardrobe, or in a cupboard, please pass it on to another person who's going to appreciate it.

Theo Koutalos 1:14:41

I can't live with that. That's brutal. Like somebody baring my book. Like what are you doing?

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:49

That's hilarious. Do you know that books do have to live on a bookshelf for some time though, after they get read, right?

Theo Koutalos 1:14:54

Yeah, of course.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:57

But you're looking at the book cover and you think that's a piece of art as well.

Theo Koutalos 1:15:01

Yeah, of course, I got published by book baby. And this took about a month of us, like, disagreeing and agreeing and they were getting very frustrated with me. And I'm like, it's got to be perfect. And then they gave me a different artist and he hit it out of the park. He did a great job.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:31

Okay, so you were advising on the cover?

Theo Koutalos 1:15:34

Absolutely, I'm like, it's got to be perfect. And book baby is owned by Amazon. Right? So it's still being self-published. But they do all the distribution. And they

get it in every single book store. Barnes and Noble target. Everybody's carried it right. So but Amazon's probably the number one way people I think buy books these days. I think most of my sales have been Amazon. And I think I've sold more digital copy than paper copy, which is normal. I think these days?

Theo Koutalos 1:15:45

Well, it's 10 bucks for a digital copy and 24 bucks for a paper copy. And I mean, everyone's got a tablet these days. And on your tablet you can carry around hundreds of books, and it doesn't get heavier.

Theo Koutalos 1:16:33

I've had people read my book on their cell phone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:39

Yeah. And is there an audio version coming out?

Theo Koutalos 1:16:43

Um, I'd like to get on that. Actually, I would, I would love to do that. I had a friend who actually passed away from COVID. Three years ago, his name was Nick Cordero, he was a Broadway actor. And he was supposed to do audio for my book. And it's really sad, because I really wanted him to do it. And so I will plan on doing that audibles contacted me. And they want me to kind of get going on picking a voice for the book. So I'll probably do that. Pretty soon.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:18

How come I heard about Nick Cordero when he passed away?

Theo Koutalos 1:17:22

It's all over the news he was everywhere. He is maybe one of the first celebrities to get COVID and pass away.

## **Theo Koutalos Publishing The Book**

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:34

Yeah, I did hear about it some time ago, that rang a bell when you said it. I know. We've spoken before. But that is sad. So this book, was it something that you pitched to Amazon? Was it something that you just wrote and then sent it to them? Was it finished when they saw it?

Theo Koutalos 1:18:01

I had a very hard time getting it published. I think because they couldn't really take my book and say, Yeah, this is a kid's book. Because there's war in it. There's battle scenes, and they're like, I don't think this is for kids. This is more for teens. And so like, publishing companies had a really hard time trying to figure out how are we gonna make money from this?

Theo Koutalos 1:18:32

And I'm like, how are you gonna get it, if you don't read it? They don't read your book, nobody reads your book. So I thought to myself, if I'm gonna get this published, I'm gonna have to do it myself. I'm gonna have to spend my own money. And I saw an advertisement for BookBaby.

Theo Koutalos 1:18:51

And I'm like, I'm gonna just do it. And it was probably the best decision. I would love to have been published by a company, but they're bombarded by submissions every day. So, I give myself six months of trying to get published. Even now, I'm getting emails of publishing companies denying me still because I went to so many.

Theo Koutalos 1:19:25

And now they're just like contacting me saying, we don't think this is the right fit for us. And I'm like, I'm already to published b\*\*\*\* so it's like, yeah, whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:38

Yeah. I know. There's so many people putting out really good work that these guys would have an unbelievable time picking the best book.

Theo Koutalos 1:19:49

They want to make money. And if it's not self-help, or it's not like something involved with like the woke culture, they don't wanna touch it. That's what's happening now. I was told by a couple do you think you would be smartest? Maybe you made some of your characters this way or that way? And I'm like, No, I don't know what it's like to be like that. So how am I gonna write that perspective? Then I'm lying.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:29

Yeah, then it's not your best work anyway, you can't write something that's not yours.

Theo Koutalos 1:20:35

It's not true. I don't want to do it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:38

I'm researching every day, I'm researching the different things that I need to understand and learn before I put it into a chapter. And sometimes I have to rewrite a paragraph three, four or five times because when I research it, I've still got the words that I read from the other person, or the interview that I heard in my head, and it doesn't go on the page. Like it can't go on the page first. It's not ethical, right? But also it's not me, it would not sound like me, if I did something that wasn't my words, or wasn't me or my thinking that I've got to attach my thinking process to it, and my expression to it. And if I just try and plug it in, it doesn't work.

Theo Koutalos 1:21:23

You know, what, I didn't have a hard time picking, like my story to have a female hero. I love female heroes. You know, and I could write the perspective of a girl because I have nieces, I have sisters, and like, I've been surrounded by strong women my whole life.

Theo Koutalos 1:21:46

So it was easy for me to write that. But I don't know what it's like for somebody to be trans or like gay, or because I don't have that in my life. So like, I can't write that perspective, because it wouldn't be lying. I was annoyed by them trying to hint at me to change characters, like gender. And I'm like, they're insects, I was getting kind of frustrated, and I'm just gonna do this myself, if I want it to be true to what I need it to be. And to get my message across. I need it to not be changed.

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:29

And what shits me about that is corporations taking advantage of a situation, or a movement or something like that and monetizing it. They're the worst at it, you know, it's like, come on, like seriously.

Theo Koutalos 1:22:44

I'm not into politics, I'm not into that stuff. I kind of stay away from that stuff. And if I like somebody, I liked them because of who they are. I don't care if they're this or that it doesn't bother me. And nothing really bothers me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:03

That's it. I was listening to a podcast by one of my favorite authors, a guy called Ryan Holiday. And he was talking about how after Mark Manson, who's a friend of his, wrote a book that was titled something about not giving a fuck, or you started to see a plethora of books coming out with the word fuck on the title. It's like originality, you know, these guys are going well.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:36

This is interesting. Somebody's had the audacity or the balls or the guts to put the word fuck on a title. And what we're going to do now is we're going to put it on every second book that comes out. You know, it's a bit silly, I think it's like that he was like, be original. Just come up with your title, whatever it is, and you don't have to capitalize on the movement of swear words on the book title.

Theo Koutalos 1:24:03

Publishers look at trends. They make money. That's how they make money, as they follow trends. So right now, there's trends going on. And eventually, it'll change and there'll be something else. And we live in North America. So we're bombarded by media. It's almost like we're drowning in American media constantly with the whole left and right, Trump and I know it's suffocating.

Bill Gasiamis 1:24:34

It's something that happens here in Australia. Other than local news. The majority of our news comes from the United States. It's just ridiculous. I swear to

Theo Koutalos 1:24:46

I swear to God, if there's another school shooting, I'm gonna lose my mind because for some reason, these people are constantly talking about guns. And it's not just gun, there's no help for mental health. That's the biggest problem that I see in the States right now, is that so many of these kids come from a horrible environment. And they don't get help. But they can go to Walmart and buy a gun.

Bill Gasiamis 1:25:20

I've got my views about that as well. But I don't want to upset anybody, because I'm not particularly about upsetting people's specific beliefs. Like if you enjoy using guns or whatever you do with them, like, that's fine, I've got no issue with that.

Theo Koutalos 1:25:36

My dad took me hunting, all the time. We grew up with guns. But my dad also was

in a war and used guns for different and he always didn't like, I wanted to join the army. When I was in high school. He would not let me go, he went on Monday, go to cadets, he wouldn't let me do anything. Because he didn't want me to have the problems that he had

Bill Gasiamis 1:26:01

The trauma.

Theo Koutalos 1:26:01

Trauma, right and understand more now, I kind of resented him because I really wanted to go. And now I get it, I get it. We didn't know what PTS was when we were young, he would just throw the couch across the room or smash the TV. And then we just have a brand new TV.

Theo Koutalos 1:26:20

You know, we didn't really understand PTS. And now I understand and I look back and I think like, oh my God, my dad has severe PTS. You know, and he saw a lot of bad stuff. Germany, the Italians were there, the Germans were there.

Bill Gasiamis 1:26:44

Yeah. And they fought against each other. It's tough, man. Those guys, they did a tough thing and that's the thing we need to learn from them. And I think it's great that we have, like I said, those role models that we can take lessons from, pass on to our kids, and then just accept what the cards we've been dealt with, and then try and make good with them try and play a good hand with those cards.

Theo Koutalos 1:27:10

I really value where we live. I think we're really lucky to live where we live. And I know that people don't really look at things that way, because they may not have that type of family history of having parents lived through war. Even my mom was very young, when Germany invaded.

Theo Koutalos 1:27:37

She remembers the bombings and the piles of bodies, so there's a different aspect to like living here for us, knowing our parents stories, and I see a lot of kids that are young, that just don't get it. And they just don't know how lucky they are.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:01

That's kind of a good thing, too.

Theo Koutalos 1:28:04

Yeah, the way it is.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:06

Yeah, and that's the thing I try my kids to see, and they're completely oblivious of all those types of things. They've lived in Australia, in Melbourne, and it's an amazing place to grow up and live. And I've never been exposed to any of that stuff. And my parents, and where my wife's parents came from, war torn Greece, they were born in the 40s. So they lived in poverty, and then they saw all this stuff that the kids, nobody should ever see, right.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:39

And then they come here, and they haven't got resources. And I'm struggling as 16 17 18 year old to relate to my dad or my mom, and they're raising me in the 1960s style of Greece, where they got raised. I mean, none of that shit applies to me. And I don't know how to tell you nicely. We live in Australia, it's a completely different world.

Bill Gasiamis 1:29:03

We don't have the trauma that you guys have. And I really struggled to relate to them for a really long time. Until somebody said to me, you know, "they did the best they could do with the resources they had available to them." And it's like, "wow, that's huge." But I let it affect me for too long, because I wasn't smart enough or educated enough about that stage to understand what their troubles were, how they struggled to bridge the gap between the culture that they left in the 60s, and that I was being raised in the 80s.

Bill Gasiamis 1:29:46

There was not only was there a generation gap, that was a cultural gap that they were trying to bridge and they had no idea how to bridge, so the only thing they taught us was what they knew which was, you know, the Greek church way, the family way, which I never regret. That's awesome.

Bill Gasiamis 1:30:03

We never hung out with other people because they couldn't relate to them. So they will always hang out with 25 million Greek people. And it was strange when I started to go out into the world at 16 17 18 and come across people that weren't Greek, and how they do things differently.

Theo Koutalos 1:30:21

I've kinda rebelled against it. I didn't want Greek friends. I didn't want to go to church anymore. I didn't want that lifestyle. I was kind of like, I don't want to go to church anymore. I want to hang out with people who are into Metallica, Guns n' Roses, that's what I wanted, you know. And then once 91 hit and Nirvana got big and the whole grunge thing. I was so anti Greek man, I was coloring my hair blue.

## Theo Koutalos Rebelling Against The Culture



Theo Koutalos 1:30:49

So I really rebelled against it for my younger age. But as I got older in my 20s, then we started going to the Greek festivals again. I started understanding my dad a bit. Like, honestly, I must have been the only eight-year-old that I knew was busting out bullets out of rabbits. Because we went hunting, none of my friends were gutting rabbits at eight years old. I guarantee you. I was the only one of my friends that know that smell, that gutting smell.

Bill Gasiamis 1:31:26

Yeah, man, that would be unique for sure.

Theo Koutalos 1:31:29

And my parents never let us sleepover in anybody's house. I wasn't allowed. And really, I have two older sisters. And they weren't allowed out until they're 21. I was going out till four or five in the morning in high school because my parents were exhausted. I was going to Lollapalooza. I was going to raves. They're tired. I



just lucked out. You know, I was so lucky.

Bill Gasiamis 1:32:01

And the girls did get treated differently even in our family. Not in my family because it was two boys, but in the extended family that had girls, girls really did it tough, especially the firstborn.

Theo Koutalos 1:32:17

Oh, yeah. Very different

Bill Gasiamis 1:32:19

Overprotective, not trusting, they used to make them feel guilty over just being normal human beings liking boys or putting a poster on their wall or all sorts of things. They struggled so much to break the old 1960s mentality and what shit me the most. And I still raise every once in a while is that my parents in their teenage years or early 20s left Greece, and everyone behind came to Australia with nothing, nobody to tell them what to do, how to do it, where to sleep, who to sleep with. They got no one looking over their shoulder. And then they did the exact opposite to us. They just went next level.

Theo Koutalos 1:33:21

So true. At that time. You either went to Australia or you went to Canada. And by the time my dad was ready to leave. Australia had closed their border. So my dad ended up going to Canada. And all I remember my dad saying one of the first thing he did, was he went to the farmers market because he wanted to try all the food that he'd never seen before.

Theo Koutalos 1:33:52

So he ate a banana for the first time, he had all these melons for the first time. And he was in heaven. He was like food heaven. He's like, I didn't eat lamb or goat for years. I just ate steak and chicken. It was like a dream come true. Oh, so funny to listen to his stories.

Bill Gasiamis 1:34:19

I'm gonna tell you a story of my dad. This is so far off the podcast topic, but doesn't matter because I think people will appreciate our stories. So my dad arrives in Australia as a young kid in his 20s and his mate say to him, "let's go hunting." So Melbourne is a very small city back then, maybe there's a couple of million people in the entire city. And there's tram services.

Bill Gasiamis 1:34:42

So the Trams run throughout the Melbourne Central Business District and into the outer suburbs in some, some lines run into the outer suburbs. So he gets on the tram with a rifle. And he just gets in and walks on the tram and sits down goes to buy a ticket from the conductor. And then sure enough, a couple of stops down the road. Two police officers enter the tram, and they approach him. And they asked him in English.

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:17

“What are you doing? Where you’re going?” but he doesn’t speak English. So they’re pointing at the gun and he’s trying to explain to them what he’s doing, where he’s going with a gun, right? So what he does, he sticks his fingers on the top of his head to imitate a rabbit. And he starts waving his fingers to say “I’m going rabbit hunting.”

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:50

They grab him off the tram, and they throw him in the back of the police car, take him down to the local station to interrogate him. But they’re getting nowhere because they can’t communicate with him. Because he speaks Greek only, you know. So they get this other Greek cop to come in and do the translation.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:08

And he reckons the Greek cop ripped shit through him. Where do you think you are? In the village? You can’t just take a gun onto a tram, and the rest of it, he was dumbfounded and devastated anyhow. Because now they had taken him to a police station somewhere where he didn’t know where he was. He couldn’t get home, he didn’t know how to get home.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:29

So he made the coppers drop him off back to his house. And that’s how he got away with it. And he never ended up going hunting with the guys that day. And he has a story to tell. So that’s what they were dealing with, you know, so I relate to a lot of the stuff that you’re saying and the difficulties that they went through. And that’s why what we spoke about earlier, you know about your wife, refugees, and all that kind of stuff, they come to another country, they come for a better life, they try different things.

Bill Gasiamis 1:37:01

They don't get it right all the time. But, man, some of them have been through hard times. And I think compassion is such a cool tool to use to sort of help people just get through, you know, the tough stages and, and settled into something completely different than that they're not experienced with or they're not used to.

Theo Koutalos 1:37:22

My dad came here and did a lot of different jobs. My mom came here and did different jobs. And they didn't have the education. They learned these jobs and made it work. You know, and I don't know, it's funny, like my dad was a very, very, very intelligent man. He didn't have the education to prove it. But you can give my dad any math equation. And he got it like that.

Theo Koutalos 1:37:52

He just had that that intelligence naturally. And almost makes you wonder what would have happened with him if he did go to university and he didn't grow up in the war. And he wasn't a soldier. You know, because my dad could like build a car with his hands.

Theo Koutalos 1:38:10

My dad roofed the house himself. My Dad fixed everything himself. He would never pay somebody to fix something ever. You know, he did his own oil changes himself. He did everything himself. You know, and he never eat at restaurants. If him and my mom didn't cook it, he wouldn't eat it. He lived here for so many years and he never had a Big Mac. Like he's just so strict in his ways, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 1:38:41

And it's a great thing to emulate to a point because you can see how healthy he was for such a long time right? He had longevity because they ate clean food that was cooked at home it was always probably fresh ingredients. And they never outsourced their nutrition to other corporations who don't have your best interests at heart. They just want to sell you a Big Mac and convenience.

Theo Koutalos 1:39:06

She prefers tomatoes were always growing in the backyard. It's just the way that they lived.

Intro 1:39:14

Yeah. And how much time they seem to have time to do everything these people. There never was not enough time to do the backyard. My parents entire backyard

is a garden. Now that we're not living at home, they just converted it all into a veggie patch. And they're in there every single day, all the year, every season. We're always getting fresh fruit and vegetables given to us so we can take home and eat. And it's a great thing to see and try to emulate although I don't succeed.

Theo Koutalos 1:39:55

I'm not as good as my dad either.

Bill Gasiamis 1:39:59

It's time consuming. Theo man, it's been really awesome getting to chat to you, learning about your story and sharing the things that we have in common. I really appreciate it. I love the fact that you got here, and you're doing what you're doing. And, that you've overcome what you've overcome. You've written an amazing book, you got a kid on the way, man I look forward to following your journey and making sure that you're releasing awesome things and doing great stuff. And it's great to connect with you, man.

Theo Koutalos 1:40:38

Yeah, man, thank you. I appreciate this. This has been great. I love learning about you too. And I love having what we have in common. And it's great to actually talk about it and talk about something that somebody else has experienced, because I think it's easier to talk about anything related to stroke and surgery, ywith somebody who knows what you've gone through, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 1:41:08

Yeah. And that's why I put it out there on Instagram a little while ago, why I said If you're somebody that's had a stroke. Please reach out, because I'd love to interview you just thinking that nobody would respond I didn't really think that I would get a lot of responses. But I got 30 or something responses, which is more than I expected, so I became overwhelmed. But I'm good with it now. That's what I'm hoping it's going to do is I'm hoping that it's going to allow people to have the courage to reach out to, if not me, somebody else and say, you know, I've had a stroke and can we talk about it, because I know that you might have had one or whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 1:41:58

I think that's what the purpose is. That's why I did it. Because I needed that. And I wasn't finding them in my backyard in my next door. So I just did that. And the

world's pretty small now we can bridge massive spans of ocean and land just with Zoom, you know, so reach out. You know, there's plenty of people doing podcasts these days that are talking about these types of things, and they're always looking for guests.

Bill Gasiamis 1:42:23

So if you reach out to them, they're gonna say, yes, they're gonna want to hear your story. Because every story is unique. It's worth telling. And it does something for you, when you tell it like it feels good when you tell your own story, and somebody listens. And then you receive an email and somebody says, shit. Thanks so much for sharing your story. You know, it made me feel like I'm not alone or whatever. That's what it's about for me. Be well, thank you so much.

Theo Koutalos 1:42:54

You too thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:42:57

Well, thanks again for joining us on today's episode, I hope you enjoyed the chat with me and Theo about all things stroke, and then you've got a little bit of an insight as to what it's like to be A first generation Australian, and in his case, a first generation Canadian from a Greek heritage.

Bill Gasiamis 1:43:21

It's unbelievable how much people that are, in my situation, and in Theo's situation have in common about their upbringing, and all the things that they have learned from their parents. And I find that that's a very common theme. A lot of those themes are very common in discussions that I have with people from all backgrounds that have parents who immigrated from their home country to a new country for a better life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:43:50

Now to learn more about my guests, including links and to download a full transcript of the entire interview, you can go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes). If you'd like to support this podcast, the best way to do it is to leave a five-star review, and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes, and Spotify.

Bill Gasiamis 1:44:10

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. Sharing the show with family and friends and social media will make it possible for people who may need this type of content to find it easier.

Bill Gasiamis 1:44:31

And that may make a massive difference to someone that's on the road to recovery after their own experience with stroke. So if you would do that, that would be really amazing and fantastic. Thanks again for being here and listening. I really appreciate you and I am looking forward to bring with you on the next episode.

Intro 1:44:50

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

Intro 1:45:07

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Intro 1:45:30

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Intro 1:45:45

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emergency number immediately for emergency assistance or go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Intro 1:46:09

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