

# Recovery from PFO - Heather Leigh Whitley

## How a PFO (patent foramen ovale) caused a stroke.

Heather Whitley is a mom of 5, a midwife, and a ski coach who experienced a stroke that was most likely related to a PFO (**patent foramen ovale**)

Links mentioned during the show:

Instagram

Facebook

[www.segolilymidwife](http://www.segolilymidwife.com)

Jack Wolfson

PHQ9,

### Highlights:

**1:10** What Happened To Heather

**7:27** What is a PFO

**12:18** My brain needs to shut down.

**15:54** I was no longer able to be empathetic

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Transcript:

Heather Whitley 0:00

Part of my brain died in the emotional region; It was evident because what I thought was happening was that I would be having a not like two months ago.

This would have been very difficult for me just talking about the stroke in the event, the emotional, either somebody giving me some dynamic information about themselves or me relaying something active; it was almost painful. , I felt like the neurons had to try to find new pathways going over dead space. And I had dizzy spells where I felt like I would pass out or get sick. And I had to, like, lay down. And that was it would happen daily for the first week or two, then it went to weekly. And then it was very sporadic when it happened. When I cleaned up my diet, I noticed that the process progressed much quicker because of what I found through you—the healing.

Bill 0:51

Yeah.

Intro 0:54

This is recovery after a stroke with Bill Gasiamis. It is helping you go from where you are to where you'd rather be.

Bill 1:01

Heather, welcome to the podcast.

Heather 1:04

Thanks. Thanks for having me on.

Bill 1:06

Can you tell me briefly about what happened to you at the beginning?

## **A PFO Caused The Stroke**

Heather Whitley

Sure. So I went skiing. I'm a ski coach at Snowbird here in Utah. I had been on the mountain with ten 11-year-olds and was fine. And I had this euphoric moment on the hill; I've listened to some of your podcasts. And it's been interesting hearing different people's stories and what they attribute to a stressful life, drug use, or other things. And you know, it was interesting because I don't have any vices or predisposing health conditions.

But when I think back to the 20 minutes before the event, I had this kind of euphoria, where I was just like came out and just beautiful VISTA and this

beautiful view. And I was like, life is excellent. And I'm so happy right now. And it was like the antithesis of what you would expect somebody you know, who would have a stroke would have something stressful going on. But I had the opposite of that. So I go down to the coaches race building our locker room, and I'm de-booting and have a little bit of a dizzy spell and some funny vision.

But I didn't think much of it. But thinking back, it was probably about 10 minutes before the stroke. And it was significant, probably, but then it passed. And I walked to my car, chatting with people along the way carrying my skis. And I got in my vehicle. I don't often talk on the phone in my car, but I had to speak to my 13-year-old daughter, who was coming off another mountain. I was a mom organizing logistics, and the traffic from a hill Canyon was prolonged. And it would take a while, and Canyon trying to say, I'll call you when I get out of the canyon, and it came out.

Hello, a little below my speech coCanyon only went, and I could see my left arm floating across the car, but I had no control over it, no sensation of it. And I was terrified. And my brain was working. Okay, so I kept telling myself, let's try that again. I tried to get the sentence out, and it wouldn't come. It was just a garbled speech. And she thought I had terrible service. But thinking back, she said, clearly something was going on. And so I hung up and thought I was having a stroke.

I'm in the healthcare field. And I guess I was like, there's no way I'm having a stroke. But I think I'm having a stroke, and I got my passenger window down and honked, and by then, my speech had returned because the whole episode was like 45 seconds, probably. And I flagged down the car next to me, and I just said I'm having trouble speaking and lost my left arm. And it was a cardiologist in the car next to me.

Bill 3:45

Well done,

Heather Whitley 3:47

It was a couple visiting Utah from Washington, DC, and she was a cardiologist. So I could pull over in front of them in traffic. And my speech was back when she got to my window. But I had related to her. Something just happened, and my left arm was still bizarre. And an ambulance was there within two or five minutes. And she

said. You don't look like you're having a life-threatening stroke. My face wasn't drooping, or I was talking entirely cognitively. I was aware. But I was also like intuitively aware something had just happened.

So I rode the ambulance down the canyon, and my vitals were fine. My blood sugar was refined. And they said altitude dehydratCanyonnd you probably haven't eaten enough today. And I said, Yeah, why don't I go home? So I never went to the hospital; they dropped me off at the bottom fire station, and I had my son pick me up and go home, and I didn't feel right. I just knew something happened. I was sitting at home an hour later, and it felt wrong. And my left arm started getting weird again. And I felt nauseous.

And I know as a clinician myself, like, often one thing isn't too concerning. But it's two things: when you have two clinical presentations of something, no matter the condition, you have something that needs medical attention. So I had my son Take me to the hospital, and an MRI showed within half an hour of getting there that there was a moderate CVA in the right frontal lobe.

Bill 5:22

Wow, dramatic.

Heather Whitley 5:23

Yes.

Bill 5:25

What's scary is how dangerous it is when somebody makes assumptions about what's happening to somebody else. And I know it happens all the time. And I'm not; I don't want to give anyone a hard time; I get it. Because you know we are human firstly, secondly, we want to think that nothing is wrong, whether we're attending to somebody who's got some symptoms. Still, we also have more, you know, paramedics would have so many people they need to see daily, so you can understand how they come to conclusions.

Heather Whitley 5:57

Well, and I just don't fit the clinical picture. Somebody struggling like that, I went and saw them a couple of weeks later and reported on what had happened. So I visited the fire station, connected with them, and showed them the images of my MRI, and it was a neat experience to reconnect with them like that.

Bill 6:19

How about with a stroke? You hardly ever hear about the good luck stories that occur. You pulled the window down, and there was a cardiologist on the other side of the window.

Heather Whitley 6:30

It was amazing. It was amazing.

Bill 6:32

Did you guys connect after that? Did you manage to find out who that person was?

Heather Whitley 6:36

I tried tracking her down, but I couldn't. I don't know if Yobutan calls 911 and gets records of who called. It would be nice to find her, but I never did. She's a cardiologist from Washington, DC, and I did some sleuthing on G and Google and came up to Dead End. So yeah, I haven't found her yet.

Bill 6:53

Fair enough,

Just before we go, 91,1 is the number of people who can't be in an emergency in the US. In Australia, it's 000. And in a different country, it might be something different. So, anyone experiencing something weird, don't call 911 if you're not in America or triple zero if you are not in Australia. So Heather, how was the time after that? So you've experienced this stroke, and then you go through a process of working on it. What was that like? What happened after that?

Heather Whitley 7:27

So I was at a small city hospital when they diagnosed me, and they, as soon as the MRI came in, shipped me by ambulance pretty quickly to a big tertiary, the Stroke Center of Utah at Intermountain Healthcare. I was in the stroke unit and probably the healthiest person in the stroke unit. But I was there for four days while they had me on bed alarms that if I sat up or got out of bed for the first 24 hours, a nurse would be called. I couldn't, I couldn't do anything unsupervised. I wasn't allowed to have water unsupervised; I had to have physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy come in to clear me to have jello.

So interesting. I was walking around the hall; I had different mini agility things to

see if my balance was still intact and if I could clear the first round of all that stuff within 24 hours. But I guess they were monitoring for another one coming. But also, um, checking my body. So I had scans on my looking for deep vein thrombosis, often in women; I have five children. So women who have had a lot of babies are women middle-aged; that's one of the first places they look, but they say those clots will usually travel to the lungs, not the brain.

They said the shape of my stroke on imaging and the MRI indicated it was heart in origin. And it was like a wedge-shaped pattern at the edema or whatever was presented on MRI. So they stuck. They did an external echocardiogram and saw no problems with my heart. But then they sent a camera down my esophagus under some anesthesia. And they blew bubbles in an IV. It's called a bubble study. And in that, they found a minor, tiny hole called a PFO, which is the most striking thing.

## What is a PFO?

Every human baby is born with a foramen ovale, a little functional hole exists to support the baby in utero. And then most people will close theirs, at birth. But about 25 to 30% of the population does not close it after birth. And they think that in an otherwise average healthy young person who strokes or has a heart attack, they think they flow the blood around enough to form a clot, which is pretty standard for our bodies to develop, they're sent to the lungs broken up a little bit. One passed through the hole and then went up to my brain. So they're like 80% sure is what this is, is was it that caused it because I don't have any other risk factors. So I was like, Well, I was a B-minus student.

So I guess I'll take the 80%. And so they made a plan to plug up the hole in my heart, which they do while I was still there, and then neurology shift change said no, let's send her home and give her like three weeks for her brain to settle down and then bring her back in and do that. And that's why I agree with that. I think that was a good call. Because the brain trauma from the stroke was, even though I have no long-term deficit, it was pretty remarkable, like what I experienced in healing that concussion.

Bill 10:43

Yeah, yeah, it is pretty traumatic. Anytime anything happens to the brain, it

presents differently. And it challenges people very differently. So, what were the challenges that you experienced when you went home?

Heather Whitley 10:54

So when I checked out, the neurologist described the right frontal lobe, which is the emotional no region of the brain, specifically executive functioning. So

Intro 11:05

If you've had a stroke and are in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be; you're likely to have many questions, like how long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things. But because you've never had a stroke, you probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may miss out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you find yourself in that situation, stop whining and Head to [RecoveryAfterStroke.com](https://RecoveryAfterStroke.com), where you can download a guide to help you. It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke. These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke; they'll help you better understand your condition, and they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. Head to the website now, [RecoveryAfterStroke.com](https://RecoveryAfterStroke.com), and download the guide; it's free.

Heather Whitley 12:18

The venue Head gave me when I was discharged was that some who had depression experienced this. Some people experience some personal changes. And some people might with me basic social cues. And I thought I was terrified of that and what that would mean, and I'm single, and thought, well, I'm going to be single a lot longer. But I also notified my kids to watch out for these things. But I also had a moment when I was receiving the news. And in the days that followed, I was like, no, that will not be my story.

## **Min Needed To Shut Down**

And I told him too, like I felt so injured in my brain while in the hospital. I mean, I didn't; I'm if you've seen me; I'm on social media and love connecting with people that way. You know, I don't mind watching movies. But I just felt like I was in a dark room. I knew my brain needed a shutdown without anyone talking to me. And I told the doctor I was afraid to read and watch him. But I was scared to

enjoy and get anything going in my brain. And he said We want you doing those things.

And it made a lot of sense. Because what I felt happened was part of my brain died, The emotional region was evident because what I think was happening is that I would be having a not like two months ago; this would have been very difficult for me just talking about the stroke and the event, the emotional, like either somebody like giving me some dynamic information about themselves or me relaying something active, it was almost painful. Like, I felt like the neurons had to find new pathways that we're going over dead space.

And I had dizzy spells where I felt like I would pass out or get sick. And I had to, like, lay down. And that was it would happen daily for the first week or two, then it went to weekly. And then it was very sporadic when it happened. And when I cleaned up my diet, because of what I found through you. I noticed that the process progressed much quicker—the healing.

Bill 14:19

Yeah, this is the beauty. This is the beauty of it: We can support the healing. And mostly, it's just by taking stuff out of our diet rather than what we put in. And the thing we need to take out is an inflammatory food. I'm doing some interviews with two with a new nutritionist and a personal trainer who are a team. They married the Turner from Australia, and our five episodes will be about five reasons to quit sugar. The reasons you must quit caffeine, gluten, and dairy: We will discuss dairy and alcohol.

So, they will be the things we talk about because they are the things that are inflammatory to the body under normal circumstances. And when you have a healing brain, they are inflammatory to the brain. But on a far grander scale, because it's under distress and it's trying to come down, and it's trying to heal, and it's trying to create new pathways. And what you mentioned, the pain you are experiencing, is valid. It's true; it's a pain; your brain hurts, and people can't understand when you tell them that.

But often, when I get overwhelmed with information, I just shut down my brain and say, " No, no more, I can't do this anymore. I need a break. Yeah, maybe do something else. And physically, it doesn't matter what I do to try and make it happen. It's not going to happen. That's it. And having that conversation with the



person on your other side is challenging because, thankfully, they didn't get it.



## **I Was No Longer Able To Be Empathetic**

Heather Whitley 15:54

I was concealing it from everybody because I had to support my family. So, I was back at work as a midwife and a ski coach. And I remember standing on the mountain talking to one of my girlfriends, and she's just telling me this very average benign story of her daughter getting into the minor Fender Bender car accident; nobody was hurt or anything, just the legal drama that was going on with that. And I think my brain was trying to find empathy for her. And all I had was a voice inside my head that said,

You got to get out of this conversation like you have. And I'm sitting there smiling, like nodding, thinking of an escape plan from this fundamental conversation that has happened so many times. As a midwife, I do a lot of counseling and prenatal work with pregnant women. And I would be sitting in my chair, and the voice inside my head, while they were talking, was, you're going to pass out like, it was just so heavy, like basic stuff that is usually I'm wired for felt so incredibly, like almost life-threatening rich for me to deal with that. It was I was afraid it was going to be like that much longer. But, um, I have improved. ; I would have struggled to discuss this with you two months ago. So yeah, I've come a long way.

# Removing Inflammatory Foods

Bill 17:05

Yeah. So what happens when you take those inflammatory foods out of the diet, including carbs? When I talk about carbs. I'm not talking about veggies, fresh stuff.

Heather Whitley 17:15

No yeah,

Bill 17:15

Processed stuff, right?

Heather Whitley 17:16

Wheat

Bill 17:17

When you take that out, your cortisol levels drop because those foods increase your cortisol level, which is your stress level. Cortisol is challenging to the body because it keeps you at an elevated heart rate and blood pressure. So you're just overworking. You're in a state of stress. And when you're staying there chronically, it's no good for the body. But when the brain is there, it has this, especially after stroke recovery. This spikes how it affects people and affects them dramatically.

Yeah,

Heather Whitley 17:17

for sure.

Bill 17:50

So when you take out the foods that cause spikes in blood sugar, and therefore heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol, when you take those out, then the body doesn't have to make these rapid responses to get rid of blood sugar and pump it out of the blood. What it's doing is just staying in a natural state of calm and ease. And then it doesn't release so much cortisol and doesn't have that draining effect on the adrenal glands. And it allows the brain to take more energy from the body to heal, work, and process. That's what the brain does when it is in distress. It needs more of your energy resources to get going to do that simple task, which

was before very easy to write a note with a pen, and now it's not.

Heather Whitley 18:48

right. And what's too bad is the hospital stroke unit is serving you like all the carbs and all the gluten and you know sugary stuff and pies and like, you know, an in my initially I'm an athlete, and I work with elite athletes. Athletes already know what you are saying about healing, whether it's an ankle injury, a knee, or this inflammation and diet. A naturopath physician friend explained to me the science you just did about why the brain is extra sensitive to those things even more than others' bodies, which is why we feel it so much more acutely when we indulge in that stuff when we're trying to heal.

Bill 19:26

Yeah, and when we're, quote-unquote, normal when we haven't had a stroke, and we notice headaches and fatigue. And we see all these things. That's the only way the brain can give you feedback. Because the brain doesn't feel pain per se, it doesn't have sensory neurons that transmit pain back to those areas that tell us about pain. So the brain doesn't feel discomfort like the belly does when we eat some food that bloats us or gives us a tummy ache. The brain doesn't do that. But it does represent migraines; it does represent other things.

So, for people listening who haven't experienced a stroke and are wondering what we're talking about and how you might notice that your brain hasn't been impacted when you're perfectly healthy. That is how you see it. And you'll find that if you take those things out of your diet, you'll see a real difference in every aspect of your healthy being and how your body operates. So I'm glad that you saw that. Were you getting people to bring you food to the hospital at some point?

Heather Whitley 20:26

Oh, well, when I got home, I had weeks. It's a big Mormon community in Utah and the Mormon food chain. It was great because my kids got everything, but it's always lasagna and pasta. And it wasn't until I connected with you, and I think you showed me the Paleo cardiologist, that you referred that book to me. Okay, somebody referred to me as the Paleo cardiologist, which is like everything you're talking about; it's a cardiologist who married a chiropractor who is very aware of all these things we're talking about.

And he wrote boo. I'm about two-thirds the way through it on the science behind

some of this, and you know, why everybody it's not specific to stroke but preventing or minimizing cardiac or brain, you know, events by eating a little more paleo which is, you know, animal products are okay, but yeah, cut out the sugar cut out that the processed, you know, the farmed stuff, and

Bill 21:24

yeah,

Heather Whitley 21:25

I like that. That's a great read. You may enjoy it too.

Bill 21:29

Yeah, I think I will. We'll share that link to the book in the show notes.

Heather Whitley 21:33

Yes, By jack

Bill 21:34

at the end of the podcast.

Heather Whitley 21:35

Yes. Jack Wolfson?

Bill 21:37

Yeah. Awesome. So you're so you're now how far off your stroke. How long ago did that happen?

Heather Whitley 21:47

Let's see, today is a

Bill 21:49

10. May in Australia.

Heather Whitley 21:52

Right. So we're right. And I have three months. So I had it February 8, March, April, and May. So precisely three months went out. And I had the Surgery two months ago, in early March. So, you know,

Bill 22:07

Let's talk about the Surgery; what was the Surgery for?

# Heart Surgery

Heather Whitley 22:10

So, the Surgery was to plug up that hole in the heart to prevent another one, hopefully. They said that if I did not plug the hole up, I had a 6% recurrence rate with all nice statiexcellents and health pictures. In the first year or two, I'd have a 6%. And that was too high for me even though they were only 80%. Sure, th, sure what caused it. So I agreed to the Surgery where they went up through my groin via a catheter and inserted a three-centimeter titanium wrapped in a gore-tex device to plug up this PFO, the hole in my heart. And I read a lot of medical research on it. The results are good. Promising has been doing it for 20 years, and I feel great.

I felt oddly incredibly average a few days after. And then, about the fourth or fifth day, I started having strange arrhythmia, and I called the doctor, and they said, Yeah, your heart just figured out there's a foreign object in there. So, I had to commit to this way of eating because my heart was now sensitive to inflammatory foods. I'm not a drinker, but I went out and had a potent cocktail one night. And about 48 hours later, I had such an event. And you know, between my heart and my brain, I almost went back to the hospital to make sure I was okay. And I just said, you know, zero of that, like I just had too much going on, you know, to be messing around the brain, lth again like that. So yeah, I'm ensuring I'm on blood thinners for another couple of weeks; I think they pull me off of all that. And I have all my followTechnically I'll be done with all like out of the woods, completely, seemingly unscathed,

Bill 23:55

seemingly unscathed. How about emotionally?

Heather Whitley 23:58

I mean, the first several weeks or maybe a couple of months, I lived in fear of, like, happening again because it was so wild that it happened. I mean, I just said No, no, no cholesterol, no blood pressure, no family history of this. No, I'm not a drinker. I, you know, my stress, like, maybe I'm in denial of how much pressure I'm under; I'm a single mom of five kids.

And you know, I'm always trying to, like, make, you know, support us better. And I think there is some underlying stress I've been trying to get in touch with and

work through and accept that I do have some pressure, and I'm fine, I'm fine. So I'm really like I've worked, ed on like, I bought a Watch, which I want to talk about because they do EKGs and test atrial fibrillation, which is a risk to this Surgery I had, also from inflammatory food eating and stuff. But it also tells you the time to breathe. And, you know, I try to set five minutes aside daily when I meditate. And it sounds silly, but I think it does help me shut my brain off for a few minutes.

Bill 25:12 Let me tell you what, yeah, breathing media does, it does. So when you take all that food, or those foods we spoke about, out of the diet while healing, meditation impacts that in your body positively; by doing the same thing, it decreases your blood pressure and cortisol levels. And it allows your body and brain to shut down for a bit.

And to go into a space where it's just being rather than doing. And when it's being, it's allowing for. As the stress and the cortisol decrease, your blood vessels change in shape, so they become less constricted. Therefore, blood flow occurs better.

Your lungs expand more, so you get more oxygen into your blood. Therefore, you're getting more healing oxygen into that part of the brain. So many physiological things change when you meditate and focus on your breathing that five minutes can have a massive positive impact on the rest of your day.

And then not only that, if you find yourself later in the day, needing another opportunity to rest and de-stress, doing another five-minute meditation from the reminder from your, you know, your Apple Watch will also help take it to the next level.

So then what that does is that it leads to a significantly more peaceful, better evening, which allows you to sleep better and heal better during sleep. So, if I suggest to many people who asked me about meditation, it is much more peaceful right now, anytime. But if you want to get your five minutes, do it five minutes before bed, whether sitting up or lying in your bed, and you've got a track in the background that will turn off on its own. So in case you are asleep, you don't have to wake your switch it off.

It puts you into that space where you will go into those brainwave patterns that will support better sleep and healing overnight. And when you wake up, you'll be

more refreshed because you'll have slept better. So whoever's listening and always will meditation was wooed oo, once is now showing that it's not we. The people who came up with reflection thousands of years ago are onto something. So, consider it.

Heather Whitley 27:49

Yeah, I think it's powerful. And I've never really done it before. So, I feel committed to it now.

Bill 27:54

Yeah, it costs nothing; you can get meditation and guided meditation tracks from YouTube or Spotify. That's yours. So it doesn't cost anything, you can get it on your phone, it's simple to

## **Floatation Tanks**

Heather Whitley 28:10

On that note, one of my birth clients had gifted me one floating saltwater session, and those pods would be seen.

Bill 28:18

I've done that.

Heather Whitley 28:21

And I was afraid I was afraid to do it. I KNEW I WASN'T READY when I first offered it because it was too floating saltwater sessions. And then I finally did it in the last couple of weeks, and it was perfect. It was in they use it a lot for PTSD survivors. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. And I thought for this type of thing, it was paid for. I knew when I was ready when I wasn't quite prepared for that. And it was like an hour of meditation while floating in 1000 pounds of salt and 10 inches of water.

Bill 28:57

Yeah, bliss, just bliss. I've done that a few times. And it's to get out. You hear the little bell, and it's time to get out. It's like, have I already been here? It just seems to go. So quick. Yeah, I love it. People are doing that. How did the stroke that you experienced affect the five children? What was that like for them?

Heather Whitley 29:24

Well, let me preface that by saying, at first, I was alone, so I have one at college across the country, and she was distraught and wanted to fly home. And then my next oldest is a 17-year-old boy who's pretty ill-equipped to handle this stuff but pretty good at managing everything at home for me. But, um, I was sitting there waiting for the MRI results. And of course, as the busy mom, I'm thinking about everything I must do the next day; I'm talking to friends, like I believe I'm Going to ski tomorrow, like in my brain, in total denial while waiting for the MRI to return. And me, while, intuitively, I knew I was almost having a breakdown that I was sitting in the hospital alone with no spouse, like waiting to be told I had a stroke.

It was emotional because when they told me I had a stroke, I had a breakdown, like I completely broke down crying, and the male doctor didn't cope with that very well, not much bedside manner. He was like, are you okay? Right now, I was like, Yes, but as a woman, I'm processing what you've just said to me and what that means for my life and my children. And you know, I, I had a moment where I was, it highlighted my single status. And it has been nice to have my partner, which I don't have, but I am a future partner there.



So it's my kids were great. I mean, they know, the hatches were buttoned down, I've got another driver in the house, they were, but I think there was overwhelming because my 17-year-old son was texting his sister in the middle of the night, mommy just had a stroke. And I don't know what to do. And she thought maybe I died like there was chaos about communicating what was happening at home. But then I was able to remember that I was okay. They have



to run some tests and keep me for observation. So I could be pretty highly still functioning, considering what just happened. And they could see me in the hospital.

So I think we all panicked about their dads across the country, just not like in the picture. So they were on their own for a few days and did fine. But I think we all were lying and needles about what the long-term or cons could be in my mind; even the long-term that moment, I was like, my minding to go into my mind? You thought a long time, but I'm almost married after a long time. A.e time, even if I was married to the father of my children. And you know, I thought about how he would have married; he would have done very well.

But would have obstructed my healing by worrying about what he was thinking and feeling about me. And it was a blessing his thoughts and feelings except for my kids to like, deal with, cry about, or win a gift in his would mean for them. I just thought it was me alone dealing with this. And as scary as that sounds, it was super empowering. Because I could do my thing and get with the program, heal, and not worry about somebody else feeling like they have to take care of me. And so, in reflection, I think it was how it worked out.

Bill 32:41

Yeah, I can relate to that, too. Not in precisely what your method, but I did have to worry about what people believe going through; I was very highly functioning in the first situation, the first instance, and I was walking around, and the doctors and the nurses were going but supposed to be lying down bed, whatever I was, well, well, maybe I don't feel like I should. So I'm not going to be up and about made a better for my parents, my brother, my wife, and my children who were 12. And, you know, 16 at the time. So that helped.

And I remember the most significant challenge I had when going into Surgery. My brother was handling the emo state of eSurgery around us. We were a Greek family, and Greek families and ru. Surgery hand that runs high, there is a very calm, level-headed Greek panda. And expand significantly when it's abolevel-headedall that type of thing, they don't cope. So, who expands significantly into Surgery, I had to be the best version of myself to show them that this is under control, although it's shown they can operate onward the brain, be reasonable. However, I washownantly could limit wilonwardsu know in myself, stopping the alcohol, stopping this and stopping that not, smoking, and not doing all these

things. And when they saw me, I had lost some weight because I looked after myself better. And the state I was in when they saw me going into Surgery, I think that would have helped them quite a bit. But I became so dramatic because my mother-in-law passed away three weeks before my Surgery. So then we had to deal with the funeral and all the challenges that crs.

And then the parties of promoter-in-law the doit ts of death, brain surgery, and drama. So it's such a burden on the person going through the stroke. If people are listening, you haven't gone through a stroke, you know, somebody t, bracken care, and state. I told my wife, and I didn't, but I wanted to tell her that I wouldn't let person X, Y, or Z come and see me. But I couldn't because she's not the kind who would say that to them, especially if they're not part of her immediate family.

Heather Whitley 35:20

Yeah.

Bill 35:21

Because they were tough to deal with when I was in the hospital, I can relate to your statement; your children stepped up because as much as we think they're incapable of doing anything, they fill all the gaps, do everything they need, and are resilient. How have you spoken to them about it since, and are you incapable of doing anything strenuous for my children about it for a while with me? , and are now. But it's been many years for me, seven years, how have they been since?

Heather Whitley 35:58

Well, I'm a super transparent person. When I went through my divorce, I broke all the rules and was utterly transparent about my stuff and their dad's stuff, and they came out of that feeling close to both of us and knowing we're both just human beings and make mistakes, you know, so like, I've always been transparent. So they were part of this with me. And I put them in charge of watching me, like with my missing social cues or, you know, noticing little changes about me, and I was like, if you guys see something, you need to tell me because you might see before I do. Depreslly with, you know, I deal with postpartum depression with clients; I've experienced it with one of my kids, you know, the person suffering, it is the last person to see it, it's usually the people closest to them that will know something's not quite right. They're not entirely participating or engaging as usual.

So, I asked them to step up and ensure they were in touch with me. And one thing they noticed right away is, you know, the family joke is I cry in every movie or TV show with even the smallest amount of emotional measures known, the scene you see, they always look at me, because I'm usually like, weeping, I'm susceptible and empathetic to that. And for a while, they immediately noticed that I wasn't doing that like I was a little lost, and some of the empathy died. And it's come back, like, I feel like now I'm back to normal without that, but that was one of the things like mom's changed. She's not crying during movies.

So maybe I was a little concerned; I had lost some empathy. But sometimes that's not a bad thing, you know, if you're too empathetic, you know, so they've done great, um, there were times where I would feel emotionally overwhelmed from some of the noise in the house. So they'd be too siding, and I'd have to go in my room and shut and ask them to tone n. But other than that, it was pretty standard; we're pretty dialed in; I homeschool the youngest was very close, you know, the kids and I, and I feel like just made them part of it, and was healthy. Because if they had questions, I could answer them. And even my five-year-old kind of understood something was going on. But my big kids were great. I wonder if they will reflect and impact that much more than I know later in life. But I mean, so far, it's been okay,

Bill 38:19

Yeah, well, you'll know because you're that kindy, you know, you're later in life and impact with human beings. You're a midwife. So you're constantly involved with people in emotion and the things that are occurring, and help people shift from one phase to the next phase, to get to the other stage; I think you'll be okay; you'll start to notice that they will perhaps present with some underlying issues that they're not sure about. And then, you'll tune in, and you'll be able to discuss it with them and get them over the line.

Heather Whitley 38:56

Well, I could see how males going through a stroke would have trouble to a greater degree; I mean, I'm a female who is really in touch and highly functioning with my emotions, And then having to process the loss of some of that, but being able to be like aware of what was happening and articulate it like Cognizant, but men. I joke that I was almost more empathetic of men because, you know, sometimes I could never understand how men couldn't, like, deal with certain emotions or deal. And I suddenly could have empathy for the male wiring and

brain because, like I said, a conversation would be very normal for me. I was like, yep, I have to deal with this suddenly. And you see, men haven't stroked, yo, just on a fundamental, just the way you guys are wired. So, I would imagine going through something like that; it's hard to articulate what's happening to you.

Bill 39:47

Yeah, especially to a female partner who is female. And then I say that in the most excellent possible way, we're wired differently; we're meant to be female to have more empathy and have the opportunity to bear children and give birth, raise, and nurture them. You know, men are; men aren't traditionally supposed to be doing that. And not that we shouldn't, we just haven't been. So that we still have some of that ancestral stuff going on that we, you know, haven't evolved from, and I'm not sure whether we need to, but we do need to talk about it. So we're aware of when we need to jump into empathetic states. Now, I was the opposite. I went into complete reversal; my Head completely switched off, and my heart ultimately came on board. I started to feel things in my chest that I had never felt before; it was called a heart. And I would cry watching movies, and I still do, and I would cry watching a cat trip over and over these weird things. And my wife would be going, what are you crying for now?

You know, I'm noticing these things. And what happened was my heart was able to come to the fore for the first time in a long time. People listening may not know that the heart has neural structures like the brain does. And when you haven't used the heart, and you are not somebody who wears their heart on their sleeve, or when you're not somebody who has followed their heart, your heart has fewer neurons and does less. So it's the same as the brain using it or losing it. And you can create negative neural patterns in your heart because you don't use it. As much as you can, fewer cheerful new designs in your nature when you exercise it and tell people you love them more. Just that makes you connect with your heart. And that's what I do now. So my children have seen this utterly different version of me, an almost overbearing, loving, hugging dude that used to be rough and tumble and, you know, not give a crap about anything. But I enjoy that part of myself now and being different.

My stroke happened near the cerebellum, so it is nowhere near the emotional part of the brain. But the impact on the load on my brain was so high that I knew it needed to switch off, and it almost did. I knew I had a witness, but my awareness wasn't related to attention. I wasn't conscious at that level for some

time. And it was maybe weeks, a few months. But understanding my gut and my heart was where it was. And I noticed all these things I had never seen before. So that was where the most significant lessons for me came from. And it took some adjusting for the other humans in my life because they've never seen this side of me. And it was strange, you know? Yeah, yeah. I related to the first time how women can be emotional, which was great. So I can leave and have that a winner for the rest of my life. I could relate to, for the first time, how mentally challenged humans have their life experiences. So when somebody is trying to tell you they are, they have some head-related challenge, and they can't iterate it to somebody. I don't think we have this stigma about mental health. That is why you look fine, but that person isn't. And I experienced death for the first time. So now I understand how people go through that, depression, and all those things and how they share it. So I'm glad these beautiful things came out of the strike. It's not all terrible for me.

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So that was where the most significant lessons for me came from. And it took some adjusting for the other humans in my life because they've never seen this side of me. And it was strange, you know?

Yeah, yeah.

## Becoming Emotional After Stroke

Bill 42:50

Now, I was the opposite. I went into complete reversal; my Head completely switched off, and my heart ultimately came on board. I started to feel things in my chest that I had never felt before; it was called a heart. And I would cry watching movies, and I still do, and I would cry watching a cat trip over and over these weird things. And my wife would be going, what are you crying for now? You know, I'm noticing these things. And what happened was my heart was able to come to the fore for the first time in a long time. People listening may not know that the heart has neural structures like the brain does.

I related to the first time how women can be emotional, which was great. So I have that ability to now and have that awareness for the rest of my life away, and I could relate to mentally challenged humans' life experiences for the first time. So when somebody is trying to make you aware, they have some head-related challenge and mentally challenged humans' life experience for the first time mental health. That is why you look fine, but that person isn't. And I experienced that for the first time. So now I understand how people go through that, depression, and all those things and how they share it. So I'm glad these beautiful things came out of the stroke. It's not all terrible for me.

Heather Whitley 43:44

Yeah, I know it is. And I think it helped the healing, to feel gratitude and also to, like, make a decision, you know, because I could have been like, I don't want to read on, I want to watch movies, I don't want to do anything that could cause me to feel that overwhelm. But I think just continuing to walk forward and decide, like, that's not going to be my story, like depression is not going to be my I don't have time to be depressed, I have too much responsibility. And I walked forward and decided I do think that helps like staying positive, because I think I could see how people could easily slip into feeling sorry for themselves getting depressed, and then that interrupts healing, and then they're not changing their lifestyle to be healthy; it's getting worse. And I feel grateful that I captured the mindset to speed up healing with all this.

Bill 44:37

Yeah, one in three people who experienced a stroke will experience depression. As a result, yeah. So, it's essential to get selling, coaching, and psychological assessments done soon. So, if you're a carer listening to or watching this, consider that for your loved one. And vice versa. If you've had a stroke and are concerned about those things, ask for a referral from somebody who can assist with an evaluation.

Heather Whitley 45:08

I'll tell you how, in the US, you can take a little quiz online because I give it to my pregnant ladies. It's called Patient Health Questionnaire Number Nine. They can Google PHQ9, and this little online 10-question quiz will appear. And in the last two weeks, how often have you been blah, blah, blah, and you get a score? It's incredible. I do it for all my clients all through the pregnancy. And I've caught some things with women I thought were okay. They weren't. And then you know it, I think it's a great way if you don't want to spend the money to go, and we don't have good health care in the US regarding coverage for therapy and stuff. But you can self-assess or have your loved one. Take the assessment because it will be the loved ones you usually regard in a depression; you don't know it. And the minute you say, I think I'm depressed, that's usually you're climbing out of it after losing months, if not years, of your life, you know, to

Bill 46:03

I see; wow, so that's important. We'll share that as well in the show notes. Anyone listening can find that easily. So what? Tell me how it impacted your work because you do beautiful, excellent work. You're a midwife, so you help deliver babies.

Heather Whitley 46:19

I do at home, born at home, wow. Yes. When the stroke happened, I had women do, and I was like, no one can know about this; I'm laying in the hospital, like, you know, I got my family. I'm trying to organize logistics and am unsure what will happen there. And then, my work and client base, I had nine or ten clients at the time, and one woman was imminently due. And I was like, What am I going to say? I've put another midwife on call because I was in spital for three or four days, which is when you're in solo practice.

You know, people hire you to have to be their midwife. So that was very difficult,

but I didn't disclose why I just said family emergency. She will be your midwife through the weekend if you give birth. So when I was discharged from the hospital, I let my client and all my clients know what had happened. And I was super transparent because by that time, we had a plan, we had, we knew the likelihood of it happening again, emit was low, and I was on blood thinners to prevent that as well. So I was like, Who's going to hire a midwife that just had a stroke?

Not only did I be transparent with my clients, but I also went public with it on my social media, which has a relatively large following. And I was afraid of doing that. But I had clients continue to interview me and then hire me and say, I saw you had a stroke; I'm glad you're okay. And I was going to say it pays to be honest and authentic with people on this stuff. I haven't lost any business. So, I had a birth about 48 hours after being discharged from the stroke unit. And I brought another midwife with me because I was nervous about falling asleep, passing out stroking again.

## **Fakhadg Well At Work After PFO**

I was entirely correct. And I was faking it, that I was okay. And so I got through the birth, and it was fine. But I'm glad I brought help in because it took some of the burden of responsibility off of me, but I was still pretty tender. And then I had several weeks. So I had another one. But just regular office visits were tough for me for a good month. I was sitting still pretty tendering because of all the emotional connectivity clinically, but I was okay. Physically, I was fine. I could process clinical information just fine. It was like a moving piece, which is 90% of the work. And it wasn't easy. It was very, very hard for a while.

Bill 48:45

So you went from Come on, it'll, it'll be okay, you can do this to Come on, lady get.

Heather Whitley

Work was a more prolonged birth than we expected. So it was like, I let the student and my other midwife pretty much do everything. And I just sat there, took pictures, and was just there in case. But I outsourced as much as I could of that birth because I knew I was in significant healing mode at that point; that's



something the denial part plays an important role. I did the same regarding trying to fake things, you know, work-related, and it doesn't help, but it's what we know; you can't be guided any other way until you do it and feel terrible after doing it.

Heather Whitley 49:30

Right.

Bill 49:30

Ah, It's there's no other way to learn. We were right; we had to take advice from other people. I just felt I struggled with trying to understand, just trying to understand what my limitations were, until I hit the brick wall. And then it was, okay. Gone too far, done too much.



Heather Whitley 49:52

And because its brain is so complicated, the neurologists can't give you any average assessment because, like, a thumbprint, everybody's healing will be different. After all, everybody's injury is unique and different. I was cleared to ski. The only restrictions I had on skiing weren't from neurology but from the cardiologist because I had been on thinners for a while. After all, they didn't want me falling, bruising, and internal bleeding. But I was clear from neurology to resume life as usual as I saw fit.

So, it was really up to me to find those boundaries. And I wouldn't know until I started to go about my and then suddenly, I was dizzy, I had to sit down. And, intuitively, I was like, I should eat to keep my blood sugar up. And I was eating carbs. And I was eating stuff that, intuitively, I thought would keep my energy up for more extended pe. And that's what was killing me. That's what was causing the episodes of interrupting healing, or I'd have to reset and go back to bed for a little while or go sit down because I was eating all the stuff that my brain was like

on fire from Yeah,

Bill 51:01

I was set from top time. When we go somewhere, and I have a sweet cake after dinner, I can feel the sugar running through my veins from my mouth and my stomach into the extremities of my arms and my hands; my heart starts to race, I can feel it in my brain, I can feel it is just doing stuff that I had previously been completely unaware that it was doing. So, it does have a significant impact. And when you're off it for as long as I've been off it, then you try it again, you oh wow, like that is wild, that are noticing that and how the body becomes used to that and then stops giving you that feedback and stops telling you that this thing that you're consuming is affecting you.

And let's face it; I've been addicted to sugar since I was a baby, whenever I could grab some chocolate, or somebody fed me something sweet. That's That's how long it's been for me. So, more than 40 or more than 35 years at that stage. So it's incredible people's responses when you tell them to do that. And then they give it a try. And then they go through this couple of days of feeling like withdrawal symptoms.

Heather Whitley 52:17

Yeah, Recovery And Artificial Light

Bill 52:17

And then feeling amazing and saying, well, I've just noticed all these different things about me. They also told me how they experienced the consumption of sugar after that break that they had. So, something to consider, I noticed all these different things. When you talk about the other things that impact your brain, like noise and too much information, some things that other people don't realize affect the brain, such as light; light affects the brain. So that's why you sometimes went into a dark room to withdraw so that there's no stimulation happening and, you know, noise. It's similar to what autistic people experience when their brain is overwhelmed with too many dots or information.

I did an episode with Dr. Michael Merzenich on episode 27, who's a world-renowned leader in neuroplasticity. Some of his studies talk about children who learn in a school on a main road; the ones nearest to the main road will learn slower than those further away from the main room. And it's simply because noise

interrupts the new Ronal structures' connections. Light has a similar impact because light impacts the body by the skin sensing during daytime and nighttime, which switches on certain hormones for certain things to occur.

And if we're in a very well-lit home, and we're supposed to live in a cave, where the nighttime is, we're still at 10:30 or 11 pm. With fluorescent light, the body puts us into a state of being awake and alert rather than getting ready to sleep. So all of these things you would never consider. How could you when we come from the backgrounds that we do, which are just regular people going about our days trying to achieve our tasks? And this is where the learning is the learning, and how to heal from stroke is not only in what the doctors tell you but also in that other part. That is what the naturopaths tell you, what the research shows, and how we think living in a home with lights, sounds, noise, and traffic is regular. Wherealsot's so far from what is expected.

Heather Whitley 54:52

The Paleo Cardiologist by Jack Wolfson talks a lot about that. He has a whole chapter on artificial light and going to bed early. And yeah, everything you just described was in there.

Bill 55:03

Yeah, brilliant. We're going to do, we're going to have a look at that. And I might even try and contact him and get him on. Yeah, have a conversation with him. That'd be great. I interviewed a gentleman called Alex Ferguson, Episode 11, who is just a cool dude. He's a New Zealand guy who does bodybuilding and is just a bit healthy. And thankfully, he's never experienced any health dramas. And I interviewed him. And we talked about how light blue light can affect sleep. And he walks around his home at night with red golden globes everywhere to mimic what would happen in front of a campfire when the sun goes down.

He switches off all the little LED lights around his home that have all that sticky tape on them. So, there's no possibility of artificial light interfering with his sleep habits and his pattern. And he teaches that to corporate people, and he's noticed a massive difference in his life. And imagine, imagine if he's seeing an enormous difference in his life. If the people are listening and watching this, do some of the things you and I have discussed already. They'll feel something better. So we're not.

Heather Whitley 56:14

totally

Bill 56:15

Ware e're not. We don't want to overwhelm a little; think about these little things as little bits of information that you might want to consider.

Heather Whitley 56:21

Yeah, midwives, there are some excellent texts and books on there on light, How it affects the artificial light nightlights if you know that if left alone in a dark room, women are like even gynecological cycles will cycle with the moon usually, but when we're in urban settings and artificial lights and not strong window coverings. We're not in our cave, that tends to, they think, cause a lot of like whether it's fertility or gynecological issues. There's a lot about this artificial light that affects all aspects of our health. Yeah,

Bill 56:55

Wow, so tell me, as we come to wrap up a little bit before we do turn it, what is your main concern that you're left with now

Heather Whitley 57:07

is a huge hospital bill in the United States; I think the account between a stroke and heart surgery is 70,000. So in terms of my healing, and that, by the way, there's good news on that, which I'll report on at some point later, like in my community, but there is some private health care that's going to pick up like 90% of it, which will be great. In terms of my long-time, I fear having another more profound one that leaves me debilitated; I live in constant fear. So I'd say I'd scaled back my physical activity, like, you know, skiing. I usually would be skiing still this time of year here in Utah, and I haven't gone at all.

And, you know, I want to be able to make sure I can still support my family and, you know, not be impacted and not have this determine like having an average ability to read partner and have them worried that they're going to be a caretaker for someone likely to strike again. So I think those are just my significant issues because I feel like from this one, I guess, pretty fully recovered. But I'm also treading lightly because I know how important and severe it could have been.

Bill 58:17

Yeah, treading lightly is a good thing. It's still very early days, and you are doing

well. You are recovering and healing, and most challenges have been resolved. The heart, you know, the clip inside. It's to home. That's all good. So you're doing everything that you could, you're getting, you'll get an excellent outcome. But I think if you tread lightly, it'll give you enough time to return to your space and heal yourself. It would be best to have That emotional healing and pay attention to whether you are stressed. And all the other little things that we are in denial about

Heather Whitley 58:59

nothing. So, it would be best if you had emotional healing, and treading lightly and doing less is most likely more beneficial to your healing and recovery. Rather than keeping yourself occupied and busy. And avoiding facing it, face it a bit earlier. And get it way sooner. And

Heather Whitley 59:23

yeah,

Bill 59:24

I hope that means you get to reflect a year from now, and I made the right decision by treading lightly. Yes, I love to ski, but the mountains will be covered with snow for a bit longer, you know, in our lifetime. Sogo skiing when we can, you know when, when things are indeed back on track. And skiing is, again, the priority because it's not a priority now.

Heather Whitley 59:53

Thank you for allowing me to tread lightly because it's hard to do that.

Bill 1:00:00

Welcome. Tell me, Heather, where can people learn about the fantastic work? Thank you for allowing me to connect with you.

Heather Whitley 1:00:06

Sure. So my most active page on Instagram is Shabby Ski Sh a BB Y Sk, Sk I, or Heather Lee Whitley, on Facebook. And I'm through both those channels; they can access my midwife page with some neat birth videos. I would say find me on those two channels. And then, from there, they can navigate to more of the birth stuff if that's what they're interested in.

Bill 1:00:32

Yeah, now I know what the Shabby ski is. I didn't understand what the scheme was. Now I know that you're a bit of a ski fanatic.

Heather Whitley 1:00:40

Yes, yes. Yeah, a little bit.

Bill 1:00:42

Thank you so much for spending some time with me and connecting with me; I appreciate it. I will follow your work and watch for what you do. And if you need anything, please feel free to message me. That's the best thing that you could have done.

Heather Whitley 1:00:59

Yeah,

Bill 1:01:00

Iwhtate it. And I'd like to encourage people to connect that way with us with whomever they feel they need to connect to. My goal has been to make it easier for people suffering from stroke to navigate stroke recovery because that's what I needed that started seven years ago. I didn't have anything, and I didn't know enough, and the doctors didn't. You wouldn't believe how far we have progressed in seven years with the information about alternatives. Inative additional things that we can do ourselves to help heal our br. You are in line with what the doctors are doing and are supporting what the doctors are doing because we don't want to put the doctors. We don't want to give doctors a hard time without them. We wouldn't be here, so whoever thinks they must go down the alternative path. It would be best if you had both. Don't, don't do that. So, I love sharing people's stories; it makes me feel good when I help people do that. So, thank you for making me feel good and participating in that.

Heather Whitley 1:02:05

I'm so grateful you have this community, Bill. I'm glad I found you.

Intro 1:02:09

Discover how to support your recovery after a stroke. Go to [RecoveryAfterStroke.com](http://RecoveryAfterStroke.com)