

Spontaneous Vertebral Artery Dissection Caused A Stroke - Frank Mills

Frank Mills experienced a vertebral artery dissection while he was having a shower. He walked into the emergency room and told the nurses he was having a stroke.

Wikipedia

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Transcription:

Frank Mills 0:00

I was diagnosed with prediabetes about seven years ago and gave up sugar. The doctor said to me, well, you've got a few choices here, nobody gives up sugar. So we'll put you on a pill.

Frank Mills 0:11

I said I'm not a pill guy. Let me try giving up sugar. I weighed 250 pounds at that time. And she said, okay, how long do you want to do this? So I said, let's try a month. If nothing happens, fine.

Frank Mills 0:27

Well, within a month, I'd lost 13 pounds. And I was feeling great. I didn't have any of the ups and downs of what is it when you have that sugar problem. hypoglycemia? I didn't have any of that anymore. Long story short, I lost 47 pounds in six months, and I've never felt better, never looked back, and don't eat sugar.

Intro 0:52

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

Bill Gasiamis 1:05

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Recovery after Stroke podcast. Now recently, Spotify released a new feature that allows people to write their favorite shows similar to how the Apple podcast app allows it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19

If you think this show deserves it, I'd love it if you left a five-star review. This will help the show rank better on search engines, and help newly diagnosed stroke survivors find the show, and therefore hopefully you could make their life a little better on the way to recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36

So go along to your favorite app, and share what the podcast means to you. It really will make a huge difference. And I would appreciate it. Now thanks so much for tuning in to today's episode.

Introduction



Bill Gasiamis 1:49

This is episode 179. And my guest today is Frank Mills, the world-famous musician who amongst other things, wrote the popular piano track Music Box Dancer, Frank Mills, welcome to the podcast.

Frank Mills 2:05

Nice to see you, Bill.

Bill Gasiamis 2:06

Nice to see you. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate it.

Frank Mills 2:11

It's a pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 2:13

Frank, tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Frank Mills 2:15

Well, it was November 28, just a little bit over a year ago. And I was in the shower one morning. Never had any inkling about any of this. Eat well, get lots of exercise, outdoors farmer type guy, play the piano for a living.

Frank Mills 2:36

That's over, I retired in 2018. So it wasn't a question of a major, major, major interruption. But on that morning, I remember in the shower, all of a sudden my legs gave out from under me.

Frank Mills 2:51

And I sort of felt I was about to plop onto the shower floor, which is never good at any age. I'm 78 at the time, I'm now 79. And I thought this was good. So I quickly called Brenda who just rescued me with this podcast, my technician and able wife, and head nurse.

Frank Mills 3:13

And I just said to her, I'm having a stroke. I know it. So we got to get to the hospital right now. So we made it to the car, and I could walk. The stroke thing was sort of brief. And I was able to walk to the car, all be it very nauseous and not feeling normal at all.

Frank Mills 3:34

And hence the decision that I thought I was having a stroke it didn't make any sense or anything else it was so sudden. We got to the emergency ward in the hospital and I walked in quite normally. And I just said to the receptionist in the hospital at the emergency ward I'm having a stroke.

Frank Mills 3:55

And she pressed this button and two guys appeared and put me on a stretcher and up we went and never saw Brenda for three days because of COVID. She wasn't allowed in the hospital. But she had the presence of mind to bring my cell phone to the nurse at the reception in the hospital, which made the whole thing a little easier.

Frank Mills 4:13

But that's briefly what happened. And I had no real inkling that my prognosis was correct in the first place until the nurse sent a doctor with the boys who put me in the stretcher and up I went and he knew in one minute I was having a stroke. So it wasn't a bad diagnosis on my part, but I guess the suddenness of it was what surprised me, and the lack of symptoms beforehand was just nothing.

Bill Gasiamis 4:41

Any of the typical symptoms, nothing at all? And you just started to feel unwell? Now what kind of stroke was it? Was it an ischemic stroke?

Frank Mills 4:52

Well, no, it was a spontaneous vertebral arterial stroke. Oh, you mean the stroke itself?

Frank Mills Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 4:58

Yeah, was it a clot that occurred?

Frank Mills 5:01

Well, the clot occurred, they don't quite know that two interesting things came out of this, which I suppose comes out of most strokes. One of them was that they did a CT scan on me instantly when I wasn't in the hospital an hour and they did that.

Frank Mills 5:19

And this might clarify your question. When they looked at it, the doctor came down. And he told me that, although there was a bit of a shadow, they couldn't see everything perfectly clearly he said your brain is very clear of cholesterol. And it had nothing to do with that.

Frank Mills 5:36

We think it's probably some matter that got released from the artery when it was dissected. And the dissection caused some, I mean, this is all on a micro level I guess. A few cells would have done it. And it was a pons stroke.

Frank Mills 6:01

And I guess in a sense, he said, he kept saying to me you're a very lucky man because this could have been a lot worse. And as that proved to be true. I'm feeling well, these days. You know, there, we can talk about the hangovers. But really, I'm lucky to be where I'm at.

Frank Mills 6:21

And I have read a lot of your notes and information. Thank you. And listen to a few of your podcasts which I enjoy. And I guess I'll let you ask the questions because it was well, the doctor, the neurologist that took care of me, and a nice guy, and he sort of laughed a bit.

Frank Mills 6:43

And I thought, what's so funny? And he said, Well, you just got lumberman's disease, and I said lumberjack's disease. What's that? He said, well, as you know, here in Vermont, the main industry other than tourism is wood, and lumbering and logging and boards and plywood and all that.

Frank Mills 7:01

And he said, a lot of guys working in the lumber industry, and particularly loggers who cut trees down, get these arterial dissections because they will be looking up at the top of a tree, and down at the bottom of the base of the tree where they're going to cut it probably 20 or 30 times during the felling of one tree.

Frank Mills 7:25

And this might go on 50 times during the day. And he said it just puts an awful lot of stress and friction on those arteries that tuck onto your skull up in that area that come out of the spinal column and tuck under there.

Frank Mills 7:44

And he said the best way I can describe your stroke is to say that you've been strangled, then you survive. It's lovely, isn't it? But in hindsight, it's sort of a good way of putting it. These arteries are not as strong as I thought they were.

Frank Mills 8:02

And they tend to be very flexible, and multi-layered. So you know that's all I could gather out of it. And I was only in the hospital for two days, and they let me go home and then the dark wall hit when I got home, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 8:19

It's really lovely to speak to somebody who, "got away with it". Because very often the majority of the people that I've had on the podcast've had, firstly, a stroke, secondly, some kind of vertebral artery dissection or carotid artery dissection, yet, they usually don't get so lucky.

Bill Gasiamis 8:41

And perhaps the dissection is more dramatic, and it causes more problems and therefore creates a more serious stroke, and now all strokes serious, the fact that you've had a stroke, that's serious, but the fact that you had a very small amount of time between the time that it happened and then you acted and went to hospital A.

Bill Gasiamis 9:08

And B, that the size of the dissection and the small particles, for example, that they released meant the brain wasn't starved of oxygen for an extended period was just a small interruption and therefore was able to come back but even you who got away with it so well, you just even mentioned that you had dark times. So

what were they like when you came home from the hospital three days later what was going on?

Frank Mills 9:40

Well, that's the big one that I think everybody having a stroke goes through and I had done very well at the hospital I was up and about they were walking me down the hall and the corridor is the same old stuff and I was having a great old time with the nurses.

Frank Mills Stroke Dark Moments

Frank Mills 9:56

I mean it was just almost normal. Although there was this looming thing, when I was on my own, it was a little different going to the washroom. And in the hospital, there was a little less confidence there.

Frank Mills 10:12

And on Monday morning when the doctor came because this happened on a Saturday morning and Monday morning, and the doctor came in, he said, we're gonna let you go home. But he said, I caution you. You're doing very well right now. But he said, when you go home, you may have some dark moments.

Frank Mills 10:29

And I sort of wondered, what's this supposed to be looking for? And he said, stairs, in particular, are going to give you trouble because your balance is off, your eyesight seems to be good.

Frank Mills 10:43

And most of the symptoms that are normal strokes were there. They were constantly taking tests by movements of my toes, my feet, my hands, my arms, my ears, my sight, my smell, my hearing, and everything else, and they're all quite good.

Frank Mills 11:02

So I left the hospital in a wheelchair down to the car, and my wife drove me home. And I got to the home and we walked and I got to the stairs I've never seen stairs in five days now. And I looked at the stairs, and I just burst into tears, I sat down, and I thought there's no way I can get up here, there are only four stairs to go up.

Frank Mills 11:34

And they were just I 've never seen that before of course since the stroke. They didn't have them in the hospital. He warned me about this. And I thought so I sat on my backside and bumped up the steps. And that was okay, I went to the washroom and then came spruced up a little bit.

Frank Mills 11:57

And then I came to the stairs again to go down where I could sit and relax with a cup of tea or something. And I froze, I just didn't know what to do. I didn't have any idea what to do. I just did whatever walking I had done, I'd forgotten.

Frank Mills 12:18

Whatever going down steps I thought about then nothing. And I sat down on my backside again I think is the only way I'm gonna get down these stairs, and I burst into tears.

Frank Mills 12:28

And I remember saying to Brenda, you know if this is the way life is going to be for the rest of my life. I'm not so sure I want to live it. Because at that time, it just seemed all the walls caved in.

Frank Mills 12:40

Everything just caved in. It was my one dark moment, which I'm sure everybody who had a stroke goes through especially if you've been hurt. It wasn't that bad. You know, but you don't realize that at the time, you don't know.

Bill Gasiamis 12:55

Yeah, it's the worst possible situation. You can't walk up and down stairs and you've got all the rest of your faculties. But you can't do that. You remind me of my dad, he's 79 I think as well. And he had knee surgery Frank, which meant that he had to go through two or three months of rehabilitation.

Bill Gasiamis 13:18

He's a heavy guy as well. And that two or three months, I can honestly tell you that he was depressed because he wasn't able to get around now. He's been Touchwood he's been well his entire life. I've never known him to be unwell.

Bill Gasiamis 13:21

And I'm nearly 50 years old. So I've known the guy a long time. And these three

months were enough to spiral him out of his regular state of, you know, being generally upbeat and happy-go-lucky to being difficult to shift from, you know, these sort of dark thoughts that he had in his head, and it was just knee surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 14:05

He was always going to get better from it. It was always going to work. It just needed him to be on his bum for a little bit of time. But it was strange how quickly he got there. So is that unlike you as well?

Bill Gasiamis 14:19

Normally are you upbeat do you normally have any concerns about being so dramatic about life that if it's going to be like this, then it's over? Like is it that dramatic has been before?

Frank Mills 14:35

No, never before, well, maybe once before but that was years ago when I was under some psychiatric care for a while. For some issues, I had as both my parents died when I was young.

Frank Mills 14:50

So that made my upbringing difficult there were some moments in my life that that situation after I was about 10 years of age due to medical problems, and my family became dysfunctional.

Frank Mills 14:59

And so I was really on my own as a young man and without guidance. So there were some psychiatric, mind you I'm a great believer in psychiatry I found a psychiatrist who was just a super guy to begin with and he understood my problems.

Frank Mills 15:28

And we solved them together and he said to me you know you need six months and you'll be feeling a lot better. Well, that's the only dark moment I ever had until the stroke.

Missed Opportunity After Frank Mills Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 15:37

I feel like, do you feel like the doctors of the hospital let you down? They told you

that you were going to have trouble with stairs, but yet, there was no rehabilitation before you went home. Do you think there was something missed there? Was there an opportunity to help you that got missed?

Frank Mills 15:56

Well, I think there were two things. I think that part of what you're saying is true. If I'd had three more days at the hospital, maybe we would have found a flight of stairs somewhere and done it.

Frank Mills 16:11

So maybe I was released a little bit prematurely. I've always had this chameleon-like effect on people that oh, don't worry about Frank, you know, he's fine. Look at him he's great he's out there on the farm and doing lumbering and still back chopping firewood again, and milking the cows and all the rest of it.

Frank Mills 16:30

And so I wouldn't want to blame anybody if there'd been a lot more time and you know, hospitals today beds are not available. And yeah. So I don't think there was anything that could have been done other than the fact that I guess I didn't take it seriously enough when they said stairs are going to be an issue.

Frank Mills 16:58

Oh, yeah, sure. stairs, stairs, trees, hills, who cares, you know, get on with it mills. And so that was the issue and Brenda, of course burst out into tears on the stairs, bawling her eyes out.

Frank Mills 17:12

And I finally said enough of this stuff. Let's have a cup of tea. So that ended we got down the stairs, sat on the sofa in the living room by the fire had a cup of tea. And I went to bed I guess, tired is the more right word.

Frank Mills 17:31

Woke up the next morning. And the whole attitude had changed. Of course, I love mornings I love waking up, especially at 79 that's a major accomplishment. Every morning, wee I'm alive again for another day. It's not all that bad. But that's kind of the scenario you know, cuz I have a pretty good sense of humor, which always sees me through these things.

Frank Mills 17:54

Anyway, I said to Brenda, we're gonna beat this, this is ridiculous. So we started going for walks. And then the first walk was out to the balcony, which is only about 10 feet.

Frank Mills 18:08

But I had a walker and a cane and whatever I needed the post-operative care or wrong word, perhaps post-stroke care was excellent here, the facilities in Vermont. At the local hospital, especially I had six weeks of intensive rehabilitation and muscular that I had the three things that the.

Intro 18:38

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

Intro 19:02

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation. Stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you it's called Seven Questions to Ask Your Doctor about Your Stroke.

Intro 19:21

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 recovery after stroke.com and download the guide it's free

Frank Mills 19:40

The eyes the muscles that was the other one that speech because my speech was a bit slurry you know that was nothing to me. Okay. My speech is slurry the doctors had said in your case you'll probably it may take about a year but you're going to be living a normal life in two or three months.

Frank Mills 20:03

So that spurred me on a bit. But it was the walks with Brenda, that really, it's we live in a very idyllic setting here. It's in the mountains of the Green Mountains of Vermont, where there are lots of cows and farms.

Frank Mills 20:18

And it's a very bucolic sort of setting and, and a lovely place to be older than younger, I think. But that's being honest. So we started our walks. And the first walk, I remember, it was down the balcony a couple of times, you know, and I thought, Oh, the fresh air and the scenery.

Frank Mills 20:21

And, gosh, this was getting slowly getting back to where I started. And that when I celebrate, we both took a walk on November 28th, down to the Sugar House, which is about half a mile.

Frank Mills 20:37

And back here, and we took the long route, which is what we called the long route when I was progressing through my post-operative care, or post-stroke care is the right word. And, we came didn't stop down there, we marched right back and just said, you know, it's been a good year, I can do this and it's happened.

Frank Mills 21:11

And so we went from that few steps on the porch to, oh, a few more steps around the house and then down to the barn. That was a big one that was about 100 feet away. And then a couple of days, I was doing that with ease. And then we push that to go the garden and we have a drive-in driveway thing.

Frank Mills 21:32

So doing that circle, that's about 500 feet, I guess. And it just went on and on and on until we finally went down to the sugar house. And after several stops at times, but a year later, I could have probably jogged it if I'd wanted to.

Frank Mills 21:48

If I had been forced to I probably could have jogged down to that place and back again, one year later. So I felt pretty good about life. There are some hangovers, however, and we can talk about those. I'm taking up more of your time here. So you have some questions I'm sure.

Bill Gasiamis 22:07

I do. I do. But that's okay. All the stuff that you're saying is relevant. And it's really important for people to hear. What's interesting is that at 79, you've probably known people before you friends, family, acquaintances that have had more dramatic strokes would you have come across somebody before?

Frank Mills 22:27

Many times past, I've probably had three friends who passed because of a stroke. And they were the typical minor strokes, a couple of minor strokes, then a more serious one. And then finally they get the big one. And the family decides to pull the plug now that that's the worst-case scenario.

Frank Mills 22:49

But that happened over probably three or four years. And looking back at all of them, there was a lot of drinking a lot of bad diet, not much exercise. It's the old story. I go to the gym three times a week. And I've been doing that since June and love it.

Importance of Being In Good Shape

Frank Mills 23:10

And I believe in it. I think you know, if anything you were talking to a fellow named Molter, I think a few weeks ago in your podcast, and he mentioned that. If you're in good shape, when you start chances are you'll weather the storm better than if you're not in good shape.

Bill Gasiamis 23:35

Steve Molter yeah he's similar age to me. He's probably in his mid-40s. And he had a spontaneous vertebral artery dissection as well. And that's the whole point of it. It's like smoking and drinking are things that we do because for some reason we think they bring us good experiences, and pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 23:58

I'm not sure if I was one of those people. But what they're doing as well, is this slowly increasing the speed at which arteries deteriorate. And yeah, and then that means when you have a small dissection that could become very catastrophic, much quicker.

Bill Gasiamis 24:17

So you're in the best position to have a dissection if you've always been a nonsmoker. If you've always been a nondrinker. And I'm not talking about one drink a day or one wine a day.

Bill Gasiamis 24:30

And if you've been fit in well, because your baseline is much, much better so that

you've got a head start on recovery because you've always been well, so you've always been unknowingly preparing for a moment when ill health might be around the corner and that does serve people well.

Bill Gasiamis 24:51

And I suppose the people who I've found that have had a stroke and they've been really fit and really Well, sometimes will complain, they'll say, what was the point of it all, you know, I went to all this effort and look, I still had a stroke. Well, life doesn't miss out on you, because you've been to the gym regularly, it still happens to you.

Bill Gasiamis 25:15

But you've done a lot of the preventative work, and that has held you in good stead. So that's important. So even though your friends had, or the people that you've known how to trick you still didn't take it seriously for yourself. It's like, this can't happen to me. This is, you know, I'm Frank Mills, like, I do all these things. These things don't happen to me. Is that true? Or is that different In your mind?

Frank Mills 25:43

think the difference difference is in the word spontaneous. And you were the first one who used that they didn't call it that. In the hospital where I was, it was just called a vertebral artery dissection, which was already three words too big for me to comprehend with all the doctors running around.

Frank Mills 26:05

But yeah, I think being fit. Farm Life has been good for me. In many senses. We don't drink a lot. I have a beer once in a while. A Scotch now and then. No, I'm not a drinker. Smoke, I don't smoke. I have a cigar now. And then I can't stand it nearly I'd be sick as a dog if I inhale that cigar.

Frank Mills 26:28

So it's just the pleasure of the smoke and sitting or relaxing for an hour because you don't get much time to relax in this atmosphere. It's all fresh air and hard work, you know, which is great for us. I think the sedentary city life is not good for us in the sense that physically, and mentally it's probably better for us more stimulation. No, maybe.

Sensory Overload

Bill Gasiamis 27:01

I'd say no, it's overstimulation, Frank, you know, it's I think about city life. For me, especially since my stroke. And now my brain is sensitive to being overstimulated. You know, too many cars on the road, too many noises, too many bright lights at night, too much of artificial stuff that's happening around us that we think is normal overstimulates the brain and it's like, no, this is too much.

Bill Gasiamis 27:26

I enjoy my best time is usually before I go to bed, I go lie down, I try and get in there. Before my wife comes to bed. I try and get in for about half an hour, 45 minutes with as little noise as possible. And as dim light as possible. Just to unwind my brain from all of the overstimulation of things.

Bill Gasiamis 27:50

And I do prefer being out in the, we'll call it the countryside, where there's a lot of different versions, different colors of green, there's blue, there's gray, there are all the different colors of nature, and there's not a lot of noise, and there's just you hear you know, the trees and the wind.

Bill Gasiamis 28:13

And you can see far into the distance rather than the short distances. Like for me, that has always felt like home and my wife says the same thing about the beach. For me, it's it's the hills in the country.

Bill Gasiamis 28:26

So city life is exceedingly becoming more detrimental to our health, well being mental health as well. But because it's it's it's a life that is I think we were living it because other people are making us live in the city. Work is there. Then we go into offices.

Bill Gasiamis 28:53

You know, we're doing a lot of things that we prefer not to be doing but we're stuck in this rut of mortgage and, and bills and school fees and two cars and all this junk, right? That describes me before the show guy was a mess before the stroke. I've never been better since the stroke and my physical symptoms are daily.

Bill Gasiamis 29:17

It's not like I've been able to recover from my physical symptoms but I've never felt healthier because I've even though I still live in the city withdrawn from the over from the commitment to doing things that overstimulate me and I'm becoming aware of it.

Bill Gasiamis 29:34

So being sedentary makes me feel unwell. So in COVID in Melbourne, Victoria Australia, where I live, the lockdowns have been the longest we've had the longest lockdowns anybody. And that forces you to be at home and on your butt for a long, long time.

Bill Gasiamis 29:53

That was harder for me than actually going through the stroke. Stroke Rehabilitation, and I had a pretty rough because I had to learn how to walk again and I had to learn how to use my arm again. And I had three strokes over three years and brain surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 30:12

So it's not like I had an easy run with a stroke. But the lockdowns have been harder on my psyche, and my emotional well-being than the stroke. So, I envy it. I don't have envy. But if I have to use a word, like, I enjoy people who live in the spaces where you where you live, you know.

Frank Mills 30:33

Yeah, well, of course. You know, the only thing we've been able to look at for the last 18 months are the cows, you know, we only got nine and they've gone to be bred so we won't see them till May again.

Frank Mills 30:47

So it's a nice life out here in the country. But again, when you get back to the possibility of stroke and the spontaneity of the dissection. I never knew what a dissection was until I had a stroke. And I knew it. I was not prepared for that. Because the friends I had lost to stroke I suspected had high cholesterol levels.

Giving Up Sugar

Frank Mills 31:19

Their blood was probably full of fat and sugar. I was diagnosed with prediabetes

about seven years ago and gave up sugar. The doctor said to me, Well, you've got a few choices here. Nobody gives up sugar. So we'll put you on a pill I die. I'm not a pill guy. Let me try giving up sugar. I weighed 250 pounds at that time.

Frank Mills 31:45

And she said, Okay, how long do you want to do this? Well, I said, let's try it a month. If nothing happens, fine. Well, within a month, I'd lost 13 pounds. And I was feeling great. I didn't have any ups and downs what is it when you have that sugar problem? hypoglycemia?

Frank Mills 32:05

I didn't have any of that anymore. Long story short, I lost 47 pounds in six months. And I've never felt better, never looked back, and don't eat sugar. I mean, I'll have the odd cookie if it's there, but I'm very fastidious about cookies and booze. So I stay away from both of them. Not that the latter was ever a problem.

Frank Mills 32:28

But one thing that I mentioned that the stroke did for me was they gave me a few CT scans, they did two or three of them. By the time I was out of there for three days. And the doctor said you will never get a stroke caused by cholesterol, your brain is as clean as a whistle.

Frank Mills 32:45

And that they had looked at every aspect of it so that there was a difference to me Bill between the dissection type of stroke, which is caused really, the doctor had said, you know, a lot of guys have dissections and don't know they had them. He said they get better and forget about it.

Frank Mills 33:04

They may have a headache or something like that. But I of course I didn't have that I did have a stroke. But I think they're very different. Medically speaking when you have a stroke that's caused by arterial blockage, as opposed to dissection, which can be it can also be equally severe, as you pointed out earlier. But it wasn't in my case. And you know, in six weeks, I was driving my truck down to rehabilitation.

Frank Mills 33:36

The nurse asked me how did you get here she said yeah, I guess you live on a

farm but it's still a normal view, and use your back walking again. Because you have to go and walk anyway. Don't you? I said I don't have to. But yeah, and walking was good. And it's funny.

Frank Mills 33:59

My left side was the one that got hit because of the stroke and the things that originally I remembered, my speech was a bit slurry. And my left arm was not in control of what it was doing. I couldn't lift much with I couldn't lift the glass to drink with my left arm. And my left leg was sort of like it would do what I call a Dipsy doodle every once in a while. I was there was a screw missing up there.

Frank Mills 34:30

You know, the brain was not quite firing on all eight cylinders, they might say, and slowly that all came back. Great therapy they had marvelous therapy, nurses, and physical therapists there that the center I went after, which lasted for six to eight weeks, I guess and after that period, the main physical things , of this job began to subside rapidly.

Frank Mills 35:00

Today I'm left I do a Dipsy doodle, I call it with my left leg every once in a while, I'll be out working down at the sugar bush on log cutting or splitting firewood and, I'll sort of lose my balance a little bit, you know. And one day I just rolled over on my side, it was so funny.

Frank Mills 35:20

I couldn't believe what was happening, I just rolled over. If anybody had seen it, they would have found it hilarious because I look just like a snowman if you push it, they roll over. And I thought what's going on here and I realized that and they told me about this once in a while the connections are the synapses are not all firing, you know, and, and you just hope that this will go away, then.

Frank Mills 35:44

So the result of all of this, yes, they went away. But my left hand as a piano player was frustratingly slow after this, too, okay, in fact, I could no longer play professionally, I would not play in front of people. And I gave up playing for my enjoyment.

Frank Mills 36:01

For better or for worse, it's perhaps I retired anytime it was a good time to retire

anyway, but the stroke pointed out a couple of things and one was that it wasn't a cholesterol event. It was a physical event. And also the piano-playing thing is coming back slowly.

Frank Mills 36:17

But surely, I'm not rushing it. But as I said, to bend, I'm at a point now where I don't think I can blame all my bad notes on the stroke, yet I'm not practicing enough. I've lost my chops in the business.

Frank Mills 36:30

So that being said, you know, we're back to a point where the dark days are over and there weren't many of them. I don't think there were more than one or two. And I'm sure everybody has them in different severity levels. And it's all part of it.

Bill Gasiamis 36:50

The piano playing was, is probably going to be a really good gentle rehabilitation. So I mean, you know, if I could encourage you to do anything, it would just get back into playing the piano and just for the sake of enjoying it. And then at the same time, challenging yourself to see if you can overcome, you know, your lack of practice.

Bill Gasiamis 37:14

And then it's good rehabilitation. So I get that as a professional musician, though, you might be frustrated about that. And you might be a perfectionist, and you might be all these things and you're thinking, it doesn't sound well what's the point of doing it anyway.

Music Box Dancer



Bill Gasiamis 37:30

But the point is, is that you don't have to be perfect, you're just playing for yourself, and you're not creating the next gold record. Because what people don't know about you or most people won't know about you is that you are quite well renowned for your music. And let me be honest with you I enjoy the music that I've listened to you and the one that I recognize you the most for which is music box dancing.

Bill Gasiamis 38:02

But when my children who are 25 and 21 now we're in their cribs, the music box that box dancer used to drive me nuts, Frank, because it was on all the time. To get them to sleep, all we had was we had that mobile thing that went around and around in circles on top of their crib, we would crank it up and all we would hear was the music box dancer.

Bill Gasiamis 38:36

And for people who don't know what the music box dancer is, you will recognize this and just give me a second while I press play on the YouTube file that I've got here and listen to this music box dancer for a moment.

Bill Gasiamis 39:34

Now that is that amazing piece, as soon as I heard that piece, I went straight back to that moment with my children in the crib when they were little, and what an amazing time because it connected me with that time when my kids were little and it was lovely for us, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 39:54

And then I thought nothing of that music. I'd never thought of the person who might have created it and I never thought that there would be somebody who would reach out to me 25 years later and say, Hey, Bill, I'm this guy, Frank Mills, I had a stroke. And my claim to fame is, amongst other things this, this track Music Box Dancer.

Bill Gasiamis 40:20

And to me, that's why I'm fascinated about this stroke recovery, podcast, recovery after stroke podcast, because it's brought people from all over the world to me that I've met, and they all come from amazing backgrounds, and I've learned so much. And I haven't had a guest that's been 79 years old, the majority of the people that have had on have been say, you know, 55, and under, which is

unrepresented, that part of the stroke community is really on represented out in the world.

Bill Gasiamis 41:01

You don't hear much about young stroke survivors, but there's a ton of them. Fortunately, I think you don't hear about old stroke survivors because most of them don't get away with it. So the fact that you're here is really good. Tell me about the career that got you into this situation where you're the creator of the music box, and dancer, and you've had a gold record because of it at least in Australia.

Frank Mills 41:35

Yeah. Well, I started with a rock band, when I was about 25 28 years old. I called the bells. And they had a number-one hit that I played piano and harmonica on in 1971. That's a long time ago. But I arranged that piece and played a rather large role in producing it.

Frank Mills 42:09

I don't know if you're familiar with the various stages of recording but they're all these different people, I happen to be the one guy who did it. But after the record went gold in the United States, get to number one called Stay a While and you can look it up by The Bells, and you will hear it.

Frank Mills 42:30

It's a very soft, gentle ballad. The Bells was a rock group in Canada at the time. And rock is putting it mildly, it was probably elevated music, at that time, but compared to what Springsteen doing these days, which is rock, you know. And I wasn't altogether comfortable with that, I was happy to get the gold record, of course, with The Bells.

Frank Mills 42:56

But I realized that I didn't want to be a singer. So I didn't mind playing the piano. I was a pianist at the time. That's how I was earning my living with the bells. So that lasted for two years, I finally decided to go on my own. And I made a record recording a piano music. It was called Seven of My Songs and some others. That's a strange title.

Frank Mills 43:21

But I played stuff like Bridge Over Troubled Water on and all of my arrangements.

And it was very different. You I would challenge some people to, you know, do you know what song I'm playing here, even though most of the late people wouldn't know it all, a musician would just sum it up right away.

Frank Mills 43:40

But my arrangements were very different. So anyway, I kind of liked that little niche. But the recording company made me a deal. I couldn't be fussed. And they said, well get do an album and we'll help you pay for it. And actually, I ended up having to go to the bank to borrow to finish it.

Frank Mills 43:56

But that's all history. And I made the album and it was an instrumental album piano album. And it was just fate was ironic, everything was telling me to be a singer. But this is going to be the you know, the way to go? And I said no, no, I'm not interested in the fame or the fortune and the singing and the Hard Rock life. I

Frank Mills 44:17

It's not for me. I want to be a piano player and just do my thing, you know? So we'll dammed up if you didn't have one of the songs on that album that was liked by the artist and repertory director at Polygram Records Canada, which is where I was at the time. And he said you have lyrics for that song? And I thought oh, here we go again, back to the same song.

Frank Mills 44:40

You know, I said Yeah, I do. He said sing at least. So he stuck the album in his office. And I sang a song called Love Me Love Me Love which went to number one in Canada three months after I'd recorded it.

Frank Mills 44:52

So I was doing okay, you know, as a young guy I had two gold records under my belt, one of them just in Canada, although Love Me Love Me Love went to number 40 in the States and didn't do well, but that's fine number 40 is better than nothing.

Bill Gasiamis 45:09

That's pretty good.

Frank Mills 45:10

Yeah, so I was off to a great career. Eventually they realized that singing was not

for me I would my heart wasn't in it. And I did a series of 26 albums on piano and orchestra after that. So writing songs, I must have written at least 200 pieces for the artist, Frank Mills on piano. And other people record them James last a lot of the big instrumental guys in Europe recorded my pieces.

Frank Mills 45:41

And in the States, Ray Conniff was he liked my music. So he recorded a lot with his orchestra and chorus. And there are a lot of covered tunes music box dancer Bill was one of 200 songs. My kids liked it and I realized up-tempo pieces are not common happy pieces of music easy to write a soppy ballad than it is to write an up-tempo happy piece, right? And, I wrote a lot of my soppy ballads.

Frank Mills 46:12

But yeah, so eventually, Music Box Dancer should never have been released. It had such a tough time going from one drawer to another drawer and being turned down by virtually everybody in the business. And finally, a fellow from England was on loan to Polygram, Canada, and Polly Door at the time.

Frank Mills 46:37

And he said to me, what's that ticularly peace, you've got an album that he put out years ago. He said, I kind of liked that. And we released it. I said to him at the time, this is all very well, you know, I gotta put bread and butter on the table here. What are we gonna how many are we gonna sell he said, Oh 5000 Or maybe seven.

Frank Mills 46:58

And about six months later, we already sold a million in Canada. And that's a big market, a tiny market for a million records. Just about every other Canadian must have bought one. So I ended up with a music box, going to number one in 26 countries. I've got 16 gold albums up there and 14 Platinum ones.

Frank Mills 47:22

And it's been a hell of a career that nobody knows about. But there's a music box dancer once said, I think in Wikipedia, one of the most memorable melodies ever written. That's about the best compliment a writer can get. And there it is. So here I am, you know, stroke later, and still, really not in the music business.

Frank Mills 47:46

I retired in 2018, purpose on purpose, did my last concert, and wrote music to the

poem in Flanders Fields. I don't know if you know it by John McCrae. It's about the First World War. And I wrote music to that. And it's being used now by veterans and things on Armistice Day. In Canada, it's starting to catch on quite well, which is nice. I did it as a nonprofit just to thank you for the vets. And as a farewell project. So that's where I'm at today. It's catching on.

Frank's Music Career

Bill Gasiamis 48:22

It's interesting, you know, you said it's a hell of a career that nobody knows about. What genre is this career that you've had? Like, what genre is it in? And because I've only ever heard of the gold albums, you know, for Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson and those kind of guys. You hear that they make it big in the charts, etc. What chart were you ranking in? Is it the same chart that I'm listening to the pop chart or something like that?

Frank Mills 49:04

I guess the best way I can describe it is BBC Two. They were the ones who caught on. And the rock stations hated me they just loathed me because, in essence, my career was one of narrowcasting Bill.

Frank Mills 49:22

I wrote songs, and piano and orchestra. I love the big orchestra and I toured with a large orchestra for five years. And my small band. Well, there are 13 of us to begin with, and then down to five. The five of us toured for 12 years, the last 12 years 2018 were from 2006 to 2018 I traveled with six of the best guys a guy could ever wish to work with.

Frank Mills 49:53

We had a wonderful career together. Everybody got well paid. And we had a great time I went to Japan, Japan is an amazing mark, as you can imagine a little ballerina with that song going around in circles. It appealed to the Japanese like nobody else before I hit several gold records from Japan.

Frank Mills 50:12

It was on the charts in Japan for nine months. And, here's the middle-of-the-road sort of easy listening elevator, Frank touring in Japan and got mobbed by schoolchildren at the airport when we arrived it was hilarious.

Frank Mills 50:29

The constant problem for me in the press has been where do we put it? Is this guy with his mega-hit? And it's not a rock and roll in the audience. They're all older people and loving it. Have a great time.

Frank Mills 50:41

So the long and short of it to answer your question was, I'd been narrowcasting, I knew that from the minute I went into instrumental music. Even the first guys at the record company said Yeah, but what are we gonna do with it? You know, it's a nice song. What are we gonna do with it?

Frank Mills 50:56

What do you mean, what do you do with it, promote it, we can't promote that nobody will play it, you know, on and on. And finally, they had to play. The phones went up every time they played the darn thing. No matter what city it was, the phones would light up and you couldn't make a phone call switchboards were jammed.

Frank Mills 51:17

It was hilarious. I remember going to Ottawa to give a concert one of the first concerts I ever gave after Music Box Dancer alone. There I was on the stage with myself and said to the producer, how many people do you expect to show up? This was an open-air concert on the beautiful river in Ottawa, which is a pretty city in Canada, it's the Capital.

Frank Mills 51:38

And there we were on the stage and he said, there'll be about 500 there. I was driving from Montreal, I lived in Montreal, drove to Ottawa, and got into a traffic jam. And I didn't know what was going on. I thought I was not gonna make it for two o'clock.

Frank Mills 51:53

And I rolled down the window and said to the guy, is this traffic gonna last? Like, is this happening all the time? Because I'm trying to get somewhere. And he said, No, they're all lined up for the Frank Mills concert.

Bill Gasiamis 52:07

Wow.

Frank Mills 52:07

So I parked my car on the field and walked to my concert. 5000 people showed up instead of 500. They ran out of free Pepsi and hamburgers in about 10 minutes they had to call in the pizza trucks because Pepsi decided to sponsor this thing. So it had its wonderful moments. It's been a great career.

Frank Mills 52:30

And I sort of sat in the back and laughed all the way to the bank. Well, this was all going around me without any fanfare whatsoever. There was a time in Canada when I could walk around and people would recognize me but I could go anywhere I want today and nobody has any idea who I am, which is kind of fun.

Bill Gasiamis 52:50

That is kind of fun. So what's interesting is that you said you know the Rock and Roll people would have hated you or disliked your amount of taking up their supposed airtime or anything like that, right? But what's interesting is that there are a lot of really famous bands, whose guitarists and whose musicians are classically trained.

Bill Gasiamis 53:27

I know the guys in Metallica and some of the other popular rock bands have classically trained musicians that play in that band and then have decided, you know that their niche, or what they love to do is hard rock, or heavy metal, or whatever they call it. Right?

Bill Gasiamis 53:47

So that's interesting. And that they couldn't appreciate your formula for success. You know, your formula is really what it's about. And I think there's something to learn from you. If you're an aspiring musician, it's like, what the hell's Frank doing? Why is he getting this airtime?

Bill Gasiamis 54:08

And if it's not necessarily, I'm gonna do what Frank does and play piano music. It's like, understanding the psyche that goes into creating a piece, and then finding a way to somehow get it played, and then having these unexpected results because of it. I think there would have been a lot to learn from you, rather than giving you a hard time about the fact that you've got a Piano Box dancer on the charts.

Frank Mills 54:42

Well, when you go into it, there's no hindsight. So you know, I can look back now and see how it came about and why it came about. But there's no doubt when anybody goes into any creative field. You're playing the odds, the odds are you're not gonna make it. That's the bad news to start with.

Frank Mills 55:04

Now, if you think you're good enough, and my attitude was always this I was raised in a house where classical music was always played. I studied classical music, most of my life and enjoyed it.

Frank Mills 55:20

And remember I got admitted to McGill University's music school by playing Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto by ear, in C sharp minor instead of C minor. And the entrance examiner said, that's very lovely, but why do you play it C sharp minor?

Frank Mills 55:40

And I said I don't know. But I play along with the record, I guess the turn tables are turning a little quicker than it's supposed to. He laughed, and he said, Yeah, you're pretty good you're in. So that was the end of it. We had a good laugh about that. But here's how it all started.

Frank Mills 55:56

Just a weird situation that I said, I'm going to take this as far as I can. I know, Bruce Springsteen, that didn't happen, quite honestly, you just sort of sold his catalog for half a billion dollars, but I don't need that kind of thing. I wouldn't be afraid of that type of life, I wouldn't.

Frank Mills 56:20

And a lot of the rock guys, I know, in the big rock bands, you know, they've had a hard life, it's 300 days a year on the road for a lot of them in the beginning. And there's not enough to do you know, you're doing the same show every night. And gosh, so I was lucky, we had various orchestras, the core band was four guys, you know, and myself.

Frank Mills 56:44

And we would build on that we had orchestras as big as 80 people in the recording studio one time. And other times, they were just the four of us. So I

liked the big orchestra, I always enjoyed playing with them.

Living A Full Life



Frank Mills 56:57

And it was a bit of a perk, I guess, to be invited to play with the various symphonies in Canada and raise some money for them, and then do that kind of stuff, you know. So it's been very rewarding, but much more, I took it as far as I could. And it went much further than I ever thought it would. So there you have the career side of it. And now I've got the stroke to worry about.

Bill Gasiamis 57:20

You're living a full life, you know, when I consider my life, it's the type of life I want to live, I want to live a full life, I want to take things as far as I can take them. And I never was like that, you know, the stroke made me wake up to myself.

Bill Gasiamis 57:34

And pay attention to what's important and having a go, giving things a try and letting fear you know, not override my decision making and stopping all of that rubbish and just basically getting on with it. You're a great example of how to go about life, give it a go, and then try something different.

Bill Gasiamis 58:02

If it doesn't work out and live relatively healthy. Avoid all of the things that we think we're supposed to be doing because others are telling us to do. And then it's not us, you know, that going into the music career for you. You know, it would have been difficult for most people to resist being told you should be a singer Frank.

Bill Gasiamis 58:28

Because they're looking at that and thinking, well, there's a pay, there's a paycheck at the end of that, you know, I might as well do what they're telling me to do. Right? And live some kind of version of a career in this field. And you're gone. No, I don't want to do that. You've done the exact opposite.

Frank Mills 58:47

It wasn't my style. You know, I just tried to be honest with myself. Yeah. I think I'm going through a few hard knocks on ladies Young. Set me up for that honesty, I had to look in the mirror an awful lot. Where is this going? You know, what do you want to do about it?

Frank Mills 59:05

I remember, finally taking the plunge into music which I equated to going off the high diving board, holding your nose and your trunks fall off on the way down, you know, and it was full of that there was a lot of humor that kept me going. Because I like a good story. And I like being with the audience and we related to each other well, because they were older. They were not the younger crowd.

Frank Mills 59:30

They will bring the babies and the children like you had, but there was a big gap in it. I never saw the rockers. They were too busy at the Springsteen concert and that's fine. I had to admit that though. You know, I had to realize that sorry, Frankie you're never gonna be a superstar you know, but by narrowcasting, as I call it, I did find a niche that seemed to work.

Frank Mills 59:53

I was certainly blessed. I have been led a blessed life. I tend to have a lot of I spend a lot of time thanking the great spirit. I'm not overly religious, but the great spirit looks after me very well.

Frank Mills 1:00:07

So especially with the stroke thing, it's been a blessing in disguise, because I've learned a lot about myself that I didn't know. And some of it's pretty good. I'm pretty happy about having recovered as well as I have. And my wife has been instrumental in that if I can use that word.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:24

That's, lovely, man, it's a great way to round up and finish up the episode, I want

to thank you for reaching out. Because I very rarely hear from all the folks who've had a stroke. And it's really important that I put the message out for everybody. This is not just a podcast for young people and have had a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:43

It's for everybody. So I'm glad that you did that. I'm glad that you told me about your career in that part of the email that I received, and you're reluctant to come on the podcast. But I thought there was no way I was going to let him get away with it, I needed to have him, I needed to meet the guy who used to drive me nuts, at all hours, 25 years ago.

Frank Mills 1:01:09

You weren't alone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:11

Listening to this music, on repeat, and nothing else and I'm so glad that we had it because it settled the babies and calmed them down. And it made it possible for us to get some sleep every once in a while.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:26

So I didn't know that I was going to be thanking you for that 25 years later. But thank you for that. Thank you for being on the podcast. And it's so great to see that you're doing well and recovering.

Frank Mills 1:01:40

Well, thank you and I enjoy your work, you've been very helpful, I'm sure to many people, not just me, and it's a good thing you're doing. I admire you for it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:54

Thanks, Frank.

Frank Mills 1:01:56

Thank you.

Frank Mills experienced a vertebral artery dissection while he was having a shower. He walked into the emergency room and told the nurses he was having a stroke.

Wikipedia

Highlights:

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Transcription:

Frank Mills 0:00

I was diagnosed with prediabetes about seven years ago and gave up sugar. The doctor said to me, well, you've got a few choices here, nobody gives up sugar. So we'll put you on a pill.

Frank Mills 0:11

I said I'm not a pill guy. Let me try giving up sugar. I weighed 250 pounds at that time. And she said, okay, how long do you want to do this? So I said, let's try a month. If nothing happens, fine.

Frank Mills 0:27

Well, within a month, I'd lost 13 pounds. And I was feeling great. I didn't have any of the ups and downs of what is it when you have that sugar problem. hypoglycemia? I didn't have any of that anymore. Long story short, I lost 47 pounds in six months, and I've never felt better, never looked back, and don't eat sugar.

Intro 0:52

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

Bill Gasiamis 1:05

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Recovery after Stroke podcast. Now

recently, Spotify released a new feature that allows people to write their favorite shows similar to how the Apple podcast app allows it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19

If you think this show deserves it, I'd love it if you left a five-star review. This will help the show rank better on search engines, and help newly diagnosed stroke survivors find the show, and therefore hopefully you could make their life a little better on the way to recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36

So go along to your favorite app, and share what the podcast means to you. It really will make a huge difference. And I would appreciate it. Now thanks so much for tuning in to today's episode.

Introduction



Bill Gasiamis 1:49

This is episode 179. And my guest today is Frank Mills, the world-famous musician who amongst other things, wrote the popular piano track Music Box Dancer, Frank Mills, welcome to the podcast.

Frank Mills 2:05

Nice to see you, Bill.

Bill Gasiamis 2:06

Nice to see you. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate it.

Frank Mills 2:11

It's a pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 2:13

Frank, tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Frank Mills 2:15

Well, it was November 28, just a little bit over a year ago. And I was in the shower one morning. Never had any inkling about any of this. Eat well, get lots of exercise, outdoors farmer type guy, play the piano for a living.

Frank Mills 2:36

That's over, I retired in 2018. So it wasn't a question of a major, major, major interruption. But on that morning, I remember in the shower, all of a sudden my legs gave out from under me.

Frank Mills 2:51

And I sort of felt I was about to plop onto the shower floor, which is never good at any age. I'm 78 at the time, I'm now 79. And I thought this was good. So I quickly called Brenda who just rescued me with this podcast, my technician and able wife, and head nurse.

Frank Mills 3:13

And I just said to her, I'm having a stroke. I know it. So we got to get to the hospital right now. So we made it to the car, and I could walk. The stroke thing was sort of brief. And I was able to walk to the car, all be it very nauseous and not feeling normal at all.

Frank Mills 3:34

And hence the decision that I thought I was having a stroke it didn't make any sense or anything else it was so sudden. We got to the emergency ward in the hospital and I walked in quite normally. And I just said to the receptionist in the hospital at the emergency ward I'm having a stroke.

Frank Mills 3:55

And she pressed this button and two guys appeared and put me on a stretcher and up we went and never saw Brenda for three days because of COVID. She wasn't allowed in the hospital. But she had the presence of mind to bring my cell phone to the nurse at the reception in the hospital, which made the whole thing a

little easier.

Frank Mills 4:13

But that's briefly what happened. And I had no real inkling that my prognosis was correct in the first place until the nurse sent a doctor with the boys who put me in the stretcher and up I went and he knew in one minute I was having a stroke. So it wasn't a bad diagnosis on my part, but I guess the suddenness of it was what surprised me, and the lack of symptoms beforehand was just nothing.

Bill Gasiamis 4:41

Any of the typical symptoms, nothing at all? And you just started to feel unwell? Now what kind of stroke was it? Was it an ischemic stroke?

Frank Mills 4:52

Well, no, it was a spontaneous vertebral arterial stroke. Oh, you mean the stroke itself?

Frank Mills Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 4:58

Yeah, was it a clot that occurred?

Frank Mills 5:01

Well, the clot occurred, they don't quite know that two interesting things came out of this, which I suppose comes out of most strokes. One of them was that they did a CT scan on me instantly when I wasn't in the hospital an hour and they did that.

Frank Mills 5:19

And this might clarify your question. When they looked at it, the doctor came down. And he told me that, although there was a bit of a shadow, they couldn't see everything perfectly clearly he said your brain is very clear of cholesterol. And it had nothing to do with that.

Frank Mills 5:36

We think it's probably some matter that got released from the artery when it was dissected. And the dissection caused some, I mean, this is all on a micro level I guess. A few cells would have done it. And it was a pons stroke.

Frank Mills 6:01

And I guess in a sense, he said, he kept saying to me you're a very lucky man, because this could have been a lot worse. And as that proved to be true. I'm feeling well, these days. You know, there, we can talk about the hangovers. But really, I'm lucky to be where I'm at.

Frank Mills 6:21

And I have read a lot of your notes and information. Thank you. And listen to a few of your podcasts which I enjoy. And I guess I'll let you ask the questions because it was well, the doctor, the neurologist that took care of me, and a nice guy, and he sort of laughed a bit.

Frank Mills 6:43

And I thought, what's so funny? And he said, Well, you just got lumberman's disease, and I said lumberjack's disease. What's that? He said, well, as you know, here in Vermont, the main industry other than tourism is wood, and lumbering and logging and boards and plywood and all that.

Frank Mills 7:01

And he said, a lot of guys working in the lumber industry, and particularly loggers who cut trees down, get these arterial dissections because they will be looking up at the top of a tree, and down at the bottom of the base of the tree where they're going to cut it probably 20 or 30 times during the felling of one tree.

Frank Mills 7:25

And this might go on 50 times during the day. And he said it just puts an awful lot of stress and friction on those arteries that tuck onto your skull up in that area that come out of the spinal column and tuck under there.

Frank Mills 7:44

And he said the best way I can describe your stroke is to say that you've been strangled, then you survive. It's lovely, isn't it? But in hindsight, it's sort of a good way of putting it. These arteries are not as strong as I thought they were.

Frank Mills 8:02

And they tend to be very flexible, and multi-layered. So you know that's all I could gather out of it. And I was only in the hospital for two days, and they let me go home and then the dark wall hit when I got home, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 8:19

It's really lovely to speak to somebody who, "got away with it". Because very often the majority of the people that I've had on the podcast've had, firstly, a stroke, secondly, some kind of vertebral artery dissection or carotid artery dissection, yet, they usually don't get so lucky.

Bill Gasiamis 8:41

And perhaps the dissection is more dramatic, and it causes more problems and therefore creates a more serious stroke, and now all strokes serious, the fact that you've had a stroke, that's serious, but the fact that you had a very small amount of time between the time that it happened and then you acted and went to hospital A.

Bill Gasiamis 9:08

And B, that the size of the dissection and the small particles, for example, that they released meant the brain wasn't starved of oxygen for an extended period was just a small interruption and therefore was able to come back but even you who got away with it so well, you just even mentioned that you had dark times. So what were they like when you came home from the hospital three days later what was going on?

Frank Mills 9:40

Well, that's the big one that I think everybody having a stroke goes through and I had done very well at the hospital I was up and about they were walking me down the hall and the corridor is the same old stuff and I was having a great old time with the nurses.

Frank Mills Stroke Dark Moments

Frank Mills 9:56

I mean it was just almost normal. Although there was this looming thing, when I was on my own, it was a little different going to the washroom. And in the hospital, there was a little less confidence there.

Frank Mills 10:12

And on Monday morning when the doctor came because this happened on a Saturday morning and Monday morning, and the doctor came in, he said, we're gonna let you go home. But he said, I caution you. You're doing very well right

now. But he said, when you go home, you may have some dark moments.

Frank Mills 10:29

And I sort of wondered, what's this supposed to be looking for? And he said, stairs, in particular, are going to give you trouble because your balance is off, your eyesight seems to be good.

Frank Mills 10:43

And most of the symptoms that are normal strokes were there. They were constantly taking tests by movements of my toes, my feet, my hands, my arms, my ears, my sight, my smell, my hearing, and everything else, and they're all quite good.

Frank Mills 11:02

So I left the hospital in a wheelchair down to the car, and my wife drove me home. And I got to the home and we walked and I got to the stairs I've never seen stairs in five days now. And I looked at the stairs, and I just burst into tears, I sat down, and I thought there's no way I can get up here, there are only four stairs to go up.

Frank Mills 11:34

And they were just I've never seen that before of course since the stroke. They didn't have them in the hospital. He warned me about this. And I thought so I sat on my backside and bumped up the steps. And that was okay, I went to the washroom and then came spruced up a little bit.

Frank Mills 11:57

And then I came to the stairs again to go down where I could sit and relax with a cup of tea or something. And I froze, I just didn't know what to do. I didn't have any idea what to do. I just did whatever walking I had done, I'd forgotten.

Frank Mills 12:18

Whatever going down steps I thought about then nothing. And I sat down on my backside again I think is the only way I'm gonna get down these stairs, and I burst into tears.

Frank Mills 12:28

And I remember saying to Brenda, you know if this is the way life is going to be for the rest of my life. I'm not so sure I want to live it. Because at that time, it just seemed all the walls caved in.

Frank Mills 12:40

Everything just caved in. It was my one dark moment, which I'm sure everybody who had a stroke goes through especially if you've been hurt. It wasn't that bad. You know, but you don't realize that at the time, you don't know.

Bill Gasiamis 12:55

Yeah, it's the worst possible situation. You can't walk up and down stairs and you've got all the rest of your faculties. But you can't do that. You remind me of my dad, he's 79 I think as well. And he had knee surgery Frank, which meant that he had to go through two or three months of rehabilitation.

Bill Gasiamis 13:18

He's a heavy guy as well. And that two or three months, I can honestly tell you that he was depressed because he wasn't able to get around now. He's been Touchwood he's been well his entire life. I've never known him to be unwell.

Bill Gasiamis 13:21

And I'm nearly 50 years old. So I've known the guy a long time. And these three months were enough to spiral him out of his regular state of, you know, being generally upbeat and happy-go-lucky to being difficult to shift from, you know, these sort of dark thoughts that he had in his head, and it was just knee surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 14:05

He was always going to get better from it. It was always going to work. It just needed him to be on his bum for a little bit of time. But it was strange how quickly he got there. So is that unlike you as well?

Bill Gasiamis 14:19

Normally are you upbeat do you normally have any concerns about being so dramatic about life that if it's going to be like this, then it's over? Like is it that dramatic has been before?

Frank Mills 14:35

No, never before, well, maybe once before but that was years ago when I was under some psychiatric care for a while. For some issues, I had as both my parents died when I was young.

Frank Mills 14:50

So that made my upbringing difficult there were some moments in my life that

that situation after I was about 10 years of age due to medical problems, and my family became dysfunctional.

Frank Mills 14:59

And so I was really on my own as a young man and without guidance. So there were some psychiatric, mind you I'm a great believer in psychiatry I found a psychiatrist who was just a super guy to begin with and he understood my problems.

Frank Mills 15:28

And we solved them together and he said to me you know you need six months and you'll be feeling a lot better. Well, that's the only dark moment I ever had until the stroke.

Missed Opportunity After Frank Mills Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 15:37

I feel like, do you feel like the doctors of the hospital let you down? They told you that you were going to have trouble with stairs, but yet, there was no rehabilitation before you went home. Do you think there was something missed there? Was there an opportunity to help you that got missed?

Frank Mills 15:56

Well, I think there were two things. I think that part of what you're saying is true. If I'd had three more days at the hospital, maybe we would have found a flight of stairs somewhere and done it.

Frank Mills 16:11

So maybe I was released a little bit prematurely. I've always had this chameleon-like effect on people that oh, don't worry about Frank, you know, he's fine. Look at him he's great he's out there on the farm and doing lumbering and still back chopping firewood again, and milking the cows and all the rest of it.

Frank Mills 16:30

And so I wouldn't want to blame anybody if there'd been a lot more time and you know, hospitals today beds are not available. And yeah. So I don't think there was anything that could have been done other than the fact that I guess I didn't take it seriously enough when they said stairs are going to be an issue.

Frank Mills 16:58

Oh, yeah, sure. stairs, stairs, trees, hills, who cares, you know, get on with it mills. And so that was the issue and Brenda, of course burst out into tears on the stairs, bawling her eyes out.

Frank Mills 17:12

And I finally said enough of this stuff. Let's have a cup of tea. So that ended we got down the stairs, sat on the sofa in the living room by the fire had a cup of tea. And I went to bed I guess, tired is the more right word.

Frank Mills 17:31

Woke up the next morning. And the whole attitude had changed. Of course, I love mornings I love waking up, especially at 79 that's a major accomplishment. Every morning, wee I'm alive again for another day. It's not all that bad. But that's kind of the scenario you know, cuz I have a pretty good sense of humor, which always sees me through these things.

Frank Mills 17:54

Anyway, I said to Brenda, we're gonna beat this, this is ridiculous. So we started going for walks. And then the first walk was out to the balcony, which is only about 10 feet.

Frank Mills 18:08

But I had a walker and a cane and whatever I needed the post-operative care or wrong word, perhaps post-stroke care was excellent here, the facilities in Vermont. At the local hospital, especially I had six weeks of intensive rehabilitation and muscular that I had the three things that the.

Intro 18:38

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

Intro 19:02

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation. Stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you it's

called Seven Questions to Ask Your Doctor about Your Stroke.

Intro 19:21

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 [recovery after stroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide it's free

Frank Mills 19:40

The eyes the muscles that was the other one that speech because my speech was a bit slurry you know that was nothing to me. Okay. My speech is slurry the doctors had said in your case you'll probably it may take about a year but you're going to be living a normal life in two or three months.

Frank Mills 20:03

So that spurred me on a bit. But it was the walks with Brenda, that really, it's we live in a very idyllic setting here. It's in the mountains of the Green Mountains of Vermont, where there are lots of cows and farms.

Frank Mills 20:18

And it's a very bucolic sort of setting and, and a lovely place to be older than younger, I think. But that's being honest. So we started our walks. And the first walk, I remember, it was down the balcony a couple of times, you know, and I thought, Oh, the fresh air and the scenery.

Frank Mills 20:21

And, gosh, this was getting slowly getting back to where I started. And that when I celebrate, we both took a walk on November 28th, down to the Sugar House, which is about half a mile.

Frank Mills 20:37

And back here, and we took the long route, which is what we called the long route when I was progressing through my post-operative care, or post-stroke care is the right word. And, we came didn't stop down there, we marched right back and just said, you know, it's been a good year, I can do this and it's happened.

Frank Mills 21:11

And so we went from that few steps on the porch to, oh, a few more steps around the house and then down to the barn. That was a big one that was about 100 feet

away. And then a couple of days, I was doing that with ease. And then we push that to go the garden and we have a drive-in driveway thing.

Frank Mills 21:32

So doing that circle, that's about 500 feet, I guess. And it just went on and on and on until we finally went down to the sugar house. And after several stops at times, but a year later, I could have probably jogged it if I'd wanted to.

Frank Mills 21:48

If I had been forced to I probably could have jogged down to that place and back again, one year later. So I felt pretty good about life. There are some hangovers, however, and we can talk about those. I'm taking up more of your time here. So you have some questions I'm sure.

Bill Gasiamis 22:07

I do. I do. But that's okay. All the stuff that you're saying is relevant. And it's really important for people to hear. What's interesting is that at 79, you've probably known people before you friends, family, acquaintances that have had more dramatic strokes would you have come across somebody before?

Frank Mills 22:27

Many times past, I've probably had three friends who passed because of a stroke. And they were the typical minor strokes, a couple of minor strokes, then a more serious one. And then finally they get the big one. And the family decides to pull the plug now that that's the worst-case scenario.

Frank Mills 22:49

But that happened over probably three or four years. And looking back at all of them, there was a lot of drinking a lot of bad diet, not much exercise. It's the old story. I go to the gym three times a week. And I've been doing that since June and love it.

Importance of Being In Good Shape

Frank Mills 23:10

And I believe in it. I think you know, if anything you were talking to a fellow named Molter, I think a few weeks ago in your podcast, and he mentioned that. If you're in good shape, when you start chances are you'll weather the storm better than if you're not in good shape.

Bill Gasiamis 23:35

Steve Molter yeah he's similar age to me. He's probably in his mid-40s. And he had a spontaneous vertebral artery dissection as well. And that's the whole point of it. It's like smoking and drinking are things that we do because for some reason we think they bring us good experiences, and pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 23:58

I'm not sure if I was one of those people. But what they're doing as well, is this slowly increasing the speed at which arteries deteriorate. And yeah, and then that means when you have a small dissection that could become very catastrophic, much quicker.

Bill Gasiamis 24:17

So you're in the best position to have a dissection if you've always been a nonsmoker. If you've always been a nondrinker. And I'm not talking about one drink a day or one wine a day.

Bill Gasiamis 24:30

And if you've been fit in well, because your baseline is much, much better so that you've got a head start on recovery because you've always been well, so you've always been unknowingly preparing for a moment when ill health might be around the corner and that does serve people well.

Bill Gasiamis 24:51

And I suppose the people who I've found that have had a stroke and they've been really fit and really Well, sometimes will complain, they'll say, what was the point of it all, you know, I went to all this effort and look, I still had a stroke. Well, life doesn't miss out on you, because you've been to the gym regularly, it still happens to you.

Bill Gasiamis 25:15

But you've done a lot of the preventative work, and that has held you in good stead. So that's important. So even though your friends had, or the people that you've known how to trick you still didn't take it seriously for yourself. It's like, this can't happen to me. This is, you know, I'm Frank Mills, like, I do all these things. These things don't happen to me. Is that true? Or is that different In your mind?

Frank Mills 25:43

think the difference difference is in the word spontaneous. And you were the first one who used that they didn't call it that. In the hospital where I was, it was just called a vertebral artery dissection, which was already three words too big for me to comprehend with all the doctors running around.

Frank Mills 26:05

But yeah, I think being fit. Farm Life has been good for me. In many senses. We don't drink a lot. I have a beer once in a while. A Scotch now and then. No, I'm not a drinker. Smoke, I don't smoke. I have a cigar now. And then I can't stand it nearly I'd be sick as a dog if I inhale that cigar.

Frank Mills 26:28

So it's just the pleasure of the smoke and sitting or relaxing for an hour because you don't get much time to relax in this atmosphere. It's all fresh air and hard work, you know, which is great for us. I think the sedentary city life is not good for us in the sense that physically, and mentally it's probably better for us more stimulation. No, maybe.

Sensory Overload

Bill Gasiamis 27:01

I'd say no, it's overstimulation, Frank, you know, it's I think about city life. For me, especially since my stroke. And now my brain is sensitive to being overstimulated. You know, too many cars on the road, too many noises, too many bright lights at night, too much of artificial stuff that's happening around us that we think is normal overstimulates the brain and it's like, no, this is too much.

Bill Gasiamis 27:26

I enjoy my best time is usually before I go to bed, I go lie down, I try and get in there. Before my wife comes to bed. I try and get in for about half an hour, 45 minutes with as little noise as possible. And as dim light as possible. Just to unwind my brain from all of the overstimulation of things.

Bill Gasiamis 27:50

And I do prefer being out in the, we'll call it the countryside, where there's a lot of different versions, different colors of green, there's blue, there's gray, there are all the different colors of nature, and there's not a lot of noise, and there's just you hear you know, the trees and the wind.

Bill Gasiamis 28:13

And you can see far into the distance rather than the short distances. Like for me, that has always felt like home and my wife says the same thing about the beach. For me, it's it's the hills in the country.

Bill Gasiamis 28:26

So city life is exceedingly becoming more detrimental to our health, well being mental health as well. But because it's it's it's a life that is I think we were living it because other people are making us live in the city. Work is there. Then we go into offices.

Bill Gasiamis 28:53

You know, we're doing a lot of things that we prefer not to be doing but we're stuck in this rut of mortgage and, and bills and school fees and two cars and all this junk, right? That describes me before the show guy was a mess before the stroke. I've never been better since the stroke and my physical symptoms are daily.

Bill Gasiamis 29:17

It's not like I've been able to recover from my physical symptoms but I've never felt healthier because I've even though I still live in the city withdrawn from the over from the commitment to doing things that overstimulate me and I'm becoming aware of it.

Bill Gasiamis 29:34

So being sedentary makes me feel unwell. So in COVID in Melbourne, Victoria Australia, where I live, the lockdowns have been the longest we've had the longest lockdowns anybody. And that forces you to be at home and on your butt for a long, long time.

Bill Gasiamis 29:53

That was harder for me than actually going through the stroke. Stroke Rehabilitation, and I had a pretty rough because I had to learn how to walk again and I had to learn how to use my arm again. And I had three strokes over three years and brain surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 30:12

So it's not like I had an easy run with a stroke. But the lockdowns have been harder on my psyche, and my emotional well-being than the stroke. So, I envy it. I

don't have envy. But if I have to use a word, like, I enjoy people who live in the spaces where you where you live, you know.

Frank Mills 30:33

Yeah, well, of course. You know, the only thing we've been able to look at for the last 18 months are the cows, you know, we only got nine and they've gone to be bred so we won't see them till May again.

Frank Mills 30:47

So it's a nice life out here in the country. But again, when you get back to the possibility of stroke and the spontaneity of the dissection. I never knew what a dissection was until I had a stroke. And I knew it. I was not prepared for that. Because the friends I had lost to stroke I suspected had high cholesterol levels.

Giving Up Sugar

Frank Mills 31:19

Their blood was probably full of fat and sugar. I was diagnosed with prediabetes about seven years ago and gave up sugar. The doctor said to me, Well, you've got a few choices here. Nobody gives up sugar. So we'll put you on a pill I die. I'm not a pill guy. Let me try giving up sugar. I weighed 250 pounds at that time.

Frank Mills 31:45

And she said, Okay, how long do you want to do this? Well, I said, let's try it a month. If nothing happens, fine. Well, within a month, I'd lost 13 pounds. And I was feeling great. I didn't have any ups and downs what is it when you have that sugar problem? hypoglycemia?

Frank Mills 32:05

I didn't have any of that anymore. Long story short, I lost 47 pounds in six months. And I've never felt better, never looked back, and don't eat sugar. I mean, I'll have the odd cookie if it's there, but I'm very fastidious about cookies and booze. So I stay away from both of them. Not that the latter was ever a problem.

Frank Mills 32:28

But one thing that I mentioned that the stroke did for me was they gave me a few CT scans, they did two or three of them. By the time I was out of there for three days. And the doctor said you will never get a stroke caused by cholesterol, your

brain is as clean as a whistle.

Frank Mills 32:45

And that they had looked at every aspect of it so that there was a difference to me Bill between the dissection type of stroke, which is caused really, the doctor had said, you know, a lot of guys have dissections and don't know they had them. He said they get better and forget about it.

Frank Mills 33:04

They may have a headache or something like that. But I of course I didn't have that I did have a stroke. But I think they're very different. Medically speaking when you have a stroke that's caused by arterial blockage, as opposed to dissection, which can be it can also be equally severe, as you pointed out earlier. But it wasn't in my case. And you know, in six weeks, I was driving my truck down to rehabilitation.

Frank Mills 33:36

The nurse asked me how did you get here she said yeah, I guess you live on a farm but it's still a normal view, and use your back walking again. Because you have to go and walk anyway. Don't you? I said I don't have to. But yeah, and walking was good. And it's funny.

Frank Mills 33:59

My left side was the one that got hit because of the stroke and the things that originally I remembered, my speech was a bit slurry. And my left arm was not in control of what it was doing. I couldn't lift much with I couldn't lift the glass to drink with my left arm. And my left leg was sort of like it would do what I call a Dipsy doodle every once in a while. I was there was a screw missing up there.

Frank Mills 34:30

You know, the brain was not quite firing on all eight cylinders, they might say, and slowly that all came back. Great therapy they had marvelous therapy, nurses, and physical therapists there that the center I went after, which lasted for six to eight weeks, I guess and after that period, the main physical things , of this job began to subside rapidly.

Frank Mills 35:00

Today I'm left I do a Dipsy doodle, I call it with my left leg every once in a while, I'll be out working down at the sugar bush on log cutting or splitting firewood

and, I'll sort of lose my balance a little bit, you know. And one day I just rolled over on my side, it was so funny.

Frank Mills 35:20

I couldn't believe what was happening, I just rolled over. If anybody had seen it, they would have found it hilarious because I look just like a snowman if you push it, they roll over. And I thought what's going on here and I realized that and they told me about this once in a while the connections are the synapses are not all firing, you know, and, and you just hope that this will go away, then.

Frank Mills 35:44

So the result of all of this, yes, they went away. But my left hand as a piano player was frustratingly slow after this, too, okay, in fact, I could no longer play professionally, I would not play in front of people. And I gave up playing for my enjoyment.

Frank Mills 36:01

For better or for worse, it's perhaps I retired anytime it was a good time to retire anyway, but the stroke pointed out a couple of things and one was that it wasn't a cholesterol event. It was a physical event. And also the piano-playing thing is coming back slowly.

Frank Mills 36:17

But surely, I'm not rushing it. But as I said, to bend, I'm at a point now where I don't think I can blame all my bad notes on the stroke, yet I'm not practicing enough. I've lost my chops in the business.

Frank Mills 36:30

So that being said, you know, we're back to a point where the dark days are over and there weren't many of them. I don't think there were more than one or two. And I'm sure everybody has them in different severity levels. And it's all part of it.

Bill Gasiamis 36:50

The piano playing was, is probably going to be a really good gentle rehabilitation. So I mean, you know, if I could encourage you to do anything, it would just get back into playing the piano and just for the sake of enjoying it. And then at the same time, challenging yourself to see if you can overcome, you know, your lack of practice.

Bill Gasiamis 37:14

And then it's good rehabilitation. So I get that as a professional musician, though, you might be frustrated about that. And you might be a perfectionist, and you might be all these things and you're thinking, it doesn't sound well what's the point of doing it anyway.

Music Box Dancer



Bill Gasiamis 37:30

But the point is, is that you don't have to be perfect, you're just playing for yourself, and you're not creating the next gold record. Because what people don't know about you or most people won't know about you is that you are quite well renowned for your music. And let me be honest with you I enjoy the music that I've listened to you and the one that I recognize you the most for which is music box dancing.

Bill Gasiamis 38:02

But when my children who are 25 and 21 now we're in their cribs, the music box that box dancer used to drive me nuts, Frank, because it was on all the time. To get them to sleep, all we had was we had that mobile thing that went around and around in circles on top of their crib, we would crank it up and all we would hear was the music box dancer.

Bill Gasiamis 38:36

And for people who don't know what the music box dancer is, you will recognize this and just give me a second while I press play on the YouTube file that I've got here and listen to this music box dancer for a moment.

Bill Gasiamis 39:34

Now that is that amazing piece, as soon as I heard that piece, I went straight back to that moment with my children in the crib when they were little, and what an amazing time because it connected me with that time when my kids were little and it was lovely for us, you know?

Bill Gasiamis 39:54

And then I thought nothing of that music. I'd never thought of the person who might have created it and I never thought that there would be somebody who would reach out to me 25 years later and say, Hey, Bill, I'm this guy, Frank Mills, I had a stroke. And my claim to fame is, amongst other things this, this track Music Box Dancer.

Bill Gasiamis 40:20

And to me, that's why I'm fascinated about this stroke recovery, podcast, recovery after stroke podcast, because it's brought people from all over the world to me that I've met, and they all come from amazing backgrounds, and I've learned so much. And I haven't had a guest that's been 79 years old, the majority of the people that have had on have been say, you know, 55, and under, which is unrepresented, that part of the stroke community is really on represented out in the world.

Bill Gasiamis 41:01

You don't hear much about young stroke survivors, but there's a ton of them. Fortunately, I think you don't hear about old stroke survivors because most of them don't get away with it. So the fact that you're here is really good. Tell me about the career that got you into this situation where you're the creator of the music box, and dancer, and you've had a gold record because of it at least in Australia.

Frank Mills 41:35

Yeah. Well, I started with a rock band, when I was about 25 28 years old. I called the bells. And they had a number-one hit that I played piano and harmonica on in 1971. That's a long time ago. But I arranged that piece and played a rather large role in producing it.

Frank Mills 42:09

I don't know if you're familiar with the various stages of recording but they're all these different people, I happen to be the one guy who did it. But after the record

went gold in the United States, get to number one called Stay a While and you can look it up by The Bells, and you will hear it.

Frank Mills 42:30

It's a very soft, gentle ballad. The Bells was a rock group in Canada at the time. And rock is putting it mildly, it was probably elevated music, at that time, but compared to what Springsteen doing these days, which is rock, you know. And I wasn't altogether comfortable with that, I was happy to get the gold record, of course, with The Bells.

Frank Mills 42:56

But I realized that I didn't want to be a singer. So I didn't mind playing the piano. I was a pianist at the time. That's how I was earning my living with the bells. So that lasted for two years, I finally decided to go on my own. And I made a record recording a piano music. It was called seven of my songs and some others. That's a strange title.

Frank Mills 43:21

But I played stuff like Bridge Over Troubled Water on and all of my arrangements. And it was very different. You I would challenge some people to, you know, do you know what song I'm playing here, even though most of the late people wouldn't know it all, a musician would just sum it up right away.

Frank Mills 43:40

But my arrangements were very different. So anyway, I kind of liked that little niche. But the recording company made me a deal. I couldn't be fussed. And they said, well get do an album and we'll help you pay for it. And actually, I ended up having to go to the bank to borrow to finish it.

Frank Mills 43:56

But that's all history. And I made the album and it was an instrumental album piano album. And it was just fate was ironic, everything was telling me to be a singer. But this is going to be the you know, the way to go? And I said no, no, I'm not interested in the fame or the fortune and the singing and the Hard Rock life. I

Frank Mills 44:17

It's not for me. I want to be a piano player and just do my thing, you know? So we'll dammed up if you didn't have one of the songs on that album that was liked by the artist and repertory director at Polygram Records Canada, which is where I

was at the time. And he said you have lyrics for that song? And I thought oh, here we go again, back to the same song.

Frank Mills 44:40

You know, I said Yeah, I do. He said sing at least. So he stuck the album in his office. And I sang a song called Love Me Love Me Love which went to number one in Canada three months after I'd recorded it.

Frank Mills 44:52

So I was doing okay, you know, as a young guy I had two gold records under my belt, one of them just in Canada, although Love Me Love Me Love went to number 40 in the States and didn't do well, but that's fine number 40 is better than nothing.

Bill Gasiamis 45:09

That's pretty good.

Frank Mills 45:10

Yeah, so I was off to a great career. Eventually they realized that singing was not for me I would my heart wasn't in it. And I did a series of 26 albums on piano and orchestra after that. So writing songs, I must have written at least 200 pieces for the artist, Frank Mills on piano. And other people record them James last a lot of the big instrumental guys in Europe recorded my pieces.

Frank Mills 45:41

And in the States, Ray Conniff was he liked my music. So he recorded a lot with his orchestra and chorus. And there are a lot of covered tunes music box dancer Bill was one of 200 songs. My kids liked it and I realized up-tempo pieces are not common happy pieces of music easy to write a soppy ballad than it is to write an up-tempo happy piece, right? And, I wrote a lot of my soppy ballads.

Frank Mills 46:12

But yeah, so eventually, Music Box Dancer should never have been released. It had such a tough time going from one drawer to another drawer and being turned down by virtually everybody in the business. And finally, a fellow from England was on loan to Polygram, Canada, and Polly Door at the time.

Frank Mills 46:37

And he said to me, what's that ticularly peace, you've got an album that he put

out years ago. He said, I kind of liked that. And we released it. I said to him at the time, this is all very well, you know, I gotta put bread and butter on the table here. What are we gonna how many are we gonna sell he said, Oh 5000 Or maybe seven.

Frank Mills 46:58

And about six months later, we already sold a million in Canada. And that's a big market, a tiny market for a million records. Just about every other Canadian must have bought one. So I ended up with a music box, going to number one in 26 countries. I've got 16 gold albums up there and 14 Platinum ones.

Frank Mills 47:22

And it's been a hell of a career that nobody knows about. But there's a music box dancer once said, I think in Wikipedia, one of the most memorable melodies ever written. That's about the best compliment a writer can get. And there it is. So here I am, you know, stroke later, and still, really not in the music business.

Frank Mills 47:46

I retired in 2018, purpose on purpose, did my last concert, and wrote music to the poem in Flanders Fields. I don't know if you know it by John McCrae. It's about the First World War. And I wrote music to that. And it's being used now by veterans and things on Armistice Day. In Canada, it's starting to catch on quite well, which is nice. I did it as a nonprofit just to thank you for the vets. And as a farewell project. So that's where I'm at today. It's catching on.

Frank's Music Career

Bill Gasiamis 48:22

It's interesting, you know, you said it's a hell of a career that nobody knows about. What genre is this career that you've had? Like, what genre is it in? And because I've only ever heard of the gold albums, you know, for Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson and those kind of guys. You hear that they make it big in the charts, etc. What chart were you ranking in? Is it the same chart that I'm listening to the pop chart or something like that?

Frank Mills 49:04

I guess the best way I can describe it is BBC Two. They were the ones who caught on. And the rock stations hated me they just loathed me because, in essence, my

career was one of narrowcasting Bill.

Frank Mills 49:22

I wrote songs, and piano and orchestra. I love the big orchestra and I toured with a large orchestra for five years. And my small band. Well, there are 13 of us to begin with, and then down to five. The five of us toured for 12 years, the last 12 years 2018 were from 2006 to 2018 I traveled with six of the best guys a guy could ever wish to work with.

Frank Mills 49:53

We had a wonderful career together. Everybody got well paid. And we had a great time I went to Japan, Japan is an amazing mark, as you can imagine a little ballerina with that song going around in circles. It appealed to the Japanese like nobody else before I hit several gold records from Japan.

Frank Mills 50:12

It was on the charts in Japan for nine months. And, here's the middle-of-the-road sort of easy listening elevator, Frank touring in Japan and got mobbed by schoolchildren at the airport when we arrived it was hilarious.

Frank Mills 50:29

The constant problem for me in the press has been where do we put it? Is this guy with his mega-hit? And it's not a rock and roll in the audience. They're all older people and loving it. Have a great time.

Frank Mills 50:41

So the long and short of it to answer your question was, I'd been narrowcasting, I knew that from the minute I went into instrumental music. Even the first guys at the record company said Yeah, but what are we gonna do with it? You know, it's a nice song. What are we gonna do with it?

Frank Mills 50:56

What do you mean, what do you do with it, promote it, we can't promote that nobody will play it, you know, on and on. And finally, they had to play. The phones went up every time they played the darn thing. No matter what city it was, the phones would light up and you couldn't make a phone call switchboards were jammed.

Frank Mills 51:17

It was hilarious. I remember going to Ottawa to give a concert one of the first concerts I ever gave after Music Box Dancer alone. There I was on the stage with myself and said to the producer, how many people do you expect to show up? This was an open-air concert on the beautiful river in Ottawa, which is a pretty city in Canada, it's the Capital.

Frank Mills 51:38

And there we were on the stage and he said, there'll be about 500 there. I was driving from Montreal, I lived in Montreal, drove to Ottawa, and got into a traffic jam. And I didn't know what was going on. I thought I was not gonna make it for two o'clock.

Frank Mills 51:53

And I rolled down the window and said to the guy, is this traffic gonna last? Like, is this happening all the time? Because I'm trying to get somewhere. And he said, No, they're all lined up for the Frank Mills concert.

Bill Gasiamis 52:07

Wow.

Frank Mills 52:07

So I parked my car on the field and walked to my concert. 5000 people showed up instead of 500. They ran out of free Pepsi and hamburgers in about 10 minutes they had to call in the pizza trucks because Pepsi decided to sponsor this thing. So it had its wonderful moments. It's been a great career.

Frank Mills 52:30

And I sort of sat in the back and laughed all the way to the bank. Well, this was all going around me without any fanfare whatsoever. There was a time in Canada when I could walk around and people would recognize me but I could go anywhere I want today and nobody has any idea who I am, which is kind of fun.

Bill Gasiamis 52:50

That is kind of fun. So what's interesting is that you said you know the Rock and Roll people would have hated you or disliked your amount of taking up their supposed airtime or anything like that, right? But what's interesting is that there are a lot of really famous bands, whose guitarists and whose musicians are classically trained.

Bill Gasiamis 53:27

I know the guys in Metallica and some of the other popular rock bands have classically trained musicians that play in that band and then have decided, you know that their niche, or what they love to do is hard rock, or heavy metal, or whatever they call it. Right?

Bill Gasiamis 53:47

So that's interesting. And that they couldn't appreciate your formula for success. You know, your formula is really what it's about. And I think there's something to learn from you. If you're an aspiring musician, it's like, what the hell's Frank doing? Why is he getting this airtime?

Bill Gasiamis 54:08

And if it's not necessarily, I'm gonna do what Frank does and play piano music. It's like, understanding the psyche that goes into creating a piece, and then finding a way to somehow get it played, and then having these unexpected results because of it. I think there would have been a lot to learn from you, rather than giving you a hard time about the fact that you've got a Piano Box dancer on the charts.

Frank Mills 54:42

Well, when you go into it, there's no hindsight. So you know, I can look back now and see how it came about and why it came about. But there's no doubt when anybody goes into any creative field. You're playing the odds, the odds are you're not gonna make it. That's the bad news to start with.

Frank Mills 55:04

Now, if you think you're good enough, and my attitude was always this I was raised in a house where classical music was always played. I studied classical music, most of my life and enjoyed it.

Frank Mills 55:20

And remember I got admitted to McGill University's music school by playing Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto by ear, in C sharp minor instead of C minor. And the entrance examiner said, that's very lovely, but why do you play it C sharp minor?

Frank Mills 55:40

And I said I don't know. But I play along with the record, I guess the turn tables

are turning a little quicker than it's supposed to. He laughed, and he said, Yeah, you're pretty good you're in. So that was the end of it. We had a good laugh about that. But here's how it all started.

Frank Mills 55:56

Just a weird situation that I said, I'm going to take this as far as I can. I know, Bruce Springsteen, that didn't happen, quite honestly, you just sort of sold his catalog for half a billion dollars, but I don't need that kind of thing. I wouldn't be afraid of that type of life, I wouldn't.

Frank Mills 56:20

And a lot of the rock guys, I know, in the big rock bands, you know, they've had a hard life, it's 300 days a year on the road for a lot of them in the beginning. And there's not enough to do you know, you're doing the same show every night. And gosh, so I was lucky, we had various orchestras, the core band was four guys, you know, and myself.

Frank Mills 56:44

And we would build on that we had orchestras as big as 80 people in the recording studio one time. And other times, they were just the four of us. So I liked the big orchestra, I always enjoyed playing with them.

Living A Full Life



Frank Mills 56:57

And it was a bit of a perk, I guess, to be invited to play with the various symphonies in Canada and raise some money for them, and then do that kind of stuff, you know. So it's been very rewarding, but much more, I took it as far as I

could. And it went much further than I ever thought it would. So there you have the career side of it. And now I've got the stroke to worry about.

Bill Gasiamis 57:20

You're living a full life, you know, when I consider my life, it's the type of life I want to live, I want to live a full life, I want to take things as far as I can take them. And I never was like that, you know, the stroke made me wake up to myself.

Bill Gasiamis 57:34

And pay attention to what's important and having a go, giving things a try and letting fear you know, not override my decision making and stopping all of that rubbish and just basically getting on with it. You're a great example of how to go about life, give it a go, and then try something different.

Bill Gasiamis 58:02

If it doesn't work out and live relatively healthy. Avoid all of the things that we think we're supposed to be doing because others are telling us to do. And then it's not us, you know, that going into the music career for you. You know, it would have been difficult for most people to resist being told you should be a singer Frank.

Bill Gasiamis 58:28

Because they're looking at that and thinking, well, there's a pay, there's a paycheck at the end of that, you know, I might as well do what they're telling me to do. Right? And live some kind of version of a career in this field. And you're gone. No, I don't want to do that. You've done the exact opposite.

Frank Mills 58:47

It wasn't my style. You know, I just tried to be honest with myself. Yeah. I think I'm going through a few hard knocks on ladies Young. Set me up for that honesty, I had to look in the mirror an awful lot. Where is this going? You know, what do you want to do about it?

Frank Mills 59:05

I remember, finally taking the plunge into music which I equated to going off the high diving board, holding your nose and your trunks fall off on the way down, you know, and it was full of that there was a lot of humor that kept me going. Because I like a good story. And I like being with the audience and we related to each other well, because they were older. They were not the younger crowd.

Frank Mills 59:30

They will bring the babies and the children like you had, but there was a big gap in it. I never saw the rockers. They were too busy at the Springsteen concert and that's fine. I had to admit that though. You know, I had to realize that sorry, Frankie you're never gonna be a superstar you know, but by narrowcasting, as I call it, I did find a niche that seemed to work.

Frank Mills 59:53

I was certainly blessed. I have been led a blessed life. I tend to have a lot of I spend a lot of time thanking the great spirit. I'm not overly religious, but the great spirit looks after me very well.

Frank Mills 1:00:07

So especially with the stroke thing, it's been a blessing in disguise, because I've learned a lot about myself that I didn't know. And some of it's pretty good. I'm pretty happy about having recovered as well as I have. And my wife has been instrumental in that if I can use that word.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:24

That's, lovely, man, it's a great way to round up and finish up the episode, I want to thank you for reaching out. Because I very rarely hear from all the folks who've had a stroke. And it's really important that I put the message out for everybody. This is not just a podcast for young people and have had a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:43

It's for everybody. So I'm glad that you did that. I'm glad that you told me about your career in that part of the email that I received, and you're reluctant to come on the podcast. But I thought there was no way I was going to let him get away with it, I needed to have him, I needed to meet the guy who used to drive me nuts, at all hours, 25 years ago.

Frank Mills 1:01:09

You weren't alone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:11

Listening to this music, on repeat, and nothing else and I'm so glad that we had it because it settled the babies and calmed them down. And it made it possible for us to get some sleep every once in a while.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:26

So I didn't know that I was going to be thanking you for that 25 years later. But thank you for that. Thank you for being on the podcast. And it's so great to see that you're doing well and recovering.

Frank Mills 1:01:40

Well, thank you and I enjoy your work, you've been very helpful, I'm sure to many people, not just me, and it's a good thing you're doing. I admire you for it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:54

Thanks, Frank.

Frank Mills 1:01:56

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:57

Thanks for listening so far, when we got to the end of the interview, and as we wrapped up after the interview ended, Frank realized that we hadn't discussed fatigue, which he experiences from time to time. So we had a chat about it. And this is the little bit extra that Frank wanted to discuss.

Frank Mills 1:02:14

We didn't talk about fatigue, that's probably the one major thing I'm left with is fatigue is feeling tired, maybe one or two days a week.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:25

So what happens? Do you go through two or three days where everything is okay? And then you have a couple of low days and fatigue is.

Frank Mills 1:02:34

Yeah, I don't want to go to the gym. And I do go. And once I get exercising and my blood flows, again, I come around a bit. But there are days when I just feel lethargic and tired. I think it's a hangover from it. He said it might take two years to get rid of that one.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:54

It's very common. And it's the main thing that's more debilitating for most people than anybody than anything I hear about fatigue a lot for me. So I'm about 10 years into my journey next February.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:09

So the fatigue has mostly gone. If I have a bad night's sleep, maybe two nights in a row. The third day was terrible. Right, and I can't sleep. Sleep is critical. Yeah. And the fact that you've quit sugar has made your fatigue better, you might not have realized that but the sugar.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:34

Those high carbohydrate have a big impact on the body, the nervous system, and the brain. And taking that out of your diet means that your fatigue bouts will have been less regular, and less dramatic. So the good thing about fatigue is that you notice when it's happening, and it's telling you, Frank, what you got to do is change something or you got to rest.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:00

And just go with it. That's what I did. And I see it as a signal from my body that I cannot ignore. And now I pay attention to it. And I do what my buddy says is going rest and if I've got appointments, places to go people to see, it's all not done, nothing's done.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:20

If I've got a podcast to edit, nothing is done, I just go down, I lay on my bed, whether it's on top or under the covers, and I just relax. So fatigue for me gets better. A lot of people report that it gets better over time, but some people still struggle with it after many, many years.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:40

But the majority will say that it gets better and it's easier to overcome. And it's early days for you Frank. The truth is unfortunately stroke is not like a broken leg. There's no timeline on it. You can't say six weeks and you'll be up and about.

Frank Mills 1:05:02

Thank you. We'll talk again.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:05

My pleasure, mate. You're welcome. We will talk again. And I enjoyed this thoroughly. Thank you so much.

Frank Mills 1:05:13

It's been a pleasure. I enjoyed it, too. I'll see you again.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:17

Bye for now. Thanks so much for listening. I had a real blast speaking to Frank and learning about his life and meeting the guy who made the music that used to drive me nuts at one o'clock in the morning 25 years ago.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:32

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Your symptoms don't follow a rulebook and as soon as you leave the hospital, you no longer have the medical advice from professionals on tap. I know for me, it was as if I was teaching myself a new language from scratch with no native speaker in sight. If this sounds like you, I'm here to tell you that you're not alone and there is a better way to navigate your recovery and rebuild a fulfilling life that you love.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:18

I've created an inclusive, supportive, and accessible community called recovery after stroke. This all-in-one support and resource program is designed to help you take your health into your own hands. It's your guidebook, through every step of your journey from reducing fatigue to strengthening your brain health, to overcoming anxiety and more. To find out more. Just go to recoveryafterstroke.com see you next time.

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Intro 1:08:02

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Post-stroke Fatigue

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Intro 1:07:37

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