

# 49. Stroke and Stress - Darren Walker

## Learning about Stroke and Stress the hard way.

Darren Walker is a father of two who was used to working up to 15 hours per day sleeping for no more than 5 hours a day until one day he collapsed on the bathroom floor.



Connect with Darren on Instagram [@astrokeofchange](https://www.instagram.com/astrokeofchange)

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Darren 0:00

My memory is getting better. I'm starting to retain things a little better. So that's I want to do something on my own. So you know, that way, I can pace myself because I'm not going to go back and do what I did before and just kill my body and just basically say, Okay, let's do the same thing again. You know, my life is way more important than that. Plus, I have a five year old and a 17 year old daughter.

Intro 0:22

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

Bill 0:29

Darren, welcome to the program.

Darren 0:32

Hello, are you doing man?

Bill 0:33

Doing good. Thank you so much for being on the program. And I really appreciate you making the time. I thought I'd get in touch because I really liked your approach when I was following you on Instagram, and I really enjoyed just what you had to say. And I thought it was a good, a good message to share. So I'm curious to know what happened to you.

## **Darren had a Basal Ganglia stroke**



Darren 0:57

Well, back on November 28, 2017, I had a hemorrhagic stroke. The basal ganglia, I can never say this still to this day, but the basal ganglia stroke is what it

basically it was, um, I was in the bathroom at my house and basically collapsed. You know, I had suffered with migraines before so nothing was like abnormal for me. It was just a, you know, my once a week, it seemed like occurrence that I was dealing with feeling a little weird feeling a little awkward. having headaches, you know, and just I collapse, I could not move my whole right side. And I'd like, it was crazy, actually. But yeah.

Bill 1:42

So you in the bathroom? Can I ask what are you doing in the bathroom?

Darren 1:48

I was getting ready to take a bath. Fortunately, I was not in the bathtub, taking a bath. When that happens, that's probably the saving grace there. So

Bill 1:55

yeah, and when you're home alone,

Darren 1:58

I was not alone, but I was in bathroom. And it's one of those really kind of like, really tight space type bathrooms and the door was closed. So when I fell down, because at the time, you know, the person that I was married to at the time, I'm no longer married. Long story, we're not going into that. But um, she did not hear me obviously. Because I kind of fell and I kind of hit my jaw on the bathtub on the side of the bathtub.

All I remember trying to do was like I was trying to talk and I thought I was talking but I wasn't actually talking like my voice was like gone. I assumed I was trying to yell and I couldn't. So I remember trying to get to a point where I can somehow because I could not use my right side at all. And like nothing where I said movements, I'm trying to move my left side, literally in such a way where I can kind of kick the door open, because I couldn't get up enough to reach that the door and pull it in the position I was in, I wouldn't be able to open it anyways.

And no one can hear me. So I got to the point where I kind of could kind of get the door open just a little bit. I remember seeing my dog at the time, you know, my dogs, not a Barker, unfortunately, dog like tries to get I've had a chocolate Schnauzer at the time, and she was trying to get the bathroom, but you know, couldn't like get the door open enough that kept shutting every time I tried to, you know, get get enough where I can maybe slide out somehow, you know, slide

to, you know, get the attention of my other half of the time.

And the only thing that ended up happening that made her hear me is we actually had a porcelain toilet paper dispenser, I got to a point where I went with my left hand and tried to lean on it to lean myself up, like kinda was getting myself up a little bit. But it actually broke off the wall. When it broke off the wall, and it shattered when it hit the floor. That's when, you know, she noticed something was going on. And we're probably talking about a 30 to 45 minute span that between me actually falling and everything happening. And then me getting to the point to where I did something that, you know, would have grabbed my attention because there's nothing for me to take a 30-45 minute bath at the end of the day, I worked in the restaurant business side come out of 15 hour day was nothing for me to do that. So

Bill 4:30

yeah. So it sounded like you automatically, you know, fight for survival? Is that how you would describe it? Because it sounds it's sounding pretty dramatic really quickly.

Darren 4:41

Yeah, I didn't know what was going on. I mean, like I said, I mean, all of a sudden, my right side was just non I couldn't do anything with that it couldn't feel it can move it. You know, I kept trying to like, move. And I'm like, what, what is going on? You know, obviously, my left side was operational. Fortunately, I was to enough that kind of tried to do things, but because of the way that bathrobes that, you know, it's it, it was impossible to get a motive around. So trying to get anything or find anything or do anything to either get me in a position to where I can break something, throw something in. The funny thing is the Toilet Paper Dispenser was the last thing at that thought I was actually going to break, you know, I leaned down and broke off the wall probably saved my life at that point in time. So

Bill 5:27

yeah, so that stroke occurred or the hemorrhagic stroke occurred in the basal ganglia, what it actually caused the structure occur. Obviously, one of the vessels broker burst. But what was behind that, you know,

# Hypertension due to stress caused the stroke



Darren 5:42

they said mostly hypertension due to stress. And you know, I had not really been much on top of my blood pressure for that previous year. But before then it was never a big issue.

Anytime I checked, it was decent, it was a little high, but there's nothing like in like, scary range. And course at that time, the blood pressure readings were different than they were as they changed recently, they took the the normal measurements down, you know, to the 120 range basically in before, you know, if you had to be above like 140 and whatnot.

And I was always so go, go go. And anytime I went to the doctor, my blood pressure was pretty normal most of the time. So, but I know in the past year, I didn't check that much. And I'd worked a lot harder during that last year.

And there was a lot more stress going on. But with my marriage at the time and everything else going on. I think it was just a combination of things. So yeah, lesson learned.

Bill 6:37

Yeah. So as a combination of things, and nobody ever says, I know only one thing ever went wrong in my life. And it was lucky durably. So as as doing and taking on too much. But I feel like I don't know about you. But I felt like when I was taking on too much, I got there very slowly.

So I would add a little bit of the task to my day, make my day just a little bit longer either, then I can squeeze that in, and then I Well, I'll just do that, then maybe I'll sleep a little bit less, not too much. You know, I'm still getting, you know, six and a half, seven hours, no big deal. You know, why am I smoking three or four cigarettes a day, not too bad.

I'm not drinking too much. And it kind of comes together in this perfect storm of stuff. And eventually, your body says, okay, I've had enough, relax. And it doesn't know how to tell you that when you're not paying attention to the signs and symptoms.

It just goes. Bang. So were you other than the headaches and migraines. Were you having any other signs and symptoms that something might be wrong that you looking back on now and going? Yeah, that makes sense.

Darren 7:47

Um, the occasional like dizziness, but I also that was like, into the migraines as well. But you know, that was one thing that kind of made me feel and I would always have like a patient on this left side, you know, right around like the back of my neck, like almost into like the lower head like mech region, it's hard to really show but like, kind of right around here.

Towards the last maybe six months. So I mean, looking at it now. It all kind of makes sense. You know, at that time is like, Oh, I can do it. I was the last month I was trying to finally get my health back somewhat. I mean, I was not a very healthy person. As far as the way I ate the way I took care of myself what I drank. I mean, people drink coffee, my coffee was Mountain Dew. Yeah. Essentially, it was like I was almost 100 pounds heavier. At the time, too. So

Bill 8:45

yeah. So when you're working 15 hours a day in the restaurant cooking yet?

Darren 8:50

Is that what you were doing? A lot of times it was cooking, sometimes it was running on the middle floor, I worked on Clearwater Beach, which for those it's worth in Florida over here, it's a very busy tourist area. So like about seven, eight months out of the year is really it was really, really busy.

So you're for five to eight hours a day. You're just constant Run, run, run, run,

run, run. And then of course, we had other hotel, I mean, restaurants on the property that I always had to go to and check out as well. So the perfect storm?

Bill 9:21

Yeah. So in those 15 hour shifts in those really long shifts. What do you do to rest, unwind, relax, nourish yourself. I know, I probably know what you're going to say. But I'd love to hear what you were doing as far as, you know, how does it they start and then what happens you know, between then and, and when you actually end up going home?

Darren 9:47

Well, most of the time, I would wake up and literally I would probably be out of the house within 15 minutes, most mornings that I had to work, I was up the I was up and out of the house before 5am two days a week before 3am.

So and most days, at the earliest I would get home would be like five or six o'clock, a lot of days, it would be eight o'clock, by the time I get home, I would usually grab a bite to eat, you know, try to get unwind a little bit do stuff around the house.

Because we're usually things that needed to be done, you know, whether it be you know, like I said, if it was cooking something for me or I usually went and grabbed something because of time but and by the time I would get wound down a little bit because I like said I always took a bath you know with with some of the aches and pains I had at the time.

I would probably maybe be in bed by maybe 10:30, 11 o'clock at night be up some mornings and four or five hours doing it all over again. Usually the same kind of day.

Bill 10:53

Yeah, because that's what I was doing the numbers, you know, you said you're doing up to 15 hours a day, there's 24 hours in a day, that's nine hours left, by the time you go home, even run some of your errands, do some chores, or whatever you have to do. Man, there's not a lot of time left for anyone else for anything else. Is There Really?

Darren 11:12

No, not at all

Bill 11:14

Yeah. So you experienced a stroke, you're in the bathroom, the dog finally gets you out because you broke something in your partner heard it? What happens then so you find yourself in hospital how did that happen.

Darren 11:32

Um, I actually saw the paramedics come in and try to get me out of there. And of course, I was still wedged, you could not actually open the door the way I was wedged in the bathroom.

So they kind of had to really like wedge me out of there essentially, it's hard to say, it's like you almost had to turn me around because it really was, if you open the door, it almost hits the bathtub.

So I'm between the bathtub and the door. So I remember, you know, the paramedics coming there were quite a few of them, actually. And basically, they took me on the stretcher out of the house, I mean, into the ambulance.

And I probably maybe for another two to three minutes was kind of too because I was kind of going in and out on the stretcher. But I remember the last thing is I kind of like maybe the aim of for like two minutes I kind of just looked up I saw clock I don't remember what time it was there anything and I just went out. And yeah, that was pretty much everything else became a blur for like at least the next seven days.

Bill 12:40

Seven days in hospital?

Darren 12:42

Well, I was in the hospital close to a month between the hospital and rehab, but I don't remember anything.

Bill 12:48

Wow

Darren 12:48

for the first seven days. Yeah, like everything was going to complete blur to me about what I was doing or what was going on. I mean, I was apparently conscious, but I wasn't really with it



Bill 13:00

with it

Darren 13:01

I guess would be the way to say it.

Bill 13:03

That's familiar. I remember being angry because people didn't visit me certain people that I thought should have come to visit me. And when I asked my wife, why didn't they come? She said oh no, they were there they came, they saw you?

Darren 13:17

Yes,

Bill 13:17

they came on this day they came on that day. It was like, Okay, I had relatives visit from Interstate, you know, a thousand thousand kilometers away.

Which means they had flying and they had to stay my parents and all that kind of stuff. I couldn't remember it. So yeah, I totally get it. And it wasn't that I wasn't aware or conscious at the time that they were around. It's just that later on the memory wasn't there.

So I couldn't form that memory. And later on may have been you know, within a month or two months. And sometimes even now, it's been since you know, my first episode, it's been nearly seven years, it's been more than seven years.

Even now sometimes, I say stuff and my wife says' No, that's not how it was. And she has to remind me because I was around I was there, but I wasn't really there things weren't computing.

Darren 14:11

Yeah, that's pretty much I mean, I remember my pastor talking to me. And you know, because I asked him as like you are there you know, what was I like? Because you know.

I'm getting different answers from different people at times and whatnot, because it was more than the stroke I was dealing with at that point in time. So and that's another story for another time.

But like, all right, this guy is going to be down the middle he's going to tell me is like because he was the first couple of days and like, I don't remember anything. He goes. I'm not surprised you don't remember everything. This is like he's like, I thought you were going to make it.

But he's like, I didn't know if you were going to make it if that makes sense. He's like, but you were just not coherent really to anything is like, apparently I had some seizures, and that first day too, and whatnot.

But um, it's like you just weren't, you didn't know what was going on at all. It's like some like, okay, because I don't remember anything. I mean, even this day now, I don't remember anything about those first seven days at all.

Bill 15:19

So were you? Did you need surgery to rectify the faulty blood vessel, the broken blood vessel had that fix itself?

Darren 15:28

Well, they decided that I guess because of where it was, it was too risky to go in there. And then of course, there was some brain swelling as well. And they had to let that go down there was a couple of different things they decided not to the actual opening, the opening in the area of the blood vessel that had leaked was almost four centimeters.

So I don't know why or why not? Because like I said a lot of it. I did not get, of course, I'm trying to read like the jargon of you know, the medical stuff. And I'm like, looking stuff. I'm like, What does this mean?

What does this mean? What does this mean? And I, as I understand that, but yeah, I said between the brain swelling that I was having, and where it was actually located, I guess it was just because it was on my left region, kind of in the center left side. So unfortunately, they can go in and do that.

Bill 16:26

Yeah, okay, I get that. Because for me as well, they didn't operate for the first nearly three years because they couldn't, but it kept bleeding. So that's why eventually we had to go in and try and resolve it, you know, so it was a real, it was an opportunity to try and avoid it bleeding.

Sorry, it was an opportunity to try and avoid surgery, but because they thought that it should rectify itself, and then it didn't after three bleeds, then they decided that there's no other way.

It's more dangerous to let it keep bleeding than it is to going the risk were far greater to my personal safety, other people's safety and, and so on. And it was just like a ticking time bomb. Now I know what I know, you mentioned that you have you're not currently with your previous partner wife?

Tell me, we won't go into details with that. And that's okay, I get it. But how soon after did you finish rehab? So you finished rehab? And then I just want to get an understanding of what happens, then how does it become harder on your relationship?

Darren 17:36

Well, I finished rehab, I got out of rehab a couple days before Christmas. And on Christmas day, I was told that she was leaving. So it's really hard to tell you how hard it is on that side.

So obviously, it was harder on you know, my mother at the time is my moms like well, you know, if no one's going to take him and you're going to leave him you know, then you know, I'm going to take and you know, take care of him and stuff.

So it was basically my mom at that point in my step father that was you know, helping to take care. And then my brother and sister were helping as well. And then other members of my family.

But basically, I can't say how you know, it was I mean, we get along great and everything. But I mean, she was pretty much gone from actually probably much before I got to the hospital, honestly, so,

Bill 18:25

Yeah. So I get that I've spoken to a few people who have had strokes, and then the relationship broke up after that, or failed, or whatever you want to call it.

They went their separate ways. And the reason is that they tended to say to me that things were probably going wrong from before the stroke, and then the stroke kind of emphasizes all the things that are wrong, because then this person who you're struggling to have a meaningful relationship with, says like.

I was probably out the door, what am I going to do hang around now? And for what reason? And I think it's not a bad thing that people go or decide to go and vice versa. I know, it's difficult for the person going through stroke. But realistically, you know, if you think about having somebody hang around, just because someone is unwell, and feeling guilty about leaving, I think it's even worse. Would you agree with that?

Darren 19:19

I actually do I it's funny, because over time is like I said, the silver lining of the stroke and everything was the divorce actually happening? Because Would I rather just do it on my own and get my own perception there?

Or have somebody who might be bitter or, you know, because now she's got to take care of all this and like you said, was on her way out the door probably or whatnot. So you know, to me, it was kind of the weird silver lining of the stroke.

It's kind of like, Okay, you know what, it's not what I wanted at first, but then more I go into it, I'm realizing, oh, it's probably was the best thing that happened.

Bill 19:57

Yeah, it's in a bizarre some of the things things that you look upon and reflect on and you think, actually, that probably worked out for the best, how hard? How hard was it on your, your parents and your siblings? Did you live near them? Or did I have to move near you?

Darren 20:17

No, I live near them, we were less than an hour away from where I lived originally with them. So it's, that was not an issue at all. And I had a lot of family locally as well. So that wasn't an issue my brother and sister both were within half an hour away. So now that wasn't an issue at all,

Bill 20:35

What kind of support that you need. Now that you're back from, or you've left hospital, there was a an amount of rehab that you had to go through was there.

## **Darren had stroke rehab at home**



Darren 20:44

Yeah, and at the time, I basically did home rehab, and they gave me exercises to do essentially physical therapy, stuff. And, you know, if my mom was working, I would have my aunt come down to help my brother come down to help to go through the different exercises.

obvious at the time, my whole right side was still numb, you know, when I was getting out of the hospital, I still cannot pick up a fork and properly eat anything, you know, I cannot use my right side really at all, at that point in time.

So that stuff that took a while, you know, I had those little stress balls, little things did, you know increase your hand strength with doing a little cards on the table and trying to pick them up with my hand? You know, all that over the next few months and stuff?

And yeah, I mean, it's that's what I did. And you know, they led me through a couple different exercises to look up as if the exercise that was doing something that's so easy after a while and whatnot, they're like, well, let's try to you know, get you to do other ones.

But you know, the only hard part about it is I never really gained a lot of feeling back on my right side. So my right side is still like extremely numb like I barely feel anything in in my foot, I feel a tiny bit, in my hand, in three of my thumb, my index finger and my middle finger, I can kind of feel but the other two, my ring finger and pinky, I still don't have much feeling in it. So it's still mostly numb on this side. But there's no pain

Bill 22:18

Is there any muscle tightness, because I'm on my left side, entire left side, same I got I've got feeling in my fingers and my toes, but it affects my balance because the foot kind of doesn't know where it is. And it doesn't send the messages back to the brain. Can you relate to that?

Darren 22:35

Yep, completely, especially like the first four to six months, um, you know, they were like, trying to tell me to do certain things, obviously, you know, I had my apparatuses I had a cane, I had a walker, I had a wheelchair, when I came home, just in case, you know, I needed any of those things. But for me, I was worried about my, my balance.

So I kind of just really taught myself to walk, it's funny, because I almost I look like I limp, I always look like I'm having a limp that people think I'm in pain or something and I get tell them as like, this is how I walk so I can balance myself. Because if I try to walk normal, and just do it like normally did, or a normal person does, I am probably going to drag my foot or I'm gonna fall or my ankles going to roll over, essentially.

So I had to retrain myself, it's like, you know, being a kid and learning how to walk. It's like, I had to retrain myself, but in such a fashion to where I kind of got my balance kind of back, but I still get those periods of time, especially when I get tired that my balances little caddywompus for a while.

So, um, but I fortunately have I tried hard enough and walk the enough to kind of learn my triggers and my warning signs. So it's but yeah the balance thing was definitely a much bigger issue than it's still a little bit of an issue now. But you know, over time, it just seems to get better and better. But it's still an issue, especially if I get tired. I've got a I've got to listen to my body.

Bill 24:14

Yeah, absolutely. I know exactly what that means. So tell me about what your triggers are and what your warning signs. So people listening and watching. They're going to, depending on what time of the recovery there in they might be over doing it and still pushing through and then finding themselves being really exhausted or not able to get back on their feet, at least that's how I kind of learned. What are you noticing a your warning signs and your triggers for okay,

settle down below to do a little bit less Darren.

Darren 24:47

Well, one of the biggest things is fatigue. I mean, just naturally, if you get fatigued, you have the one side of your body, you can barely feel anything anyways. So if you're getting fatigued, that side is automatically going to do not operate the way you're learning that you've learned to really operate it.

So if you get fatigued, don't, don't overkill don't overdo it. And that's one of the biggest things that I feel that people need to really listen to. Because we get fatigued and just as people, we just push it, push it, push it until you know, whatever happens happens. So I would definitely say, Listen to if you're fatigued, take a break. There's nothing wrong. There's this Donna race to win. If it's just a baby step, it's a baby steps, sometimes you're going to take two steps backwards instead of a step forward.

So it's just, I just think you gotta listen to that. But the fatigue is the biggest thing I've noticed from talking to people, when they're re learning teaching themselves, how to walk and how to balance and how to do this. One of the biggest things I hear is fatigue, and they overdid it, you know, and they should have listened to because they were tired.

And then when they were tired, because they were pushing it, they either had an accident or a loss or balance or something happened. So my main thing was be listen to your body. Because even though you can't feel the one side, you could still tell when you're tired.

You know, like I said, I don't deal with any pain. So it's really awkward. Because a lot of stroke victims I've seen experience a lot of pain. I don't have the pain issue. It's really weird. So I can't like tell anything on pain. But just you being tired, you can still tell when you're tired. You can still tell when you're exhausted.

Bill 26:37

Just be be kind to yourself, I think. Be gentle to yourself. Pay attention. hey um were you left handed or right handed?

Darren 26:45

Right handed.

Bill 26:46

Okay. So that brings another sort of level of complexity into the situation because everything that you do, write, eat, hold a cup, drink, whatever, everything now, probably, you know, clean up after the toilet.

Everything now is not able to be done, you have to use your left hand which works well. But still, did you ever nearly poke your eye out with a fork? because I had those experiences or I would go to rub my eye. I'll go to rub my eyes and I would poke it out. Did you ever did that?

Darren 27:22

Oh, how many times I've scratched my eyelid going up in my eye oh goodness gracious. More than enough times now fork I don't think in a rehab, I got close with it one time, for some strange reason is like I was trying to balance put it in my hand, my right hand because they had that, you know, like looks like a giant eraser that goes around the fork and stuff so you can hold the fork.

And why I had my hand up like this. And I almost kind of did stop my, once that way. But for me mostly was just like going with my left hand to get my you know, you know, once I started learning with the right hand, I definitely scratched myself quite a bit.

Bill 28:04

Did you ever choke yourself with the toothbrush while you're brushing your teeth with your left hand almost go too far?

Darren 28:12

A couple of times again.

Bill 28:15

I know. It sounds a bit weird to laugh at it. But really, it is funny when you when you look back eventually learned to do those things properly. And don't you poke yourself in less than less. But I did it so many times it was so frustrating because now I'm dealing with a sore eye or whatever, you know, it almost wasn't worth it to try and rub my eye.

Darren 28:36

Oh, yeah, well, it's funny because like, like you said, you get so frustrated while you do it. But then you look back on it. And maybe this is just me. I just kind of



laugh at it. I laugh at myself if I do something funny these days, or some or word doesn't come out, right?

Because occasionally, usually, again, when I'm exhausted my speech sometimes will like I'll think of a word and can't think of it or something will come out wrong. You know, whatnot, I just bust out laughing sometimes. It's just like, Oh, well, this is just me. It's my new normal.

Bill 29:05

Yeah, it's hilarious I couldn't agree more. So how long? Were you at a work for? had, what happened with that?

Darren 29:13

Um, well, as far as that's concerned, I'm still out at this point, because of the issues, the non feeling issues with the right side of whatnot, though, I think we're finally to the stage where I'm starting to do something on my own something that doesn't involve me, because all my whole career was in the restaurant industry.

That's what I've done. That's what I've known. And they go back to that, well, that's either virtually impossible, or a, you know, Time Bomb, as you said earlier, it's like a time bomb waiting to happen, you know, essentially. So I'm trying to go in things a little bit differently this time, slow down a little bit.

## **Darren was getting better**

Darren 30:10

Down here, you know, we've got where people are notary's down here. And you know, I want to get involved with that and get involved in being able to marry people and stuff and something where they call a notary signing agent, which they work with real estate, you know, down here in the States.

And so that's something I've actually started to do recently, because my memory has getting better, I'm starting to retain things a little better. So that's, I want to do something on my own.

So you know, that way, I can pace myself because I'm not going to go back and do what I did before and just kill my body and just basically say, Okay, let's do the same thing again, you know, my life is way more important than that. Plus, I have a five year old and a 17 year old daughter. So that more than a thing as well. So

Bill 30:41

You need to be around for them. That's one of the things that played heavily on my mind, you know, is, you know, I was doing too many hours at work or that kind of thing. And I was doing it for the kids. Not really just for the kids. But you know, the thing that every parent goes through, you know, trying to put through school and feed them and clothe them and have them happy, and all that kind of stuff. So, you know, when there's an opportunity to work on a Saturday or Sunday to make a few extra bucks, you did it. And then it and then it was like, okay, so I was doing this all of all for them. And at 16 and 12, they were possibly without the dad. And what was the point of that?

Darren 31:21

Yep,

Bill 31:22

you know, it's crazy. And that makes you really reflecting and step back. So definitely, I've changed the way that I go about my work and the amount of hours that I do. I try and do less and less, as far as hours are concern. But, but enough that, we able to cover everything that we need to cover.

And really not not worry about the silly things, you know, because most of the stuff that I was working towards was, you know, a newer car or a bigger house or stuff that in the end, really,

I can't do anything with I cant, take them with me you know, when I go, all I can do is leave them behind. So it's just crazy that that's really what I was aiming to achieve. And, and almost didn't get there. So I totally relate to what you're saying. How long ago? Did it happen? Your haemorrhage?

Darren 32:17

Where about 16 months to this day. So in fact, it is okay, what 16 months in a day or two? Yeah, so to be exact,

Bill 32:26

So you still fairly early on in the recovery phase, because recovery is ongoing, but it is still pretty fresh. How has it impacted you mentally? psychologically? Can you talk about that a little bit, has it given you a bit of a tough time,

Darren 32:47

Mentally was really tough for a while I feel like it's getting better. I came, you know, across me, you see, you know, on your time about my Instagram, it's called a stroke a change. It's something that I did recently, because I got to a point where I realized and I was kind of like this a little bit before.

But I was suddenly becoming an introvert. Like I wasn't wanting to be around people. And if I was around people, I can only have like a short window, and then I would just get like tired of people, or I would get frustrated or would get anxious, or I would just get like, you know, just didn't feel right.

And you know, I'm different. Now I'm not able to get out or do the things I want to do. But the one thing I noticed in it came down to perception. Because I always say that reflect the reflection, people look in the mirror all the time, your reflection is a direct representation of your perception of how you look at things.

So, you know, I got to the point where, you know, I what helped me mentally and what helped me emotionally was trying to help lift other people up, you know, was something I kind of had always done before. And notice, once my perception about things, you know, I started accepting the baby steps I started, you know, welcoming it, I started welcoming that very tiny things.

They're very little things that very little victories, you know, and you know, I was even welcoming, the times that I didn't have a triumph and things I noticed once I started changing my perception of how was looking at everything.

My mental state, my emotional state became a heck of a lot better. It's like, for me, I felt like my place and maybe my testimony, you know, at this point in my life was to try to help other people. And when I was helping under people, all of a sudden, I wasn't as anxious. I wasn't as you know, depressed or frustrated at things.

You know, I felt like, my purpose was to start helping, and I was never a person to speak publicly, I would have never done this 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 years ago. So it's like, for me, it was definitely really rough at first.

But one thing I can tell everybody who is going through who's been, start before even if you haven't, quite frankly, you've been through something else that's like major, you know, or catastrophe that's happened, you know, look for the little things.

First, look for the baby steps, look for the little things, you know, start focusing on that start focusing on the bigger things, try to work really hard to change that perception. Because once you try to change that perception, things get better.

And it comes around for me was being selfless, you know, really trying. And sometimes, I felt like I wasn't unfortunately, taking care of myself every once in a while.

So every once in a while I did have to take a step back, as like, take a break from social media take a break from talking to people for a few days, you always need the rest of yourself, you always need to take care of you at the end of the day.

There's no doubt about that. I've my emotional state and my mental states gotten a lot better. But I think it all was because of my perception changing, and everything and whatnot. And I noticed as I'm helping more people, I'm seeing people I'm helping motivating people.

And for me, you know, if I just say one thing, or just get one smile out of one person, then to me, I feel like I've done something good.

Bill 36:26

Yeah. Interesting. So do you feel like you had a really like an awakening moment that you actually noticed this? If I'm doing this as opposed to what I was doing in the past, I'm feeling better about myself, etc? Because I did exactly what you're saying. In 2013, I started public speaking about stroke, raising awareness, etc.

But I didn't realize that it was helping me but I just kept doing it. And it was bizarre, because now I know now and we're seven years down the track. But back then it was just instinct, I suppose. I don't know did you actually have that awareness that this is actually helping me I'm going to keep doing more of that.

Darren 37:11

Well, for a while I didn't I mean, you know it was really weird. And my aha moment kind of became about a month, month and a half before I started because I had my personal Instagram for the longest time. And, you know, I started the a, a stroke of change. But that happened about a month and a half after my aha moment.

And essentially, it became a couple of things. I started doing group messages with

my personal Instagram, to people and not just like stroke victims, because at that time, you know, there were a few people in the stroke community I talked to write on a regular basis and whatnot, but I wasn't as connected with it, then, as I was at that point, as I am now.

So for me, when I started doing these group messages, I'm like, you know, just basically saying, you know, you've got you are good enough, you know, you mean something you matter. You know, I had so many friends that were depressed, there were, you know, some I feared were suicidal and stuff.

## **Darren became an inspiration to others**



Darren 38:23

So I kind of took my perception, and also likened it all around a life. As I said earlier, it's not just even if someone's going through stroke, I wasn't just looking for that I was looking for anybody struggling. And over time, you know, I got a couple of these messages that, you know, thank you, you've really helped blah, blah, blah. But I got a message out of nowhere.

This is about little more than a month before I started the one Instagram page. That was basically this long message about how inspiring I was. And I, I didn't realize any, I'm just sitting here helping somebody, like I said, if I can make someone smile with like, that was that was good enough for me. You know, I've always been good at talking to people.

I was pretty much people like, I was the Dr. Phil of our group at times. and stuff.

It's weird. But you know, yeah, and it didn't just happen once it happened a couple more times. And then next month, and in two cases were people I never even talked to, like, at all.

And then I got this through Facebook a couple of times, too. And so it's like, over time, I'm like, Okay, so what I'm doing, you know, my perception that I've got here, you know, I guess now here's the reflection part of it. You know, it's people are noticing it. I mean, cuz for a while, I'm like, I'm just doing this to do this.

I mean, do people really notice that they're really making a difference, but I'm going to keep doing it. Because it's me. I mean, that's how I've always been. So when they've changed it, but all of a sudden, there was like that month period, where just kind of all like, out of nowhere, starting to come in on I realized is like, oh, OK, I am doing something.

I didn't believe and think was that inspirational to anybody? I'm just me, you know, so but you know, so, for me, that was my aha.

Bill 40:03

That's amazing, man, that that's amazing. Because it's similar to what I experienced. Isn't it Really? What's the word? Excellent. I'll use the word excellent, isn't an excellent that the first thing that most people do when they have the ability to feel better, and get on their feet, etc, is to reach out.

And when they're going through the toughest time in their life ever, they reach out, and they want to help other people in the community that went through something similar to them.

That just blows me away, that, you know, you go through the worst time with the worst day of your life, when you have a stroke, and any other illness, let's face it, when you get diagnosed with something terrible, whatever it is, and that's okay.

But it's like, and then you go, oh well, how can I help other people, there's the most bizarre thing, but I happens over and over and over again.

Darren 41:03

Yeah, it's like when you when you hit rock bottom, you really don't want anybody else to have to hit that. Or, or if you see somebody there, you suddenly want to try to pick that person up.

You know, and it's, it's just, that's because you've seen rock bottom, you've seen basically, death, almost flashed in front of your eyes, in your opinion, you don't want to see anybody else, they're so angry.

Bill 41:28

That's such an amazing thing that you know, the human condition, you know, and I call myself a better version of myself, no, not not a better person, because I was always a good person. But I call myself a better version of myself, because I'm noticing more and more that I'm doing these things.

And it's not thinking about it, I'm not making myself do it, it's just, I think it's our default, it's the human default is to try and lift people up and help people and do all those types of things. And I see so many times, you know, it's really, really heartwarming.

I really enjoy seeing people do that, and 99.9% of the people that you're posting to, or supporting, etc, don't actually say thank you, they may not be ready to be thankful, or they may not be aware that they will feel great when they thank somebody etc.

So it's way bigger than the one or two or three people that contact you and say thanks, there's so many more people may that adjust accepting your message and your wisdom, and they just lapping it up and lapping it up. And it's making a difference to them.

And therefore, it's making a difference to their family and friends and the people that they interact with every day. It's just going around the globe. So people listening, if you are loving this conversation, at the end of it, drop me and Darren a line, you know, I'll put the links there for you to get in touch with Darren on Instagram, and wherever you can be contacted and drop us a line and tell us that you loved what we did, we really going to appreciate it.

Darren 43:10

And like I said, you know, I'm always here to help anybody to talk to anybody to have an ear for anybody. I mean, that's just how I've, you know, always been and I'm willing to help anyone out in any way that I can. Because like I said, I've been there if I can help somebody who either not get there, or somebody who's been there, have some hope, you know, that's what I shoot for.

Bill 43:36

Yeah. I love that how people not get there is really the best approach. And that's kind of what I try and do raise awareness about prevention. But that's a tough, that's a tough gig man. Because

Darren 43:49

Yeah,

Bill 43:50

I don't know about you. But I wouldn't have listened to anyone tell me how to prevent stroke when I was 36. And I just literally a few months before my stroke at 37. What about you? Would you have paid attention to somebody tried to help you prevent stroke?

Darren 44:06

Probably not. I probably like oh I'm fine you know, cuz before it happens to you, you think you're invincible, essentially. I mean, you think nothing's gonna happen to me. I'm okay. You know, and obviously looking back at pictures and looking back at everything now.

It's like, what was wrong with me? I should have listened to somebody you know, at that time, because Did I hear it talked about that? I hear people talk about things that can happen to you. If you let yourself go and stuff. Yeah, I did. But like you said, I wasn't listening at that age.

Bill 44:40

Yeah. So what are the some of the things that you need to do now? So and what? And I know you're not on here asking for help, but what do you need help with, I suppose, to get you back?

## **Darren's stroke community**

Darren 44:50

Oh, hell, you know, honestly, camarad. See, there it goes the word, camaraderie community, just, you know, people to be good to each other. I mean, honestly, for me, you know, to have good friends that have people to lean on to have a community a lean on, that's what, you know, stroke communities really good about, especially since I started the stroke of change page.



You know, I've started talking to quite a few people, I've had people reach out to me, and to me, community is a big thing for me, because, you know, there's still those moments emotionally and mentally, you know, I have not dated or been in a relationship, you know, since any of this either.

So, you know, there's still those things, you're like, wow, can I do that the same way, or people going to look at me the same way or whatnot. So it's nice to have the community for certain things I know will probably come up at some point or, you know, I may think, well, am I not going to be able to do or whatnot, because we're only human at the end of the day.

So you know, it's nice having that community and I've been fortunate enough that I have that community of people, again, not just the stroke community, but the stroke community, especially to highlight you know, we're very, where people that try to be motivating to everybody, and we try to be there and we reach out for everybody, and I absolutely love it.

So, to me, really the simplest thing for me, it's just community, I've been blessed. I've been lucky and blessed to make it, you know, to where I have been, you know, I'm, honestly, if I deal with the whole left side numbness if I deal with this slight issues that I still have or whatnot, I'm here I'm alive.

Bill 46:45

Yeah. Yeah. Sounds familiar, man. That's awesome. I am. Tell me about the kids that age differences. quite large, you know, 17 to one was a 4?

Bill 46:59

How did they cope with all of this? How did your 17 year old cope with this? And then I imagine your five year old was kind of a little bit on aware, but what did you notice?

Darren 47:12

With my 17 year old, she kind of held it in and was kind of quiet about it for a while. And you know, then she took about like, four or five months before we had like a talk about it, and stuff.

But she's actually handled a lot better, you know, a lot our conversation, she'll sit there and, you know, tell me you through everything that you've went through, you've shocked me, you know that you've come out the way you have thinking the

way you have stuff like that.

## **What saved my Darren's life**

Darren 47:40

She's handled it pretty well. The ironic part of it is the five year old who at the time was three at the time. That was what saved my life.

was on my end, sorry, she was she was for the time sorry. She, I did not see her until, the hospital well actually I was in the rehab hospital the time, almost three weeks, and I had not seen her. And you know, she was there. I was told she wasn't there.

But even she was the first seven days I wouldn't have remembered anything from it. And I literally sat I heard somebody yell, Daddy, as she comes running from the door, yelling daddy in literally goes there and gives me a hug.

And she handed me this like drawing like cuz she just stick figures and stuff, obviously. But I had daddy and it had been at a house and blah, blah. But I mean to be it's funny because I, people sometimes again, we're going to say an aha moment. Or sometimes these moments for me, you know,

I feel like it was like, I kind of woke up a little bit. Because at that point, I was not, I couldn't tell you three words that begin with the letter B. I could not, you know, tell you anything simple, I can tell you an animal that belonged on a barn. You know, these are stuff they told me afterward and whatnot. And I wasn't even supposed to originally leave before Christmas.

So that was the other thing. And I remember one of the doctors that telling me I kind of just woke up started waking up a little bit. When my daughter came, like, literally and I tell people is like I really truly believe it was like a God thing at that moment in time that, you know, she was put right there at that time.

And it was just like, everything's gonna be okay, here you go. This is one of the main things you got to strive for, you got to live for you gotta do it for Here you go. It was like, you know, people say they see the light or whatnot. But for me, it's like, you know, seeing and hearing my daughter, I mean, everything just got instantly better for me

Bill 49:58

Yeah I really do do credit my recovery to my wife, of course, she was amazing. At that time, she just took on a task that she wasn't ever meant to take on. And I'm very grateful for that.

But the children is what made me realize, you know, I had this, I had this moment where I thought, what would they think of me if I passed away? Would they have been, you know, you know, they would have loved their dad.

But that that was a bit of a bastard, or the dad was a bit of a prick or angry or whatever. What would I have thought of me if it all ended then. And when I did that reflection, I really didn't like what I thought they would think of me. And I'm not saying that I was a terrible dad was a great dad. But I was an angry dad, I was just tired dad I was a frustrated dad I was acting, I was acting out because

I made it so important that everything that I needed to do was the most important thing in the world, you know, I needed to get this job done. And then to get paid for this. And then to do that. And then when I reflected on how they would have thought of me is when it made me start to say I love you more hug, then more apologize more. And not only to my kids, but to my wife and the people around me that I know, have put a lot of time into me and being my friends and family and what have you and put up with my you know, my cranky side, you know, when I was cranky.

So now I'm not saying I'm not cranky, and I'm not saying I'm perfect. And I'm not saying that everything goes smoothly. But now when I do it, I do have this massive moment of reflecting and going, Oh, well actually I misbehaved then or that wasn't appropriate, I think I need to go and rectify that by apologizing for my behavior and telling them that I love them and giving them a hug. And I think that has created a much deeper, much more heartfelt relationship with my family then then I had before, which is the massive true blessing here because like your 17 year old, my son now is 22 and 18.

But we are starting to now grow these kids into amazing people because they've had these deep, meaningful conversations that are about truth. And they're about honesty, and they're about everyone is allowed to say whatever they feel without being judged, because they feel something, it's just about being able to share and be true and open up, right. So I can really relate to your, you know, your 17 year

old holding it in for a while because they want to be strong for dad, they want to make sure that you're not worrying about them.

But really, they've been affected, you know, deeply, you know, at a real sort of, you know, at a level where, you know, we can't even imagine. So it's great that she was able to now come back to you and start sharing about the journey that she's on with her dad, you know, being in the situation. Has it? How has, how has your conversation with her changed?

Darren 53:35

Um, well, the first I'll say like, five months before that time, you know, our conversations were really, almost non-existent. I don't know if it, she just didn't know how to approach it at a time or whatnot. But now, you know, it's like, almost like nothing ever happened in a weird sort of way. But at the same time, it's also like, Hey, you know, my dad almost died. And her um, Her grandfather also had a stroke about 17 years ago.

So she knew what her grandfather went through. So, and like, she was just a baby, when he had his stroke, she was literally a few months old. So you know, she's kind of been through it once, but he survived. He's done very well with it, fortunately. So our conversations, I it's weird, because I think it's like, we're much more appreciative of the time we have together. So you know, you can tell it, there's definitely, you know, a difference in attitude, I guess, would be the word for, for everything, you know, now we know, it's a realization now that time is actually finite instead of infinite. So,

Bill 54:59

yeah, I really love that that way. That's a really awesome way to end the podcast. And in a moment, when we end it this will have been one of the you know, man I relate to all of the podcast but, this will be one of the ones that I really do relate to end get because of this, you know, situation with the children and how, you know, you've come out of being, you know, the same guys made the guy that just went out of your way to do as much to make as much money as possible to bring home as much, you know, in a way love as possible, to support to help out to grow, to develop kids, and all that kind of stuff at almost at your own peril.

And I know parents do that everywhere, all over the world, that's what parents give their lives for the children, but it's not worth it's not worth giving your life

for your children, it's better to be here for the children and having a dollar less or, or, or an older pair of shoes or you know, whatever, so that we can be around for longer and experience these times. One of the most valuable things for me, is time. And people give me their time. I am forever grateful for that.

So on that note, mate thank you for sharing your story. And thank you for your time. I truly, really truly appreciate it. And I wish you well I'll follow you on Instagram and I hope to continue to grow you know help you grow your community by being active in it. And I wish you all the best and give my love to everybody your family and everyone who's been through a tough time with you because tell them that without them we couldn't do it. So I really appreciate them for helping you be here

Darren 56:55

Yeah, thank you and now obviously send the best on your end as well. You know, I you know, if it wouldn't be for your wife and your children. You know, they're obviously big reason you're here the way you are to and stuff so, you know, we always have appreciate the ones who love us through the toughest times.

Intro 57:12

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