

Stroke Caregiver Journey - Donna O'Donnell Figurski

Donna Figurski became a stroke caregiver and wrote a book about her experience called Prisoners Without Bars after her husband experienced multiple brain surgeries that saved his life after a brain hemorrhage.

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01:37 Introduction

03:31 Arteriovenous Malformation

11:27 Too Much Body Stress

18:53 The Theory of Everything

21:12 Stroke Caregiver

26:48 Keeping Busy

32:29 Laughing It Off

44:50 The Recovery After Stroke

55:00 Prisoners Without Bars By Donna Figurski

1:03:56 Evolving Passion

1:14:00 Following The Road

Donna Figurski 0:00

The first new neurologist came up to me shook my hand and said, I saw your husband's brain on my home computer. He looks like he's in really good shape. (Sigh) next words out of his mouth. He'll make a great organ donor. Yeah, gasp okay.

Bill Gasiamis 0:22

How do you grow from that to that? That quickly? It's so bizarre.

Donna Figurski 0:28

That was it. That was it. He's in good shape, his body is in good shape. He's gonna make a great organ.

Bill Gasiamis 0:34

Oh, his body is in good shape. Oh my gosh. Right, right.

Intro 0:46

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

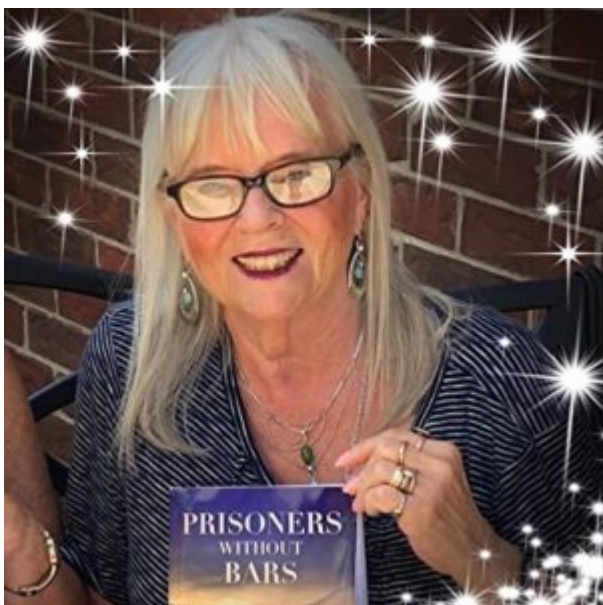
Bill Gasiamis 0:59

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the recovery after stroke podcast. Recently, Spotify released a new feature which allows people to now write their favorite podcast shows similarly to how the apple podcast app allows it. If you think the recovery after stroke podcast deserves it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19

I would love it if you left the show a five star review. This will help the show rank better on search engines and help newly diagnosed stroke survivors find the show. And it could make a massive difference in their recovery and also help other caregivers find the show and feel like they're not alone.

Introduction - Donna Figurski



Bill Gasiamis 1:37

So go to your favorite podcast app and share what the podcast means to you it really will make a huge difference. Now this is episode 182 And my guest today is Donna Figurski whose life was completely changed after her husband David experienced a bleed in the brain and multiple brain surgeries 17 years ago.

Bill Gasiamis 1:58

Which meant that Donna became David's main caregiver many years later, and just a couple of years ago, Donna completed and published a book that she wrote about their journey together called Prisoners Without Bars: A Caregivers Tale. Donna O'Donnell Figurski, welcome to the podcast.

Donna Figurski 2:20

Thank you, Bill, I'm so happy to be here.

Bill Gasiamis 2:23

Thank you for being here, I really appreciate it. I very rarely get to hear from caregivers. And I think one of the biggest and most important things in stroke recovery is to get a feel for the people behind the scenes that are also doing their own version of recovery when they're dealing with somebody that they know or they love or they care for who has had a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 2:54

And my thoughts were often with my wife about what she might be going through when I was becoming unwell. And I ended up in hospital three times. And it was a very serious situation. And she had to take care of the kids go to work, be a caregiver to her dad.

Bill Gasiamis 3:19

And it's like, the forgotten person in the whole picture because everyone asked me how I'm going and how I'm doing and how's Bill and how's this and how's that. But nobody did much of that with her.

Arteriovenous Malformation

Bill Gasiamis 3:31

And I think that would have been better for me to know that people would. So while I was going through all the dramas of the strokes for me to know that my wife was also being cared about, in the same way that people were caring about my situation. Tell me a little bit about how you ended up becoming a caregiver.

Donna Figurski 3:57

Okay, I just have to reiterate what you said though, it's so true. I always say that the victim or the survivor, as we usually call a brain injury survivor is the star of the show, you know, and everyone else is a supporting character.

Donna Figurski 4:14

And the caregiver is probably the the lead supporting character. So, yeah, so I get that and that's my role, and I'm sure that was your wife's role. So how did we get here? Wow. It was about 17, well, it was 17 years ago, it was more than 17 years ago on January 13 on 2005 when David came into our bedroom around seven o'clock in the morning, with his hand over his right eye.

Donna Figurski 4:47

And he was having horrendous pain to go running through his head. He had been exercising. He had done 13 chin ups, well he always did 12. But he did 13 that day. And 13 is what caused his subarachnoid hemorrhage, and his brain bleeds. So he had three brain bleeds within two weeks, every time the doctor would go in and take care of one, they'd come back out and tell me, he has something else we have to take care of.

Donna Figurski 5:25

So he went in for a subarachnoid hemorrhage, the bleed. And then when they took care of that, they said, he had an aneurysm, which was like a time bomb. And that had to be removed.

Donna Figurski 5:41

So I signed on the dotted lines to have that removed, thinking, Okay, now we're okay, we're going to be able to go home finally, only to find out that when they came back from that surgery, they said he had an AVM, which is a arteriovenous malformation.

Donna Figurski 6:02

For the audience, it's a it's a tangle of blood vessels. And the neurosurgeon called that a time bomb, it can go off at any time. Now, also, they told me it's congenital. So my husband was born with it.

Donna Figurski 6:17

And many of us live with it all our lives and never have a problem with it. But for someone who just had a subarachnoid hemorrhage, they wanted it removed. So David went back into brain surgery for the first third time, within that period of time. And by the end of January, he had three brain surgeries.

Bill Gasiamis 6:39

Well, that's pretty intense, I had an AVM and that's what bled and caused the

three bleeds in my brain and then eventually brain surgery. And, yeah, it was not really doing anything until it started to do stuff. And then when it started to do stuff, it seriously started to do stuff and became an issue.

Bill Gasiamis 7:01

And I can understand what the doctors would have thought when they went into your husband's scans and saw that there was multiple issues there. And it's like, okay, well, since we're in this situation now, we may as well go, take it a little bit further and resolve the matter as best as we can. So that is not a risk of a more serious bleed later on. That's potentially fatal. So how old was he at the time?

Donna Figurski 7:07

He was only 57 at the time. So he was pretty much in his prime. He was very, very health conscious. Very, you know, I said, he got it doing exercising, which he did every morning, he ran 20 miles a week, he took all his vitamins and placed all of them on the corner for me to take.

Donna Figurski 7:38

So I had to take mine too, if it were up to me I probably wouldn't have. But they were always there. So he was very motivated to keep himself healthy. So that's what was crazy that something like this happened to David.

Donna Figurski 8:17

But I think when I said to you earlier that the neurosurgeons and every one of them said he had the slimmest chance of living through any of those, I think the reason he did was because of his good health, otherwise, I don't think he would have been able to survive, that if he had other issues going on.

Bill Gasiamis 8:37

Yeah, the foundation is the most important like anything. And if you've got a good foundation to start with, well, then you got a better chance of starting from a higher level of wellness, and then therefore, having a smaller gap to close to get to a level of wellness that's supportive of a really healthy life.

Bill Gasiamis 8:59

And, yeah, at 57 There's a possibility that, you know, most of us in the Western world, you know, might have some risk factors elevated because of our lifestyle for heart attack, cancer, stroke, all those things. So it's great that at 57, he didn't really have any of those elevated levels of risk.

Bill Gasiamis 9:29

And the AVM is one of those things. It's part of the stroke risk, but it's not really something that you're doing to yourself that you're causing yourself through your lifestyle through smoking and excessive drinking and not eating well, and not exercising it's just one of those things, you know, it's kind of a random event of nature.

Bill Gasiamis 9:49

And then one day, maybe it does do something and then some days. For some people, it will never do anything or just stay benign and just never pose a threat. So that's, that is a really important part of the story. I think it's that, that we need to start from a great foundation.

Bill Gasiamis 10:09

And then once we've become unwell, we need to create a new approach to health and well being. And we need to learn about, in fact, what have we been doing, and whether or not he was supportive of good health, even though we might have thought we were doing things that were healthy for us, maybe a little bit more effort into looking into that.

Bill Gasiamis 10:33

Maybe might reveal that perhaps, you know, we could avoid, you know, that supposedly, one drink a day, or that one drink every second day, just to make sure that we're keeping everything as healthy as possible to give us as least complications as possible, going forward into our older years, because we've already kind of behind the eight ball when you have a stroke, and you want to make sure that you live as long as possible and as healthy as possible, so that you have good quality of life.

Donna Figurski 11:07

Right. And I think that's one of the things with David, he didn't drink he didn't smoke he did earlier in his life. But you know, like, we all would go to parties and things like that, and smoking in college, of course, but he stopped smoking and all that kind of stuff way, way back when in his early 20s.

Too Much Body Stress

Donna Figurski 11:28

And so that was not an issue. So that was good, you know that he didn't have that going against him too. So, you know, that's why it was so I'm suspecting that it happened to him, that, you know, he was in such good health. And yet, it happens. And it happened because of, I think, the extra stress that he put on his body at that time.

Donna Figurski 11:54

You know, so again, that's something you have to be aware of, not to overdo, sometimes. But with David, good enough, was never good enough. You know, he always had to strive for more. And that's, that's always been his life. And, you know, so sometimes I even have to remind him now, because he's still going, you know, he's exercising now.

Donna Figurski 12:16

To help him get regain some, you know, I can't say his former life back, because that's never going to happen at this stage. We had high hopes, in the beginning, when the neurosurgeons told us, he would be able to get back to 95%, well, they lied.

Donna Figurski 12:36

They didn't really lie, they really thought he would, but he really isn't back to 95%. But fortunately, for David, all of his disabilities are physical. You know, so he doesn't have any cognitive problems. He doesn't have any emotional or personality problems. So we feel very fortunate for that.

Donna Figurski 13:04

Because it could have been a lot worse. And I don't know whether you realize I also interview, stroke and why interviewing brain injury survivors period. And, and I and I see a lot I see a lot of people that are, I haven't been able to get back to near where they can have a fruitful life. So that's why I say, you know, we're happy that we are where we are, despite the limitations.

Bill Gasiamis 13:35

Yeah, but it's still strange what you said, not many people with physical disabilities consider themselves blessed. And if they do, they haven't revealed themselves to me, I know that some people would absolutely think that right. But that's a really interesting spin on a physical disability.

Bill Gasiamis 13:54

It's like, some people will lose a toe and then focus on the rest of their lives, and it'll ruin their lives. And some people won't be able to move and get out of a wheelchair, and then they'll win tennis world championships or Wimbledon, or they'll climb mountains that they've never climbed before when they had working legs.

Bill Gasiamis 14:15

Do you see what I mean? So it is a little bit strange. Is it a mindset that you guys picked up after the strokes and the brain surgeries? Or was it your standard mindset? Is that how you guys went about life normally?

Donna Figurski 14:30

Well, I think we did let go about it in the positive and most positive manner. And I think the thing that impacted us the most is David is a professor at Columbia University in New York City.

Donna Figurski 14:45

So that was his life, his family and his work were his two major things in life. I think if he lost that, if he lost the cognitive ability of being able to teach or write graphs or write scientific papers, I think that would have been much more devastating to him. So put it in the balance now, the physical disabilities and his cognitive.

Donna Figurski 15:15

And so what are you going to value more? Well, obviously, for us, it's going to be the cognitive, you know, because he actually was able, after a year and a half, to go back to his laboratory, he was able to have students enter his lab and guide their research and get their PhDs under his guidance.

Donna Figurski 15:36

So saying that that's the reason why we put it into perspective that way? Do we like the fact that he has difficulty walking? No. Do we like the fact that he has difficulty speaking in our or ataxia, or swallow disorder or vision? No, not at all. But he can still do the other things, he can still type with one finger now.

Donna Figurski 16:07

Whereas he used to be all over the keyboard, he can still read, he can still write papers, he edits all my work, my book, which is behind me Prisoners Without Bars. He is my first editor before it goes to my publisher. Anything I write on my

blog, or the radio show, or any articles I write, he's my editor. So yeah, we value that intensely.

Bill Gasiamis 16:36

Yeah makes sense. Some people tend to focus on the negatives even worse, even though there's a lot of positives to focus on. And others do what you're saying. And I think, either one is, okay, I'm okay with whatever people choose to do. The question is, what are you choosing? Is it useful? Or is it not useful for you?

Bill Gasiamis 17:52

And absolutely, I think your idea of focusing on the positives is definitely a way to go, and then also not being comfortable or not being completely satisfied with the negatives, well, then that's obvious, too. And that makes complete sense. We don't have to enjoy what we're experiencing in our body, physically, but we can live with it, and we can still achieve things.

Bill Gasiamis 17:52

And even for people that are listening who can't or haven't gone back to their original Korea or their previous career, there's still lots of things that you can pivot towards, and do and live a fulfilling life and something that makes you feel like you're contributing to society, I think it's really important, and it takes time, and you have to learn new skills, and you have to put a plan in place, and you have to go after it.

Bill Gasiamis 17:52

And it's doable, you can see that in so many people who have become disabled and still lived an amazing life. And I always go back to Stephen Hawking, you know, the most famous, most world renowned scientist, and for the majority of his life, he wasn't able to participate physically, in almost any way.

Bill Gasiamis 17:52

And also, he wasn't able to use words, etc. Until electronic voices became a thing. But it wasn't an amazing help, no matter what, he still managed to find a way to become a prominent scientist in his field.

The Theory of Everything

Donna Figurski 18:53

I mean, he's done more than many people that are able completely able. And he's

been able to do that with his disabilities. And there's a great documentary, I think it's a documentary or a movie. I'm not sure which, but about his life. That's very fascinating. If anyone wants to look at that. I don't know the title, but I'm sure you can look it up and find it easily.

Bill Gasiamis 19:17

Yeah, it was a movie and it came out, probably about within the last decade. I don't think it was that many years ago, I'm just gonna look it up.

Donna Figurski 19:30

It's within the last few years, I think.

Bill Gasiamis 19:33

Yeah, I'm just gonna look it up right now as we speak just so that we can tell people what it's called. It is called The Theory of Everything. And it was released in 2014.

Donna Figurski 19:46

Okay, so not so long ago.

Bill Gasiamis 19:48

Yeah It's good I've seen the movie and it's a lovely movie, because it also still goes through his experiences. As an able bodied person, then a disabled person, and then also his emotional challenges and the marriage breakup, and all the things that you would expect the difficult in normal life.

Bill Gasiamis 20:17

And then also become even harder and more complicated when your life shifts from being enabled by the person to a disabled person, and all the changes and shifts that the whole family had to go through, including his wife.

Bill Gasiamis 20:31

So it's a great insight and for me, I was able to really take a lot from that movie, as far as relate to a lot of it, and kind of understand how they ended up navigating the challenges that disability poses.

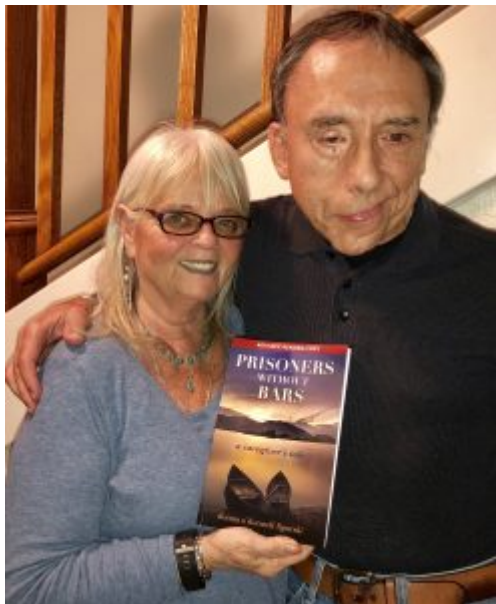
Donna Figurski 20:52

Yeah. And there are many. There's certainly many.

Bill Gasiamis 20:58

So, what were you doing for work? When your husband, David, had a stroke? How were you going about your life?

Stroke Caregiver



Donna Figurski 21:12

Well, I was a first grade teacher. And so when David had his brain injury, and I called the paramedics, and from the ambulance, I called my secretary at my school and said, get me a substitute for today. And I didn't know really what this entailed.

Donna Figurski 21:35

In fact, when I asked when we got in the ambulance, I asked the paramedics if they could drop me off home afterwards. I mean, don't even go there. You know, it's like, that's where my mind was, I had no idea.

Donna Figurski 21:49

I mean, first off, paramedics are never going to drop you off. And, but that's where I was, I was all in this calm, you know, convoluted state. But I didn't realize at that time that I would be involved in this in the hospitals, basically living in a hospital for the next two to three months.

Donna Figurski 22:09

And when I didn't go to my class that day, and they had a substitute for me until May. So we're talking mid January until May, I had to leave my first graders, because I couldn't leave David, I would not leave him in the hospital by himself.

Donna Figurski 22:27

Because every time you know, he was going through all these brain surgeries, and he come up a little bit from his consciousness, and then he'd be, you know, thrust back down, then he'd come up again and throw us back down for the next one.

Donna Figurski 22:42

When he finally got to rehab, I thought, okay, he'll be in rehab for three hours, you'll have dinners and lunches and everything, I'll go to work. And I'll come back, my work was an hour away, and then an hour back, and then another half hour to the hospital.

Donna Figurski 22:58

So I thought, well, I'll get there by five o'clock, and I can stay till 10. And then we'll start all over again. Well, the first night while I was going to do that, and David ended up pulling out his trach or trying to pull out his trach. And he had a G peg in his stomach to feed him.

Donna Figurski 23:20

So the nursing staff had to glove him, they put mitts on him big, they were just like soft boxing gloves like, but you know, what, how big those are, and how. And so, it David had those on, when I got in the next morning for this one, this one first day. And he's, you know, raising his hands.

Donna Figurski 23:44

And I thought, Oh, he's really excited to see me. And all he wanted to do with me get those things off of him. And he also had to be restrained. He was, he had tried to get out of bed.

Donna Figurski 23:55

And again, pulled out everything when he fell on the floor. And I realized that there's no way I will let him in the hospital with these mitts on all day, and restrained to a bed. So I called my principal and explain to her and then they started taking all my sick days. And I said, that's fine.

Donna Figurski 24:18

Once the sick days got used up, they started to take my personal days. And I said thank you so much, you know, because those come back to you eventually at the end of your teaching career at a discounted price. But like I needed them now. And I was just so grateful that I had the support of my principal and my

superintendent.

Donna Figurski 24:39

So that's what I was doing. I was teaching until that day, and then I didn't go back to teaching until the beginning of May. And that's when David was home at that point. He was we had caregivers for him. Friends of ours from Germany came over and spent time with him when I couldn't be there, and they just lived with us.

Donna Figurski 25:06

So we were fortunate that we were able to work that out so that I could go back to work. Because in May all my time all my paid time was going to be gone. And David wasn't working. So really I needed to get that salary back in. And it worked out. Well. We were fortunate, we were lucky that we had the connections to do it.

Bill Gasiamis 25:27

Was he when he got home? Was he able to toilet himself and do all those things, feed himself and be independent in any way?

Donna Figurski 25:36

No, no, he wasn't able to do that I had to, he was in the wheelchair, or if I had to remove him, from the wheelchair to a couch, to a chair, to the bed, whatever, to the toilet, that kind of thing.

Donna Figurski 25:53

So what happened is, I went I was there for a while when he came home April 1, which I thought was a real April Fool's joke, because he should not have been left out of the hospital at that point he was totally unable to do anything. But that's insurance. And that's another whole topic.

Donna Figurski 26:13

So that's when we arranged for one of my daughter's friends from Germany to come over and stay. And she took care of, of all those things for him when I wasn't there. When I got back from work, I went totally on duty with him.

Donna Figurski 26:31

But she was always there. So we became a family. And I did this four times and with a 3 of the four girls, we really became a family that just lived together and did everything together. Fun stuff, and not so fun stuff.

Keeping Busy - Donna Figurski

Bill Gasiamis 26:48

Is this still raw for you? Have you moved on emotionally from it? Is it still triggering? What's it like after all these years to reflect back on that part of the journey?

Donna Figurski 27:02

Well, part of the thing, though, is I don't think about the beginning. I can talk about it now. Because I wrote the book about it. And I've gotten all that kind of stuff out of me. And I talk to a lot of people about it, because I give talks out in the community and elsewhere, you know, interviews, and so I can talk about it.

Donna Figurski 27:25

And I can talk about it objectively, like I am talking to you now. But if I stopped and thought about it, if I stopped to think about those days in the hospital in the rehab in the early coming home, if I stopped to think about the things that we're missing out on our life now, I could very easily become depressed. But I don't do that. I keep that at bay. And so I often call it my Energizer Ostrich. I keep way, way, way busy with my head in the sand. So I don't think about it. So I don't get depressed.

Bill Gasiamis 28:07

Yeah, well, it's in your awareness, but you don't focus it or your efforts into it. And, and therefore it's doing its job. It's kind of saying, Hey, I'm still here. But you're going yeah I know you're here. But I got other stuff to do. You know, we've got things to do.

Bill Gasiamis 28:23

Because this week is my 10 year anniversary. So in Australia today, it's the 12th of February 2022. So the first brain bleed for me was the week of the 12th of February in 2012. And unlike you, I kind of reflect on things and I talk about it all the time. So it's kind of always off my chest and out into the ether.

Bill Gasiamis 28:52

And I've answered a million questions about it. And I've done 180 podcasts about it, you know, so there's a lot of therapy in all of those conversations and all that talking. But listening to you now, I asked you about whether you get triggered

because I'm getting triggered listening to you talk about your husband.

Bill Gasiamis 29:12

And that's caught me a little bit by surprise. Maybe it's the 10 year anniversary, I don't know. It's not that I have an issue with being triggered. It's just that I've noticed it and I thought maybe it still goes on for people after that many years. And it makes sense that it could because traumas kind of like to lurk around. And as much as you deal with them. They still like to find a spot sometimes to hang around in.

Bill Gasiamis 29:39

But what I find is they get less traumatic over time, the memory changes and shifts and the experience, especially your version of the experience becoming a positive one because you've written a book, and you have this upbeat approach to life and this gratitude about his problems are only physical. And I think all those things kind of tend to help to not allow the trauma to define both you guys and run your life.

Donna Figurski 30:20

Yeah, I think you're I think that's very true. And just congratulations on your 10 year anniversary too, because that's huge. And I don't know whether you do anything for it. But every anniversary, we make it kind of big, we go out to dinner before the pandemic thing, we go out to dinner I'll buy David flowers or I'll cook in a special dinner, we have cake or some special dessert for him.

Donna Figurski 30:45

So we do acknowledge it. But we acknowledge it is like, I'm just glad you're here. You know, that kind of thing. So, yeah, but definitely different things can trigger you. Although, like I said, I try to bury them. You know, and I think because I don't want to face that. I know, it's happened, it's in my face every single day. Because David has difficulty walking across the room.

Donna Figurski 31:13

He has his face is a little distorted from some of the paralysis. So it's in our faces every day, it's never gone. But, you know, I think of him very much as before. He's different. He's very different. But I think of him very much as the person before I treat him the same way. You know, so if I get angry with him, I'm gonna get angry with him. Like, oh, God, he's got a brain injury, I can't get angry with

him. So sometimes, that happens. It's real.

Bill Gasiamis 31:50

That's lovely. It's lovely to treat him as per usual, because that's what most people want. They don't want to be treated differently. They want to be treated the same. But let me tell you a couple of times when I've been treated the same by my wife, and she's taught me off.

Bill Gasiamis 32:05

I have used the but I've had a stroke routine on her. You know, I've done that a couple of times, to try and smooth things over to make me get out of trouble. I've used the whole Come on, you know, like, I had a stroke, like, you know, give me a break, you know, but I probably deserved what I had coming. And that's all right.

Laughing It Off - Donna Figurski



Donna Figurski 32:28

One of the things that we do is we laugh it off. You know, if something, you know, okay, so he's got me annoyed with something. And then he'll try to say, Well can't even say what we said the other day, but it was just like, insult the other person and something that you know, that they're really going to be triggered on be upset with, and then we just crack up, you know, cuz it's like, it's funny, you know.

Donna Figurski 32:59

And that's, I think that's a lot of what we do with each other is we keep it light, keep it easy. If somebody I mean, very rarely do we get angry at each other for a long period of time.

Donna Figurski 33:10

But there are things that you know, in every marriage, and whether you have a brain injury or not, that are going to tick you off and you say something that maybe you didn't want to say or something like that. But then if we just laugh it off, it just goes away. And I think that's one of the good things about how we handle it.

Bill Gasiamis 33:33

Yeah, one of the things about getting angry is that I very rarely can remember why I got angry. And it gives me the shits, you know, I get angry. And it obviously was something that happened that was at a low emotional time for me or something like that.

Bill Gasiamis 33:50

And vice versa for my wife. We could say the same things to each other on different days. And most days, it's like, whatever. And some days, it's one of the worst thing you could have said, and those ones frustrate me because it's like, how did we get there?

Bill Gasiamis 34:07

And in three or four days, why was it so bad, but I can't remember what started the argument? I mean, it's so silly. And today, I could honestly only remember maybe sort of a handful of things that were serious enough that I can remember I actually was angry for a reason it was valid.

Bill Gasiamis 34:28

And, you know, I could identify it, and I could discuss it now. But obviously, not going back to the anger we've resolved it. But it's only a handful of things that I can remember that I was actually properly angry about that she did that she caused.

Bill Gasiamis 34:45

That she needed to make better, so to speak, was all the other stuff. I have no idea what they were about. Doesn't matter. And we've been married 26 years like I've got no idea.

Donna Figurski 35:00

David's sitting here right behind my computer laughing because he's totally agreeing with you. Because it's true. It's like, and I think that happens with

people who are really connected to each other. As David I and I are and it sounds to me like you and your wife are that, you know, you do get angry occasionally.

Donna Figurski 35:22

But then you don't even think about why, you know, when it's gone away, where as somebody else, if they've done something that I really didn't like, and I'm feeling unhappy with them, sometimes I'll remember that longer, you know, but with David, they just kind of fade away.

Donna Figurski 35:40

And I think that that's probably good. I mean, it's very good, because you're not harboring bad feelings about each other. And so, yeah, I think that's because I know that I can barely, you know, barely remember things that we get angry at. And some of the things are so ridiculous.

Bill Gasiamis 36:03

Yeah, angry for the sake of being angry is probably the wrong place to be at, especially in life, you've got so many other problems to solve every day, that last thing you need to be is putting your energy into something that's completely not constructive at all, and just meaningless.

Bill Gasiamis 36:20

So I like that idea of just forgetting about what you got angry about not remembering how you got there. And then using that as the motivation to stop the anger on the next crazy argument. And just moving beyond that quicker and getting to the other side of it quicker.

Bill Gasiamis 36:43

Kind of acknowledging that it happened. And then it's like, okay, well, alright, let that go. Now we can let it go move on. I'm practicing that I'm not fantastic at it yet. I'm 47, I'm still practicing that every day to try and be better at releasing non useful emotional, stuck points, you know, and situations that just get no positive outcome. So how long into this whole journey did you decide that you needed to write a book about your experience as a caregiver?

Donna Figurski 37:29

That's funny, because I didn't really decide to write a book. What happened is I was writing children's picture books. And I had been sending manuscripts out to agents and editors for several years and getting this close, but never quite signing

on a dotted line.

Donna Figurski 37:50

And then when this happened to David, all my writing stopped. Because I couldn't write, my mind wasn't in children's picture books at that point, I was still reading them to the kids in school spot what I was doing the entire time that David was in the hospital, and he went to three different places.

Donna Figurski 38:13

I had a digital recorder with me, because I knew I wouldn't remember what everybody said. So as soon as I spoke to a doctor or therapist or whomever, I would go off and tell myself what they said. And then later that evening, I would go home and write what we call the David update.

Donna Figurski 38:35

So that we lived in New Jersey at the time, and I only had two family members anywhere nearby, the closest other was 400 miles and most more across the country. So and friends too, of course, I had to keep them apprised of what was going on with David.

Donna Figurski 38:53

So much like those Christmas holiday letters that everybody sends out. Well, that happened almost every night like David waved today, David took a long sigh You know, I mean, it was just everything, or David had the trach put in or the GP or whatever it was, I wrote that down and let people know.

Donna Figurski 39:16

Then about 2006 Around January, I started to read these to David and it because he didn't know what had happened to him and he never asked me you know, he never really felt you know, went back to the beginning.

Donna Figurski 39:32

And so when I was reading in the first chapter of how the paramedics came into the house and how we got to the hospital, etc. And how what the doctor said to me on the first thing and I am going to tell you this.

Donna Figurski 39:47

The first neurologist came up to me shook my hand and said, I saw your husband's brain on my home computer. He looks like he's in really good shape.

(sigh) next words out of his mouth. He'll make a great organ donor. Yeah, gasp. Okay.

Bill Gasiamis 40:09

How do you grow from that to that, that quickly? That's so bizarre.

Donna Figurski 40:16

That was it. That was it. He's in good shape. His body is in good shape he's gonna make a great organ donor.

Bill Gasiamis 40:22

Oh his body is in good shape? Oh my gosh.

Intro 40:30

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

Intro 40:54

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 [recovery after stroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) where you can download a guide that will help you it's called a seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 41:14

These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke. They'll not only help you better understand your condition, they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. Head to the website now, recoveryafterstroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Donna Figurski 41:33

So I mean, that's just part of the gasp in my book. But, so anyway, I started to read these these missives, I guess I might call them because they weren't chapters, but I started to read them to David.

Donna Figurski 41:48

And he would sit on the floor of my office, and he would go oh, my gosh, you know, that happened to me? You went through that? You know, and he was like, totally gasped by it all, because he had no idea he was in a coma. You know, he was sleeping the life of Rip Van Winkle.

Donna Figurski 42:05

And I was, as you know, taking everything into control into hand. So, at that point, he kind of like suggested I should write it in a book. And I thought, I can't right for adults, I could never write a book that's long. Okay, it's 200. And I have it here. It's 270 Oh, no, it's more than that.

Donna Figurski 42:33

It's 300 Some pages, you know, so, I can't write this. But I sat down, and I started and I worked, and I worked, and I worked. And I worked after school and late into the night, and I worked on weekends. And that was in 2006. I didn't finish it until about 2013 or 14.

Donna Figurski 42:56

And then I didn't even get it published until 2018. So, that's how all that happened. So no, I didn't plan to write a book. What I have thought about when I was in the waiting rooms of all the different hospitals, is they need a pamphlet, you know how they have it for diabetes, and for Parkinson's, etc, Alzheimer's, they need a pamphlet so that people know what to expect with traumatic brain injury.

Donna Figurski 43:28

Because I had never even heard those words. I didn't know what they were, I didn't know what a brain injury was. So it turns out that I decided to, I didn't get to write the pamphlet, but I ended up starting to write this. So that's how the book came to be. And now I'm actually writing another book with someone you know.

Donna Figurski 43:52

Deb Brandon, you interviewed Deb a couple of weeks ago?

Bill Gasiamis 43:56

Yes.

Donna Figurski 43:57

And Deb and I are finishing our first draft of a book, from the caregivers lens and from the survivor lens.

Bill Gasiamis 44:05

Wow.

Donna Figurski 44:06

So we meet once a week, and we work on our chapters and just, you know, do our discussion and then write our parts. And hopefully within a year we'll have that book out there. Because I think it's important for people to have these tools available to them. Because up in 2005 I didn't know anything.

Donna Figurski 44:32

And there was very, very little out there. There's a lot more now. But I just feel people have to be able to get the stuff in their hand and preferably read it before it might happen to your loved one. But if not least get a chance to read it and see that you're not alone.

The Recovery After Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 44:50

Yeah. 2012 There was nothing out there either. There was seven years after David had his stroke. But the internet was kind of still emerging and ideas about these types of podcasts and groups and communities and whatever, they weren't just fleeting. No one had really taken the time to do it seriously, in 2015, is when I started the podcast, and I was putting out maybe two or three or four episodes a year, you know, not much.

Bill Gasiamis 45:23

I didn't really got serious about it maybe three years ago, where I'm putting out an episode a week, there's a lot of work that's involved in that, as a stroke survivor, 2015, I didn't have all of the focus, the energy, the ability to go through that. So relying on stroke survivors to be the people who put that information out there is, I think, not the right path.

Bill Gasiamis 45:46

Because stroke survivors have got too much on their plate to try and get content out to make life easier for themselves and other stroke survivors. And for the caregivers. I mean, that's really impossible to expect the stroke survivor to do

that. That being said, then it's also just as hard for the caregiver to do that, because they're too busy giving care and trying to do regular life.

Bill Gasiamis 46:13

So I've seem to have found like this zone that I can go into and put this content out. But of course, there's not enough time to do all the things that I want to do. Because I've got to do regular life stuff. So this is a good start for me. And I like the way you stumbled into a book over the many, many years.

Bill Gasiamis 46:37

And it took a long time to get it done. And that's a great thing that there was no real deadline on it. There was no real publisher getting on your case and forcing the issue and all that type of thing. It just evolved and emerged. And I like the idea of that. And I get impressed by people who come on this podcast, every single one of them because they have a need to give back in this way that helps other people.

Bill Gasiamis 47:08

And even if it's just getting on for an hour and then talking, somebody will pick that up at some point and they'll go, Well, I needed to hear that podcast episode or I can relate to that one or that made a big difference. And caregivers don't have enough of those things that they can relate back to.

Bill Gasiamis 47:30

They've got a great perspective on a lot of stroke survivors from my podcast, but they don't have a lot of different versions of caregiver stories. And that's what I like about the fact that you're doing this with Deb, especially giving two sides of the story in one book that's amazing.

Bill Gasiamis 47:51

Deb is somebody who really really impressed me because of her background also in academia. But because more so because she was such a reclusive kind of character. And then found that in fact, she was able to be more involved in social aspects of life because of the stroke for some reason.

Bill Gasiamis 48:22

And it made her more empathetic and made her more able to understand what other people were going through made her a better teacher it made her a better mom a better a better human all around and she sees it as being a real positive

aspect of what happened in her head.

Bill Gasiamis 48:45

That was on episode 178 and she had a cavernoma which is similar type of situation to an AVM but the cause of a cavernoma is a little bit different in some people. So it's really cool to hear that you guys are coming together. How did you meet each other?

Donna Figurski 49:11

That's funny because I meet a lot of people on social media. And something that Deb said someday because I will pick people that say something and say would you like to do an interview on my surviving traumatic brain injury blog? I interview caregivers and survivors and that's a paper I mean that paper but I mean it's like goes on a website.

Donna Figurski 49:37

And then so she did that. And then she also did a radio show with me. And then you know I know how it was it was because I saw her book. That's how without what's what drew me to her and said, Okay, I really want you to be on my show. Well, then it turns out that our publicists were, there was a connection between our publicist somehow.

Donna Figurski 50:04

And, yeah, maybe it was the same publicist, maybe that's what it was. And so anyhow, they worked together so that we would go to the Tucson Book Festival. So Deb was gonna fly out to Arizona from Pittsburgh. She was going to fly right to Tucson, and we were going to meet there.

Donna Figurski 50:22

And I said, Well, that's silly. Why don't you fly to my house? And we'll drive down together with David, we'll get hotel rooms down there. And we'll go to the book fair. And she did, you know, and this is somebody I had never met, we just met online, I liked her. And I've invited her to my home.

Donna Figurski 50:41

And so we have been best friends ever since we've been very close friends. And she proposed this book to me about a year ago. We started working on it last December. So just past and I said, yeah, let's do it. So we have an editor that's going to be working with David's my editor first.

Donna Figurski 51:02

But then we have another editor overall, before we send it to a company. So that's how we got involved together. So every week, sometimes more than that we talk about what we're writing, you know, and go back and edit each other's and all that kind of stuff. So that's how it happened. It's amazing. And that's how I found you. Actually, it was through Deb.

Bill Gasiamis 51:26

Yeah, I think I saw something on your Instagram or somewhere. And I said to you, you should be on my podcast. That was it. And you didn't think that you qualified to be on my podcast, which I found strange, like, bizarre that somebody who is caring for a stroke survivor didn't feel like they're able to speak on my platform. I'm curious about that, just as to why you thought that perhaps that wasn't the right platform for you?

Donna Figurski 52:06

Well, I just thought you were focusing on the survivor, and not necessarily on the caregiver. So I felt like I was a little bit out here, from what your interests were and what you were promoting on your podcast. So that's why I just asked you, you know, wanted to make sure that you knew that I wasn't a stroke survivor, that I didn't have the injury and just so that I didn't come on the show with misconceptions.

Bill Gasiamis 52:37

Yeah, fair enough. The thing about it is every stroke survivor has a caregiver, whether they are professional caregiver or family member, every one of them has it. So I imagine that they would appreciate an episode like this. Not I imagine they definitely would appreciate an episode like this.

Bill Gasiamis 52:57

So for me, it just goes hand in hand, the both of us are going through stroke recovery, the caregiver and stroke survivor. I mean, it's just I think it's even more unfair that it's thrust upon the caregiver. Like I sort of say, from that perspective, I don't have a lot of caregivers approached me that's what I'm worried about.

Bill Gasiamis 53:20

The most of them do it in suffer in silence. This is the thing that I'm concerned about. That's why when I see a caregiver, it's immediate. It's like, come on, let's

tell the story. And when I say a caregiver writing a book, that's even better, because then they're taking that story to the next level, and making it possible for people to stumble across the book, in a bookstore, online, or in all these places.

Bill Gasiamis 53:49

No one's gonna find my podcast in a bookstore. You know, they can find a podcast, which is great, but no one's gonna stumble on it. I've stumbled on some books in bookstores that related to traumatic brain injuries, and that's made my day to find them.

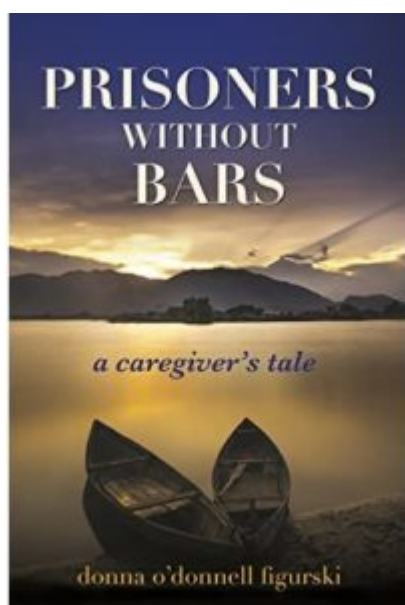
Bill Gasiamis 54:06

And then to connect to the author and then to invite the author on to the podcast. And, you know, it's another level of necessity, we need every story from every person and that's all I do. I just share stories about recovery. So what I love about your stories, you guys are so far down the line, so many years down the line, that I get to express to people what it's like, X amount of years down the line, if you're just going through it now.

Bill Gasiamis 54:36

And it's really terrible. And it's really hard and all these things. Well, it gets easier, still complicated and difficult and all those things but you seem to find a new way to do life and to adjust and to be yourselves and to reemerge from this thing in some way that's meaningful to you.

Prisoners Without Bars By Donna Figurski



Bill Gasiamis 55:00

And that's why I do it's called recovery after stroke. It's not about staying in the stroke, it's not about staying in the problem. It's about recovering after the stroke. And however long that recovery takes is fine. Like, it doesn't matter. It's just about the entire after part of the stroke. So caregivers are always involved in that always. Your book is called Prisoners Without Bars. Tell me about the title. How did you come about that?

Donna Figurski 55:38

I started off with very mundane titles like conquering traumatic brain injury, and then subtitle or something like that, or surviving traumatic brain injury. And that's how it was in the very beginning.

Donna Figurski 55:51

But it wasn't catchy. You know, I mean, it stated it, but it wasn't catchy. And so when I was writing the book, there is a line in the book, saying that David is a prisoner without bars, basically, because of his disabilities. And the fact that he cannot leave our house without me.

Donna Figurski 56:12

He can't walk down to get the mail, because of the uneven sidewalk or the little slope in the driveway, because he has such difficulty with his balance. So I wrote that he was a prisoner without bars, then I was at a writing conference some years ago, I guess it was actually 2013 when we moved to Arizona.

Donna Figurski 56:34

And I talked to an agent, and she looked at me, and she, you know, once I explained the book to her a little bit, she said, No, this book is Prisoners Without Bars. And I said, No, no, no, no, no, this is about David. It's not my book. It's all about David. And she said, No, this book is about you. And I said, No, it's not, you know, and here I am arguing with an agent, you know.

Donna Figurski 57:00

But then I went home and told David, he goes, she's right. This is Prisoners Without Bars, because I was really restricted in my life for a good five years, where David did go back to work a year and a half. So while he was at work, I was able to go to work. And before he got home, one of his professor friends would drop him off.

Donna Figurski 57:25

But before he got home, I get all my errands done, so that I would be in for the rest of the night. So he wouldn't be alone at all. So yeah. Then when he started to promote that, he said, yeah, that you are a prisoner, as well as, as I am. Now, I'm not so much a prisoner now, because I can get up and walk out, go to the grocery store.

Donna Figurski 57:46

And David is able to be in the house and take care of himself that way. But truly the way in this book takes place, up to the when he returned to work. So the first year and a half. So it went to be Prisoners Without Bars, A Caregivers Tale. And David kind of was pushing the caregiver part. So that's how I got the title, it's funny how it evolves.

Bill Gasiamis 58:14

Yeah, that's true. That's my take on caregivers as well. It's like, everything goes on hold, and everything revolves around the other person. So whatever you had in mind, to do for yourself, it stops. And, most caregivers don't go back to it. They, put themselves last on the list of to do things.

Bill Gasiamis 58:38

And it's really disheartening to see that it's like, hang on a sec, take a break, go away for whatever, you know, organize some way to not be in this situation for a day or half a day or whatever, and go back to experience something that you need to experience in the summer that you'd like or something that you enjoy or something that's not about stroke recovery, or helping somebody or whatever. But they don't really do they.

Donna Figurski 59:05

You know I give talks about that. Because when I go out to give caregiver talks, and this is something that I talk about all the time, it's not something I did. That's why I could talk about it because I know I should have, but what I do is I carry these little stones around that I purchased, and I call them I'm going to pick one I really like it's a tummy time stone.

Donna Figurski 59:33

We call it a Me Time Stone. It's just a tiny little black polished stone. All different kinds of shapes. Here's one great big huge one that I never thought anybody

would want something that big but I did go to a conference or a talking engaged speaking engagement ones.

Donna Figurski 59:51

And a guy picked one of those stones as big as that. And I said why in the world would you pick something that big? He said Look at me. I'm a big guy. And he was he was like way, way up here, you know. So the purpose of the stone is and I keep all them, as you see, I have them right here, I have them all over the house, you know, my vanity in the bedroom, the bathroom, by all my computers, I mean everywhere.

Donna Figurski 1:00:17

And those are to remind me that I'm important too. That when every time I see this, I think that you need to take some time for yourself. Now, like I said, In the beginning, I did it. But now I just say like a cup of tea, or a cup of coffee for me, you know, but a cup of coffee, a bubble bath, a lot of people like to do that.

Donna Figurski 1:00:42

A walk around the block, read a chapter in a book, whatever you can manage to stop and take your mind off of everything else in your life and focus on on yourself. And frankly, what I did, this was past the five year mark, again, I started to go to the theater. Now I had, I've always wanted to go to the theater to work in the theater.

Donna Figurski 1:01:07

But I didn't have the time to do it. And I was retired then at that point, too. So I started going to the theater meetings on once a month, Friday night, from seven to 10. And I had my phone right with me, if David needed me, he could buzz me. And that was my first time where I would take time for me.

Donna Figurski 1:01:31

And now I'm in the theater all the time. I'm the stage manager for shows I have a show coming up in March and we just finished one in December, another one in April that I'm the stage manager for so that's going out every night for several hours. And David's right here with us, you know, he works on his computer, I keep him busy he's editing my work.

Donna Figurski 1:01:53

Or he's listening to a lot of TED Talks and things like that. So you know, the

prisoner part has moved on a little bit. And the Me Time Stones have taken over a little bit. And, and I really think that it's so important, even when you are inundated with every single minute taking care of someone that you do find some time for yourself, you know, just to decompress, you have to, reboot, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:26

I think that's one of the most important things with anything like if you don't do that it becomes a chore becomes difficult becomes something that you start to dislike or despise, and then that becomes resentment.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:42

And then it's not useful. It's not supportive, if you've chosen to hang around and be the caregiver. Part of being a caregiver is caregiving for yourself. It's not just for the other person, the caregiver role is about caring for self first and then the other person because if you don't care for yourself, you can't care for the other person.

Donna Figurski 1:03:05

They say that on the airplanes don't they? Flight Attendants start every flight with put on your own oxygen mask before you help others. Because if you don't have your oxygen, you're not going to be able to do anything. And it's the same concept.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:18

Yeah, exactly. Right. Exactly. Right. So I feel like your journey has been really evolving, constantly evolving and changing and shifting and you've found space for things. Just by chance, as in naturally, as in, oh, here's an opportunity. Here's a window of opportunity for me to slot something in.

Evolving Passion

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:56

I'm going to try that, and let's see what happens. Is that how you guys went about it? Is that how you ended up in the theater? Or was it in the back of your mind to get involved in theater way, way long ago? And you just didn't know how to make it happen. Just like the book, everything that you're speaking to me about seems like it just kind of emerged and evolved rather than got targeted to achieve.

Donna Figurski 1:04:24

Yeah, I think you're correct on that. I have always had the theater in the back of my mind since I was in second grade. I was Little Red Riding Hood and that was my starring role. But, so it always been something that I would have liked to have done, but when I was working, there was never any time to do that.

Donna Figurski 1:04:47

You know, so um, and then when I retired and that was well after David's injury. Again, it took five years for me to be able to feel that I was able to even do something and I happen to see our local theater had a meeting. So I said I'm going to go. So that that one going to that one meeting is what has evolved into.

Donna Figurski 1:05:08

Now that was back in 2010. So 11 years of my working in the theater, and this is all volunteer kind of stuff that you do, you know. But first back in not leaving, New Jersey, and now here out in Arizona. So that was one thing. And then another thing is I went to a jewelry class, and I liked doing it.

Donna Figurski 1:05:31

So I ended up setting up my whole studio. And again, after five years, nothing happened before that. And I started to create jewelry. And that I would zone out, we were in a three storey house. And we but my main story was on the first second floor. So David was just, you know, a few steps away in another room. And I was there. So I was still available for him.

Donna Figurski 1:05:57

But when I was creating, It's almost like I had blinders on. I could think of nothing else. But what my creative work there. And that was really very rejuvenating. Then when we moved out here to Arizona, in 2013, and 14, that's when I started to want to sell, get my book out. It was done at that point. And I was on social media. I hadn't known about it prior to that.

Donna Figurski 1:06:29

So I started to join all of the groups, all of the brain injury, stroke group, caregiver, there are a few of those spouses groups. I joined something like 30 groups or something, and tried to keep up with some things, but obviously couldn't keep up with all. But I found that, wow, there are a lot of people out here that are going through this, and I didn't realize it.

Donna Figurski 1:06:52

So I woke up one morning, and this is literally what happened. I woke up one morning and I said, I need to create a website or a blog and start helping people because I had enough knowledge about what was going on in brain injury. So I started I built a website. I think it was it's a WordPress or was actually a blog.

Donna Figurski 1:07:15

So I built that. And I called it Surviving Traumatic Brain Injury. I wish I had just put brain injury. But at the time, I don't know when I can't change it now because it's popular. In fact, it just won its third award and won two awards. And I just got nominated, not nominated. It just got acclaimed for honored for one of the top 35 Drum blogs on brain injury.

Donna Figurski 1:07:48

And they took 1000s of them. So I was like, Yes, I was really excited about that. Yeah, so I found that that was really helping people. And so when I started to do it with survivors, when I added the caregiver page, and then I added this and I added that. And then from that I ended up with somebody contacting me a friend that I had met online. So Donna, I am one of the hosts on the brain injury radio network.

Donna Figurski 1:08:16

And I think you'd be great to be a host there. So I said, Oh, no, I can't do that. I don't know how to be a radio host. I can't you know. And so she said, No, just try it. And then her boss came on and said, I've been watching you too. And I'd like you to do it. So I started and now that is seven years or eight years ago now that I've been doing that twice a month.

Donna Figurski 1:08:44

So you, you know, things didn't evolve. And they evolved around brain injury, basically, because that's where my focus in my life. Yes. If I can do anything to help anybody, if I can let them know that they're not alone. Like I felt and like you said you felt in 2010. Yeah, I just think that's why we do what we do. I mean, I'm saying that's what I do. And I think that's why you're doing it too.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:14

Yeah, kind of fell for me. Things evolved in the same kind of way. And usually, it's just because I took advantage of an opening spontaneously, something came up. Yeah, let me give that a try. And then from that something came up and evolved

and emerged.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:31

The book that I'm writing came out of that exact situation like you, I had no intention of ever writing a book ever about anything. And then I went to a particular course that a colleague of mine, friend of mine mentor of mine, put together and it was about modeling excellence and how do you model excellence in a particular field in your chosen field.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:59

And then from that one of the things that I realized was that there was a whole bunch of people saying that stroke was the best thing that happened to me. Deb Brandon was one of those people who said that, and then it's like, Okay, how did everybody get there? How did they get to be able to say that? Can we model that? Can we find, like a formula that makes people do that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:22

And then that began a conversation with my Instagram followers. I was contacted by about 15 Instagram followers, who said exactly the same things that I was saying. And then I found that we all had a lot in common, and all the things in common. We didn't know that we had in common, but we had a lot in common.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:41

That ended up getting us to that point of saying those words. So it's kind of a story about post traumatic growth and how people did that journey. Some of them didn't have a clue that they were doing it, they just did it, and they got there somehow. And then that is what evolved into this thing. That's become a book idea. And now it's half a manuscript, and soon, it'll be complete.

Donna Figurski 1:11:08

Can't wait to read it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:09

Yeah, it'd be lovely to read. I even can't wait to read it and I haven't even finished it. And it's like, it's just funny how I'm writing that book, but I'm not aware about what's in it. Like, I think it's gonna be a great read for me when I go through it. Strange. So yeah, so everything has evolved, it's been 10 years and the book idea, and it came about mid last came up about mid two years ago.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:40

It's taken time to get to that point, it's taken about a year to write half a manuscript. And no one, I don't have a publisher yet, or anything like this, and there's no one on my back, forcing me to write X amount of words, by the end of this month, or whatever. And I haven't written for about a month at the moment. So I'm not really worried about that, or concerned about that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:04

It will just come as it comes just like the podcast did and then evolved from a few episodes every so often, to an episode a week. That's kind of how everything else is coming up. I wanted to focus on this part of that conversation, because it's an idea that it's it's a, it's part of the story to sort of suggest to people who are doing tough in the very early stages of caregiving.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:36

That right now it's the time to do the tough stuff. And then soon, somehow things will shift, and it'll be time to go into the other stuff that you've always wanted to do or that you want to do. And not to feel like this thing is never going to end I'm never going to get my life back, or I'm never going to do what I love anymore. It's the tough stuff happened for you many, many years ago.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:03

And there was a season for that. And then the seasons changed and evolved, then became this other aspect of caregiving, and enabled you to be creative drawing from this part of your life that you also didn't choose. But you've found a way to actually make it a useful thing for people and for yourself.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:29

Because you're sharing and you feel like you're giving back and you feel like you're contributing and you feel like you're making a difference. And you are. And that's all come from this thing that you've asked for.

Donna Figurski 1:13:42

I know exactly. You know, and that that's the thing, it's like, everyone comes to another fork in the road, you're always coming two forks in the road. And sometimes you get to choose with that fork is sometimes you don't is in this kind of a situation, but you still have to follow it.

Following The Road

Donna Figurski 1:14:00

You have a choice, you can make that a fork, a happier fork, or you can make it an unpleasant path, or an unpleasant, pleasant journey. And it's just easier to make it pleasant. You know, it's more fun that way. So you just for me and for David, we just try to find the fun in life, you know, the fun whatever we can do. I mean, just goofing around the house, you know, silliness sometimes, but it works.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:36

Donna, your book is called Prisoners Without Bars. If somebody wanted to look you up online, find the book. Where would they go?

Donna Figurski 1:14:48

They could put in, they could go to Amazon, they could go probably to anywhere there. It's all over the place. Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, just I'll put in the title. Probably what I've noticed is that when I put in prisoners, and Amazon and my last name just Figurski, that'll bring it up.

Donna Figurski 1:15:12

You could also go to my website, DonnaFigurski.com. And then if you go to the book area on that website, you can see all the cast of characters, because most of the characters are in the book that, you know, that I talked about are on that website. Some will remain anonymous for various reasons, for privacy, but most of them are there. So it makes it more fun to read the book that way too.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:43

Yeah. Fantastic. Thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Donna Figurski 1:15:47

Thank you. I really enjoyed talking with you, Bill.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:50

Well, thanks for listening to another episode of the recovery after stroke podcast. I really appreciate you tuning in. And please do feel free to Like share, give the episode a thumbs up if you're watching on YouTube, leave a comment below. Anything that you could do to interact with the show will help it rank better.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:14

And therefore be found easier by other stroke survivors and their caregivers from all around the world. And hopefully, it'll make their stroke recovery journey just that little bit easier. And make them feel less alone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:29

And make them feel like they have other people out there that are like them that they can reach out to and hopefully be inspired by them and hopefully support them overcome all the challenges that we know that people who experienced a stroke need to overcome. Thanks again for listening. I really appreciate it and see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:16:51

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Intro 1:17:08

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Intro 1:17:31

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Intro 1:17:46

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Intro 1:18:00

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Intro 1:18:16

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