

# 80. Stroke Recovery Mindset - Sally Callie

Sally Callie experienced a stroke due to an AVM in her mid 30's. She was a young mum of 2 babies under the age of 2 and had not long stepped down from her olympic duties. Sally's mindset training during her Olympic career held her in good stead for managing her mindset when dealing with the challenges she had to overcome after stroke.

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Bill 0:00

Did you find yourself when you were in the actual stroke process? Were you really aware of your mindset? Or did that come later that you notice that I had a good mindset just because of my training?

Sally 0:13

Look, I think we all hit rock bottom and it does take rock bottom to, I guess. I put in a positive mindset. And I actually went there at rock bottom, I was sharing a ward with six elderly stroke patients. It was three months living in rehab, I was told I'd need a year off work. Two children at home financial pressures we were actually living in Auckland, which was even more difficult so we had no family around so I really felt like a burden on my family and hit rock bottom.

Intro 0:45

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

Bill 0:55

Bill from [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) This is Episode 80. And my guest today is Sally Callie, Sally Callie is a triple Olympian coach, educator, member of the Queensland Olympic Education Commission and a disability advocate Are you a stroke survivor that wants to know how to heal your brain overcome fatigue and reduce anxiety.

Bill 1:14

By the time this episode goes to air, I will have been eight years into my stroke recovery journey. Three brain hemorrhages and then brain surgery created similar challenges for me. The thing is very few people understood what I was dealing with. The only people that understood were other stroke survivors.

Bill 1:32

One of the unexpected nice things to come out of my stroke experience is that I have been asked to share my story a number of times in newspapers in the national news and as a speaker at various corporate events in the hope of rising awareness and to support other people that are going through stroke now.

Bill 1:48

Most recently, I was involved in the launch of a joint advertising campaign by the Cancer Council of Australia. Quit Victoria and the Stroke Foundation which was called smokes lead two strokes. The aim was to encourage more people to quit smoking and decrease their risk of stroke.

Bill 2:05

Being involved in these campaigns made me realize that stroke prevention is

important. However, what I needed when I experienced stroke was help to bridge the gap in that critical time when I went home. Realizing that the amount of support drastically declined once stroke patients live hospital motivated me to create a way to support stroke survivors so that no one has to do it as hard as my family did.

Bill 2:30

If you have fallen in the cracks between hospital and home care, and desire to gain momentum in your recovery, but do not know where to start, this is where I can help. I'll coach you and help you gain clarity on where you are currently in your recovery journey. I'll help you create a picture of where you would like to be in your recovery 12 months from now, and I will coach you to overcome what's stopping you from getting to your goal.

Bill 2:56

During coaching I will also teach you the 10 steps to brain health for stroke survivors and guide you through each step with supporting interviews from experts, and information that is based on the latest scientific research.

Bill 3:09

Some of those include training on the type of mindset required for an ongoing successful recovery, and how to decrease the anxiety created by the thoughts of another stroke. There'll be a module on emotional intelligence which will help you manage out of control emotions, information about the gut, and how a healthy gut is the first step to a healthy brain.

Bill 3:30

And we will cover nutrition and the kinds of food required reducing fatigue, and they'll be much much more if you're one of the first 10 people to join recovery after stroke coaching, you'll get a one on one private coaching thread with me access to the course 10 steps to brain health for stroke survivors when released.

Bill 3:47

Access to member only monthly group training calls and access to the survivors private forum, the first 10 people also get more than 70% off the full price of 599 and 12 months of access will only cost you \$149 per year, be one of the first 10 people who reply for recovery after show coaching now and get the first seven days free.

Bill 4:08

After the seven day free trial, you will pay the annual amount of only 149. And the price of renewal will never increase for as many years that you stay a member once the first 10 coaching packages are solved, the price will never be offered again.

Bill 4:21

So take advantage of the seven day free trial now by clicking the link below if you're watching on YouTube, or by going to [recoveryafterstroke.com/coaching](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/coaching) if you are listening online. Sally Callie, welcome to the podcast.

Sally 4:36

Thanks bill. It's great to be here. I've been listening to your show and really enjoying hearing how the stroke survivors have managed their journey and it's really great to relate to some of those stories.

Bill 4:47

It is thank you so so much. I really got curious when I came across your Instagram because you're talking about mindset and mindset. Such a big thing when it comes to stroke recovery. And often people's stroke recovery mindset is not is not optimal for a really good healing journey. Before we get started in that conversation, tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

## **Sally Callie had an Arteriovenous Malformation**



Sally 5:20

So, I had just stepped off the Olympic team. So after three Olympic Games, which was Atlanta, Sydney and Athens, which were great successes. I stepped up the Olympic team and I guess I was in catch up mode I was about 35 36.

Sally 5:37

So I met my husband, who was a fellow Olympian produced two children and world record pace. Life was hectic, I was playing catch up maybe the career a little bit similar to your story Bill, just going absolute skyrocketing.

Sally 5:50

And I was standing in the shower one day after giving birth to my son Jake, it was all of two weeks old. And I just felt away the vertigo come over me on my left side collapse convulsive And I just fell to the ground and had no idea what was happening.

Sally 6:04

So I had two children at the time Zach, who was one and Jake, two weeks old, and I just thought I was living through a stroke. I had no idea. So I went into hospital that night, a little bit like your story actually was quite reluctant to go into hospital because I felt too busy to go to hospital, but went in and did an MRI and they found a genetic brain malformation, so an arterial venous malformation.

Sally 6:28

So an AVM which, which often is, bleeds under times of stress, so likely the strength of the stress of childbirth or could have just been the stress of playing catch up mode, as as we do as Olympic athletes. I was given the advice that I needed invasive brain surgery, On my craniotomy and they told me the risk was a 15% chance of stroke, paralysis, coma or death.

Sally 6:54

And that just terrified me. You know, having a newborn baby at home who was just two weeks old. I just didn't feel that I was in a position to undergo craniotomy. So I made a big decision to delay the surgery and delaying the surgery by six months was the best decision I've ever made.

Sally 7:11

I've learned more about myself in those six months than I have, you know, I have in my life because it's a time where you stop and you value life and you slow down and you focus on the quality, not the longevity of life. And I just spent six months

making sure every day counted because, you know, the following six months, there was no guarantee.

Sally 7:31

It was just incredible to see every sunrise every sunset, to reconnect with my children, with my husband with friends. Just get back in touch is why we're here. So it was amazing. And then obviously, the morning of the operation arrived, and I'm sure many of your listeners know what it's like to arrive at the hospital waiting for craniotomy.

Sally 7:56

And yeah, the surgery took seven hours and successfully the AVM was removed. However, I woke up paralyzed on one side and intensive care. So I stroked during the surgery. And so I was devastated. absolutely devastated because I really thought being an Olympic athlete, I was naive.

## **Sally's athletic Identity had vanished**

Sally 8:13

I just thought my body could cope with anything and I knew my body well enough that there would be no way it would ever let me down and find myself as a, an infant in an athlete's body. It broke me I lost My whole identity. I guess in a flash, you know, in seven hours, my whole identity, which was an athlete was vanished.

Sally 8:34

So I guess that was the challenge that I had. That my whole identity was wrapped up in that physical side and having to accept that no longer did I have that was an enormous experience to go through.

Bill 8:48

Yeah, we have a lot in common. So I had an experience an AVM I delayed surgery. I went through that I did like surgery for almost three years because I didn't come across a surgeon who was confident enough who had the right mindset for surgery. And now that we're talking about mindset, that's what it was.

Bill 9:13

And I decided, no, I'm not going with this guy, I'm going to find another, found another surgeon and that surgeon had from the get go, the right mindset for surgery that we're going to go in there. We're going to get it out, they'll get it

fixed me No problem. And I thought, That's amazing. Do we have to do it now?

Bill 9:30

No, we don't, we can wait a little while. And after the third time that the AVM bled, I decided it's time for surgery. But I kind of didn't decide by then the surgeon really didn't want to give me an option. And she really said, Look, we've got to do this now because it's getting a bit too risky for you.

Bill 9:50

And I had dragged out this recovery journey for three years already and you know the ups and downs when it is to put it into it. So that's what we did. And it's interesting that those first six to 12 months were the ones that I decided that I'm going to make things good with family, friends, wife, children, all those types of things in case the next one was a more serious one, and I didn't make it or I didn't wake up from surgery.

Bill 10:21

And that was a really good thing to be able to reflect on my previous way of being yourself and going, Okay. I probably wouldn't want to go out of the world and have feedback from my parent, my children, that goes something along the line what along the lines of dad was, there was a good dad, but he was angry all the time, or cranky or whatever.

Intro 10:51

If you've had a stroke, and during recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be. You're likely to have a lot of questions going through Your mind, like, how long will it take to recover? Will I actually recover? What things should I avoid in case I make matters worse?

Intro 11:09

Doctors will explain things. But obviously because you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery.

Intro 11:22

If you finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com), where you can download a guide that will help you. It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke. 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](https://recoveryafterstroke.com) and download the guide. It's free.

Bill 12:04

Yeah, so so that's the way the path I went there. No, you. You're an Olympic athlete. Let's get back a little bit. The rowing team in Australia, whether they the men's, or the ladies, is this massive thing. It's a massive machine that just captures our imagination. Because whenever you hear about the Olympics, you always hear about the rowing team and how amazing and fantastic they do and when they're not doing well. You have some really massive headlines as well about Olympians in the rowing teams that don't do well. What is it about rowing in Australia? That we go so that we get so fixated by it?

Sally 12:47

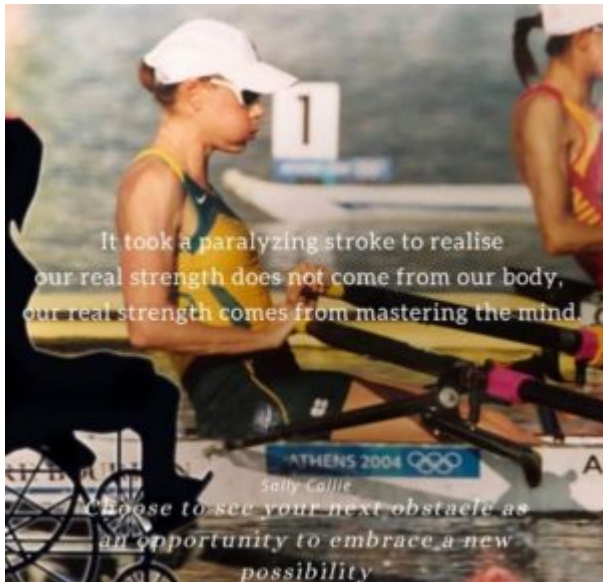
Look, I don't know because I guess I'm on the inside of that, but it's incredibly united team. rowing is a sport that takes huge hours, you know, huge commitment and it's one of those sports that How do you work the further you go? So I guess the bond and if you've ever rowed, if people have ever rowed, they sort of can relate to that and understand that and respect that.

Sally 13:08

And I feel like being on the team for 12 years, being on the national team for 12 years, our part of my family so it is an incredible sport. I've learned so many skills from a sport that helped me through the stroke, you know, the determination, the grit, the resilience, the mindset, you know, the race is a seven minute race and it's, it's all about mindset.

## **How Sally got into the Olympics**





Sally 13:27

It's not about the body, you know that the race is not about who's the fittest on the line, it's who's the mentally toughest, and that's what I called on after my stroke. But my story of getting into rowing was quite unique actually. I was in my final year of high school, when a woman came into school when we were sitting in assembly and she went around to every school in the state and asked three questions to every student in the state and that was are you tall? Are you 16? would you like to go to the Olympic games?

Sally 13:56

400 kids were rounded up and taken down to the car. Yes that the sports Institute spent had to be greater than height, power and endurance were tested. Parents were interviewed. And then those 400 kids were narrowed down to 10 boys and 10 girls and nine feature Olympic champions.

## **The Art of Resilience, Grit, and Delayed Gratification as part of having the right Mindset**

Sally 14:12

Now, we were told that within four years if we did everything right, we'd be at the Olympic Games. So it was quite a whirlwind, a whirlwind experience of discovering a sport and within four years sitting on a start line, and learning all those that for years those skills of resilience and grit, that delayed gratification that teenagers often don't learn so many incredible life lessons that you can transfer into times where you go through these obstacles and you can turn them into opportunities.

Bill 14:41

Wow, that is amazing. So that really does illustrate why your identity is this way of being this person. I am a rower. I'm active, I'm physical. I wake up early in the morning. I do this amount of training and I trained for years. To do a seven minute race.

Sally 15:02

Yeah, exactly. And they repeat that every four years. So yeah, it is my life and it has been my life. But I guess the best thing stroke did was it taught me that you can't cling to one identity, you have to embrace new opportunities that come along the way.

Sally 15:16

And I do wonder if I hadn't stroke if my life had gone to plan, what I'd be doing today, would I still be involved in sport? Or would I be exploring other areas because I think losing your physical ability gives you the opportunity to discover new things, you know, to really get in touch and connect with people discover new jobs, new opportunities, like yourself, you're podcasting.

Sally 15:38

You know, you probably wonder whether you would have ended up in this area and it's, I just think you've just got to open yourself up to new opportunities when these things happen, you know, and close the door on the old one.

## **Creating a support team for stroke recovery**

Bill 15:48

Yeah, I love it. And you talk about team and how important that is to get to the Olympics and perform and train and motivate each other. I talked about team as well. I talked about it from the point of view of you need a team of people around you to create a successful stroke recovery and to heal your brain successfully.

Bill 16:06

Now, success is measured differently. So, you know, definitely an Olympic sport success is measured by whether you finished first, second or third. Fourth doesn't really count does it? But, but if you're a real winner, if you're a real winner, it seems like second doesn't really count either.

Sally 16:20

Yeah, it's true. Yeah. And you know, when you go to the Olympic Games, it is all about medals. And unfortunately for me, I've raised in three Olympic Games and I've come fourth in every Olympic Games. So I left with no medals, but a bag full of resilience and grit and determination and I will say you got to close that door and, and look ahead. So I think that's been quite helpful.

Bill 16:43

Do you feel that that harshness is something that motivates you or stops you from experiencing the good that's happening because that harshness I finished fourth, that's not good. I mean, that's fourth best in the world. That many people that are the fourth best in the world than anything.

Bill 17:01

And you guys get there every year and almost go beyond. But in that time, you've won a lot of events. It's not just, it's not like you came forth in every event you ever ran. There's that whole idea of being so hard on yourself that I finished fourth and I didn't get a middle interfere with other parts of your life.

Sally 17:25

I look, you know, I go back to you say that, to come fourth at the Games, you must have won a lot of events before I personally feel like I've failed more times than I've succeeded. And I sometimes think to succeed, you have to put yourself out there and fall over learn the lessons, I think we call it failing forward, you know, I call it turn your failure into success, you know, really turn it into a future, you know, opportunity.

Sally 17:50

So, I feel like about more than I succeeded and, and I think that fourth place was an opportunity to go and do something with my life. Supposed to retire on the back of a cereal box like my idol Lisa Kenny not, not that Lisa do that. But, you know, that was sort of my initial thought I thought fantastic.

Sally 18:09

I've been telling ideas in four years I'll be at the Games, I can't wait to pick up my gold medal, rake up the ticker tape parades and retire in the back of the cereal box. And I'm so glad that didn't happen to me. I'm so glad that I had to have a degree to back up my fourth place. I had to get a job. You know, I had to get my feet out there in the real world and really face the financial pressures that we all

do and things like that, because it takes up so much.

Bill 18:31

Yeah, so when we talk about team I talk about team, including doctors, including physios, including your community around you, including coaches, including psychologists, including everybody that you can go to in a time of feeling down or tough or during a tough time and say, Hey guys, like I'm actually not doing well.

Bill 18:51

I need something to help me get through. And I've noticed when I coach people that when they make me part of their team It's designed that coaching process is designed to get people to have somebody to talk to at their most vulnerable is coach is being in a team in a sports team.

Bill 19:14

You guys help each other get through the tough times, as well? You know, during that training Do you can you go to your teammates and say I'm having a really tough day? Actually, I need something to help me get through the end of this next training session. Like how does that work?

Sally 19:28

Absolutely. I think your teammates in my scenario have become like my sisters, you know, we see each other at our worst and our best. We rely on each other. And, so much so that interestingly, my writing partner in Athens, we broke the world record and that Olympic record still stands today.

Sally 19:45

She after the Olympic Games, she moved to cycling. She won the National Championships in the time trials, which went very well, and then ended up racing a race called the Tour Down Under in Adelaide, and she fell off a bike in the race, ended up in a coma for three months and end up With a major brain injury, so at the same time, I called her up from my hospital bed, she called me up from hers.

Sally 20:06

And I said, What are we going to do? I mean, we both couldn't walk. She she had a slur. And and I think the brain knock had caused her vision as well. So she was probably in a worse state than I was. And she said, I've got one word for your Sally. I said, What Amber? Which goes neuroplasticity, read up on it.

# Sally Callie taking accountability and ownership

Sally 20:23

And from that point on, we both became students of our purposes. You know, we took that accountability, that ownership. And together we worked as a team, but also driving the goal not relying so much on our medical team but relying on you know, each other, the experts that I guess we could relate to.

Bill 20:41

That's beautiful neuroplasticity. That's one of the first things that I came across. And I came across it again, because I was curious about, you know, how do I take responsibility for the things that I can do. Is there something I can do that doesn't cost money, that doesn't take any effort? I don't have to do anything about because that's how much energy we have right?

Bill 20:59

We have zero energy at the time of stroking and, the fact that you guys came together to support each other had your teammate, you know by your side and vice versa going through this thing at the same time. That's, that's one of the best things that you can hope for.

Bill 21:17

And some people will feel like they don't have a team around them. They need to start thinking about how to create the team around them and do it in a way that's very simple like zoom or Skype or whatever you don't leave your home if you can't if you can't get up yet. So how old were you when you experienced stroke?

Sally 21:38

I'm just trying to it was actually seven years ago. So it must have been I almost forgotten it all. Now I must have been 36 37 similar age to you. And I felt like a young stroke survivor because I was put into a stroke rehabilitation unit in the public system. And I just felt too young to be there almost felt like palliative care, being taught to adapt to my new permanent disability.

Sally 22:00

Was heartbreaking. I believe things have changed. Now we've come a long way with stroke rehabilitation about always making sure we call it a stroke survivor, as opposed to stroke victim, changing our language.

## Sally Callie felt lonely after having a stroke



Sally 22:10

And I think what you're doing with coaching and I think podcast, there's so many more resources. When I went through my stroke, I felt so lonely. I just had to seek a team because I felt like the team that I was given a goals didn't align. Their goal for me was to pick up my child and my goal was to run again, you know, our goals were so out of line, and I was desperate to return.

Sally 22:32

And they were desperate not to disappoint me. So that's where we were a bit misaligned. So once I got the accountability, the ownership now I could take my goals and run with it. And I think that's the best thing a team can do is teach you how to be accountable, that support you as you move through that journey.

Sally 22:47

And it's not like if you if you want it to run, it's not like if you learn running, you wouldn't be able to hold your child. That's sort would've just come.

Sally 22:54

Yes, that's right. And I think a coach is so important. What you're doing, I just I would have just thrived in that environment. If I could have had a coach help me through and support me through that, experience.

Bill 23:08

And that's what I experienced. I was, you know, fifth 2012 home for six weeks, bored out of my brains and no one touching base and saying to me just wait

another six weeks until your next appointment and I'm like, well, there's got to be something I can do. So I called after I was released after seven days the first time and then by the 10th day after the bleed in the brain, I was with my psychologist, and straight into the office, they're going somebody needs to tell me what the heck's going on and you need to help me work out how I'm going to navigate this because I don't know what is happening to me.

Bill 23:45

My life has just been turned upside down, and I need somebody to say it's going to be okay. And I'm happy to pay for you to tell me it's going to be okay. But the hospital the doctors, all the people they were just happy to, so to speak. Patch me up and send me home make the bed available, which I get because there's other people coming through.

Bill 24:06

I'm coming just as as I was coming through so I spent Unfortunately, my first week in a part of the hospital that was for people had spinal cord injuries, they weren't moving or doing anything. They were just yeah, being supported in every way, shape or form.

Bill 24:26

And I associated some of what I was saying to my potentially my life going forward. It was really traumatic. I just needed somebody to tell me that it wasn't kind of be that way. You know, if I did, if I did the best I could do in helping healing my brain in my recovery.

Bill 24:46

Then I could have a good outcome now. I have permanent issues on my left side. You can't see them but I have them. They are some spasticity some numbness and muscle weakness, sensitivity to touch all that type of thing which a lot of other people can relate to. What are you living with on a daily basis?

## **The physical challenges for Sally Callie after stroke**

Sally 25:09

Yeah, I'm similar left side weakness, no fine motor control on my left side. And same as you there's not much movement in my fingers and my toes. Hot cold

doesn't really exist no blunt sharp sort of bricks and things like that. And u know in cold weather, they'll definitely be a limp present.

Sally 25:28

But I hide it really well. I do find myself holding my left hand you know when I'm sitting down or the best thing though, I think I'm left side dominant as well. So I do have to pick up a pencil and write with my left side. I do naturally reach for a door handle with my left side and I've heard that that's a real asset to the to have a stroke on your left side.

Sally 25:47

But I found sports that have really tested me you know, mountain biking is a great sport for me. You know, you put gets clicked in so there's nowhere or you lose that foot. And you have to use that lift right or you end up doing these endos over the handlebars.

Sally 26:00

Yeah, it really puts me under pressure mountain biking, I thoroughly love being clicked in, but also knowing I've got to actually respond. And so much stimulus coming into your body. And it's a great sport, You got to find those sports where you can do it and it does test you and stretch you at the same time.

Bill 26:18

So your ability to be active and still athletic and still relate to that identity that you held on to since you were 16 doesn't go away. And you say that a lot of wheelchair sports where, you know, people who experience injuries, end up jumping into a wheelchair and then becoming the world's best. Paralympian basketball player or something like that.

Sally 26:42

And inspire so many people along the way. That's what I love about these stories. You know, they can turn this obstacle into this incredible opportunity and share their story and make it bigger than them. That's that's the goal for all of us. You know, sharing these incredible stories we have.

Bill 26:56

It's interesting that alot of stroke survivors decide that that's what they're going to do. They start Sharing and start expressing by you going out on stage and talking about mindset to people in the corporate world. And wherever else you're



going to is that is that therapeutic for you?

Sally 27:11

That's been great. This speech writing, you know, obviously, to get up on stage and talk for 30 or 40 minutes, you know, you put a lot of work into the words, it's been great to find that golden nugget in what I thought was a tragedy.

Sally 27:23

So it's been an incredible journey to talk about. It's only I've only been talking about it in the last year. So I'm seven years post stroke. So it's took me six years to get to this point. So it really therapeutic and I'm writing a book as well, whether that book will ever be published, but it's so therapeutic speaking, writing, because you're forced to find the Golden Nugget and relate to the life skills, you know, that are so important when these cables comes on, come along.

Bill 27:49

Yeah, I remember deciding that in 2013 that I'm going to go and learn how to speak about Stroke Prevention for the Stroke Foundation. and you know, it was a room of about 20 stroke survivors. And combined, we all had, you know, the brain power of about two stroke survivors, because we were all very of two normal people, so to speak because we were all very early on in our stroke recovery journey.

Bill 28:16

We didn't know what was going on. It was such an interesting and warm and amazing and funtastic. 20 people who had been through the worst thing in their lives, all about now sharing and helping other people. So, of course, you don't know where it's going to lead.

Bill 28:31

And I get to talk as a result of that I got approached to go and do a talk at a university, Australian Catholic University here that teachers, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, those kind of people. And I thought I like that, that's going to be interesting.

Bill 28:48

I wonder what i got to want to know, but they were third year occupational therapy, students getting ready for learning about stroke and then starting to go into hospitals to do some training. I'm thinking, Okay, great, what what will they

want to know?

Bill 29:03

And what they wanted to know was how can they be better at being carers for people recovering from stroke, and they wanted to hear from a stroke survivor to tell them what I didn't get while I was in therapy, so that they can make sure that they pay attention to those things and support those people.

Sally 29:22

And what did you say, Bill? What was first advice you gave?

Bill 29:25

Yes so the advice I gave was just to be really gentle patient and to be really aware that we struggle with different things memory, so we need to have things repeated to us often. We need to be potentially guided physically but be careful about touching different parts of the body because sensitivity is an issue.

Bill 29:45

I just talked about the things that they would not consider as being important for a stroke survivor because thankfully, they haven't experienced a stroke and they don't understand and I also spoke about fatigue and the challenges that fatigue created when you know, you're trying to get me to climb those steps or to do that exercise, you know, it might only be a minutes worth of effort that I could put in for that entire day.

Bill 30:11

And I'm done. The feedback has been amazing. The lecturers love it because they get somebody who they can relate to who looks younger, who looks physically normal. But is experiencing these things, and I had to spend a month in recovery. And one of the biggest challenges I had was communication.

Bill 30:31

I felt like, again, it's always my issue. I felt like people don't communicate enough about what's going on. So the first two or three days I was sitting there waiting for them to assess me so that I can go into the actual physical part of the rehab.

Bill 30:47

And nobody was telling me so I had to seek out information from the medical team about why am I still sitting in my room. And I haven't been out to rehab yet

when I'm here for that. And they expect the reason why is because I was being assessed, but it took three days for me to get that answer. I just thought that they'd forgotten about me.

Sally 31:08

Yeah, yeah, the communication is a big one, isn't it? communication is enormous. Because, you know, we want answers, we're ready to go. You know, a lot of us are eager to solve this problem and get some direction. But obviously, there often is delays in bed. So there's a public holiday or something that slows everything down and, that communication is essential.

Bill 31:29

One of the things that I got a gave back as feedback, which I really appreciated being able to do was the fact that I was asked the number of times, what kind of rehabilitation would you like to do? What do you want to achieve? And that was amazing, because I was really afraid of losing my balance of falling over and, you know, hitting my head after the craniotomy. I was really concerned about that.

Bill 31:53

Yeah, they had a pool on site where I was wonderful. So I said, Can we use the pool because they didn't offer it. I knew it was there. And they said, Yeah, sure. And we did a lot of the therapy sessions in the pool, walking, floating, swimming, all those types of things. So the fact that they asked me was great.

Bill 32:12

And then I remember in outpatient rehab, I was asked, What do I want to achieve when I'm at home alone after this is after the month in hospital rehab. I said I want to be able to run and they said to me, okay, what do you want to do a triathlon or something else? No, I don't want to do that. I just want to be able to run across the road incase there's a car coming. So that was amazing. Because they asked me what my needs were instead of assumed that I wanted to do this, that or the other.

Sally 32:45

Yeah, that's great. I guess that's why I grew my devil horns in my rehabilitation because I knew I had a young a new child and they made the assumption that my only goal would be to pick up my child and I wanted so much more out of life, than just to pick up a child. Yeah, yes. Yeah, I didn't ever you know, ask, what's

your background? Where'd you come from? You know, What's your job? How are we going to get you back working again? Yeah, it was just about being capable of going back home pick up a child.

## **Sally Callie found her passion**



Bill 33:13

Yeah. So that's what I love about that opportunity. And I suppose why I asked you about speaking on stage is to just give people an idea of how you come to finding your passion, because I didn't really know that my passion was being active on a podcast or speaking. It was something that I had to discover, by stumbling upon more than anything, but by trying different things.

Bill 33:36

And I'd love to tell people who are listening, you know, that part of creating your team is finding a way to uncover what your passion is. And you're going to need support for that you're going to need people to help you. And there will be people out there that you can go to and say, hey, I want to learn about public speaking.

Bill 33:52

I want to learn about this. What's the first thing I need to do? And how do I do it in a way which is really easy for me to say? To learn about that and experience it on a very low scale, so I don't see myself. Yes too much when I'm going out into these public forums.

Sally 34:08

Yeah. Now, Toastmasters is a really great option. I decided to join Toastmasters and it's a huge mix of people from the corporate spectrum to the English as a second language. There was a stroke survivor there when I was there last it's a

great, warm, friendly place to go to get those that confidence up, which is a wonderful opportunity.

Sally 34:28

But I think step one is embracing the difference. You know, that was the first thing accepting this new identity you've got. That was my biggest jump and my biggest awakening. One of the ladies I shared a room within the rehab. She gave me this broken ball and it was glued back together with a gold glue.

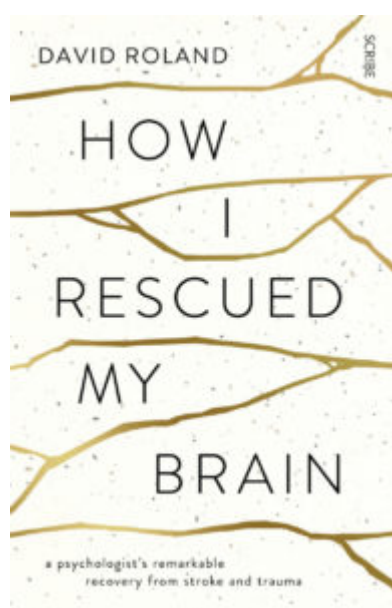
Sally 34:46

And it resembled the Japanese ancient art of Wabi Sabi. And she said even though your body might be broken, you need to embrace this new possibility and let the light shine through the gold. The analogy was just magic. It really gave me a sense of this is something I can now capitalize on.

Sally 35:02

I'm different, and I need to be proud of this difference and I need to embrace this new possibility. And that was that was it for me, you know, to have this beautiful Wabi Sabi Japanese bow on my bedside table reminded me that I need to now be proud of my difference. And open that door up to new possibilities.

## **How I Rescued my Brain.**



Bill 35:18

You and me must have been separated at birth. I interviewed I interviewed a gentleman called David Roland, who was a psychiatrist who experienced a stroke

and wrote a book called [How I Rescued my Brain](#).

Sally 35:33

Fantastic. I haven't seen that one I thought I've read every stroke survivor book that is brilliant.

Bill 35:38

And look at look at the images.

Sally 35:41

Fantastic. The Wabi Sabi gold, the golden glue.

Bill 35:44

Isn't that amazing? And I saw that in a bookstore and I found myself just drawn to it immediately because I knew what the image was. And then I saw the I saw the title I bought Immediately I contacted David and I've interviewed him early on in the podcast series about 19 or 20, somewhere there.

Bill 36:06

And he has an amazing story about how he experienced a stroke. And one of the challenges that he experienced was, again, his identity and the kind of work that he was doing as a psychiatrist was actually making him what was the word he was making him traumatized.

Bill 36:22

And some issues with the family created the perfect environment for a stroke to occur, the strike occurred and now he writing this book and learning from his experiences he's able to talk to other medical professionals from the point of view from a psychologist about how to approach stroke recovery when they are dealing with people and his book is one of the ones that is a must read for certain groups of medical professionals all around the world in some parts of the of the world like England.

Bill 36:57

So yeah, That art of taking a broken vessel and healing it with gold and making it more beautiful than it was originally. Such a great an analogy for what it is that we can become as survivors of a traumatic brain injury caused by stroke.

Sally 37:17

Yes, we must redefine perfection. Because, you know, I always felt being an Olympic athlete, it was all about perfection. And when I was lying, paralyzed in rehabilitation, I had three months living in the rehab center. I just couldn't figure out how to strive for perfection.

Sally 37:33

But once I focused on the progress, and redefining imperfection and understanding that being authentic was actually the new perfection for me, you know, having something different, something to capitalize on. Now, that was different. I think that was my my milestone. So embracing that Wabi Sabi methodology is is a really great tip to share.

Bill 37:54

That's just amazing. I really, I just love how your journey has mimicked mine in a couple of ways. It's just really amazing. It's fascinating.

Sally 38:04

So your craniotomy was at February 2011.

Bill 38:07

No that was November 2014. So they decided to go in and remove it then and I was released from hospital around about the same time, around the time when it's a rehab, and then I came out of rehab about two days before Christmas in December 2014, and then, and then the home rehabilitation and recovery started and yeah, it was quite quite the journey to get to there. We also unfortunately, at that time, we lost. My mother in law passed away, literally a week and a bit before my surgery.

Sally 38:50

Oh, that's difficult.

Bill 38:54

And my wife was going through some really difficult life challenges.

Bill 38:59

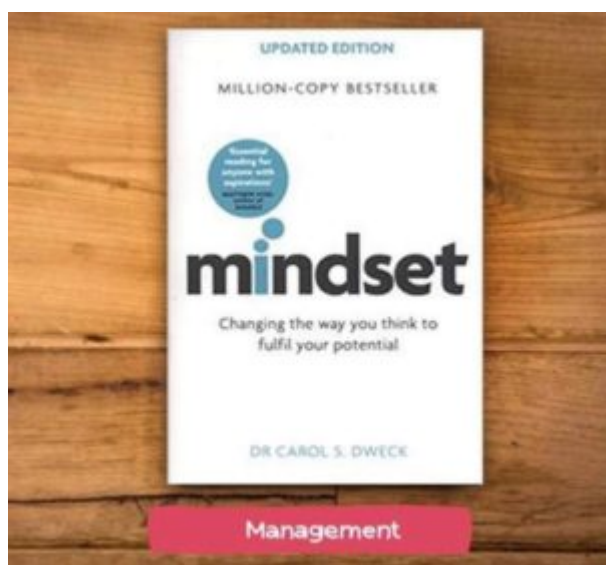
So you talk about, you know, mindset. In that time, we weren't actively practicing a positive mindset and that was definitely part of what helped us overcome and heal was. Okay, we'll just keep moving forward, keep moving forward. And as we move forward will then being able to get to a safe distance away from the trauma

of losing a loved one, brain surgery, needing to learn how to walk again, all that kind of stuff.

Bill 39:29

And then that distance allows you to look back and then start to heal those traumas and start to address them and start to put them to rest. Did you find yourself when you were in the actual stroke process? Were you really aware of your mindset? Or did that come later that you notice that I had a good mindset just because of my training?

## Having a good mindset



Sally 39:52

Look, I think we all hit rock bottom and it does take rock bottom to, I guess. I put in a positive mindset. And I actually went there at rock bottom, I was sharing a ward with six elderly stroke patients. It was three months living in rehab, I was told I'd need a year off work. Two children at home financial pressures we were actually living in Auckland, which was even more difficult so we had no family around so I really felt like a burden on my family and hit rock bottom.

Sally 40:22

So I had to put some really positive practices in place. I was offered some anti depressants, but I really wanted to have a go at fixing this myself. So I pulled out my Olympic diary, which I called my a walk diary, say As many Wins As Possible at AWAP. And that's where I used to write my progress over perfection because when you're at that Olympic level, you only get 1% improvements every day.



Sally 40:44

And that was just like being a stroke survivor, I was only getting 1% improvements, you know, it might have been and I being able to sit up by myself or being able to use a shower by myself. So everything I wrote down so it became a gratitude diary. And I think that was fantastic, every positive thing that happened to me, you know, three months I wrote down.

Sally 41:05

And I started sharing that with my family. A whole lot of things like that putting positive things I adopted meditation focused on what you know, we can only can we can only we can't control what happens to us, but we can't control our response always trying to create that time and space between how I interpret and how I respond.

Sally 41:24

And I think those three things strengthened me and brought me back to being an Olympic athlete in a stroke survivor unit. You know, the games were 90 days away, London 2012 was only 90 days. So I linked in with a few athletes and I mentally joined their training program.

Sally 41:41

I turned my green hospital gown into Olympic uniform, just mentally by hospital band became my ID my wheelchair was my rowing boat, and those elderly stroke patients became my crew and I just had to brainwash myself and turn that inner critic that we'll have into my inner athlete and just go for this like I was training for the games because as a mother Two children.

Sally 42:00

I'm sure you got many listeners out there and you were similar. I just didn't feel like I was worth something to my family. I felt like a burden. So I had three months of opportunity. And I had to work my butt off to come home and be the mother, the worker, and the partner, my husband. So it's a lot, isn't it? A lot of pressure that we have to put on ourselves.

Bill 42:23

It is and how do you be a how do you be all those things when the first thing you should be doing is healing?

Sally 42:31

Hmm, Exactly. And I think you need to focus on your ability, not your disability. And that's why if you're lucky enough to get a spot in a rehabilitation center, you need to use that time and that space to focus solely on yourself. And when my husband and kids came in to visit me, it was so difficult.

Sally 42:51

You know, they were one year old and six months old, and it highlighted all of my disabilities. No balloons popping kids screaming. It was so difficult that in the end, I started to decline going home on the weekends, I declined their visits, I just had to narrow my focus. And imagine I was at the Australian Institute of Sport training for the Olympic Games, because there was no way I could get distracted.

Sally 43:13

I don't know if you were similar, but the family highlighted how incapable I was. And it got to a point where I did have to ask, you know, three months of just focus to get myself better so I could return home and be, I guess the best mother, I could be.

Bill 43:29

That small price to pay three months and then after that, you're there. You're back. You're on. You're much better than you were. I it was good the family and friends kind of disappeared early on quite quickly.

Bill 43:44

So they came around us I support but because I had drawn this thing out for three years before surgery. They kind of all did the visits, they all did all that sort of stuff. So I was left to my own devices pretty much after I came home. Yeah, but one of the things was, I did find it difficult being around certain people, and the ones that are low energy draining kind of personalities that come in, and you know, puppy dog eyes and all that kind of stuff.

Bill 44:10

And it's like, Guys, you need to go home, you need to get out of here, I'm tired, I need to sleep. That was a real issue, being able to minimize that contact from those types of people, even though they had, you know, beautiful intentions. It wasn't what I needed to have around.

Bill 44:28

I didn't need morbidity and all that kind of stuff. Because we had just been

through that we had been through that literally. A few weeks earlier. And what we needed now was to focus on life and living and staying alive and doing all that type of thing. And then in our own time, reflecting on what we've lost and sharing those memories and, you know, coming together as a much smaller group with my sister in laws and and my wife and I are doing that in private and then During the recovery distance from other people are supposed to put it.

Sally 45:06

Yeah, I think visitors need to lay their sympathy at the door, you know, there's enough enough sadness going on. And I always said to my visitors, if you're going to visit bring your light, because I'll have you doing a job will be walking down the hallway together, you'll be supporting me as I walk and leave that sympathy at the door because it just makes you feel lower than you need to feel.

Sally 45:26

It's difficult, isn't it, trying to be grateful and appreciative but also trying to get your job done and we're fatigued. We've got a busy day with the occupational therapy and the physio and trying to fit in visitors was quite a challenge. Often Something had to go for a visitor to come in. So it was always you know, visitors I did have to come and do a job and help out with their rehab if they were going to come and visit.

Bill 45:49

And it's not about the visitors. It's not about the person coming to see you. It's about you. You're in recovery. You're recovering from a brain injury. It definitely should be about you It should not be about how they feel their emotions. It should not be about, you know, the unmet needs. Because they're not getting something back from you.

Bill 46:06

They shouldn't be doing any of that stuff when they're turning up. So we love having you there. But when you're there, you don't even have to say anything. You just need to turn up and say, give us a hug. I love you. push you around in the wheelchair help you walk. But leave your whole emotional side of it. Leave it at the door and walk in.

Sally 46:26

Yeah, exactly. It is like that, isn't it? While in rehab, you know, I met some

amazing people. You know, I'm not sure if you're the same, but it was incredible to connect with people that you wouldn't normally connect with. And a lot of them were elderly stroke survivors and had great stories. You really had deep and meaningful conversations that were quite roar at times, you know, lots of regrets in life as well.

Sally 46:51

So, as a young stroke survivor, it was a fantastic lesson in life, to have a year with these people, you know, three months in rehab. You know, seven or eight months as an outpatient, and just hear what an older stroke survivor could give you, you know, and it's all about maximizing life and making sure every day counts and not working so hard. And it was just an incredible opportunity to learn how valuable and precious life is. And just slow down, take a breath, and enjoy while you've got your ability.

## **Sally Callie practiced Meditation and Visualization even before stroke**

Bill 47:23

Yeah, tell me about meditation. You spoke about that a bit earlier. And I was wondering about whether or not that was something that you guys were taught to do in preparation for your big events? Was meditation, one of those things that was really encouraged or did you pick that up later?

Sally 47:43

It was more in the form of visualization, which I guess is a type of neuroplasticity. And we would always be visualizing racing just to get rid of those nerves because the Olympic Games only comes around every four years. So by visualizing it made it less, less unfamiliar, you know, less foreign.

Sally 47:58

So and just eight weeks prior to the Olympic Games, Athens 2004. I broke I fractured my rib while riding my bike. Now we were the gold medal favorites for that race. So with eight weeks ago, the only person that could see the flip side of that injury was a sports psychologist. And she just said beauty it's eight weeks to the game six weeks to heal a bone let's get start on the visualization.

Sally 48:21

So for the next eight weeks, I sat in a boat park with a Thera band wrapped around a tree and visualized every aspect of the race. You know, that was perfect in my head and my writing partner, she was out in a single scull on the glacier lake, and I (inaudible) So when the games arrived, the conditions were incredibly rough like they were terrible to the point you could barely row but we took off the start.

Sally 48:43

And the visualization kicked in the fine motor control. The single sculling my own partner had done just had us sailing along in this race sitting on top of the water, and we crossed the line in first place with a world record. So that visualization really paid off.

Sally 48:58

And then when I was lying on My back in rehab, asking the doctors when is movement going to return? One of the doctors said, Well, why don't you ask how how will movement return? So I said, Well tell me how and he said, Look, it's a long shot. But maybe you should try visualization.

Sally 49:13

And I said brilliant. That is something I know what to do. So I spent my whole time in rehab, visualizing the rowing movement and just visualizing holding the rowing or in my head, and what did that feel like, visualizing a crosswind into my face? visualizing, I guess, the lactic acid in the quad muscles, you know, and then it got to a point where I could stand I'd start visualizing movement by squatting, you know, squatting up and down, falling back into a wheelchair or falling forward onto a bed.

Sally 49:41

And that visualization is what became, I guess, you know, The Reconnection of the neural pathways because they're always there. I just had to reconnect by thinking about the movement. And I say that to other stroke survivors think about picking up a golf stick or think about picking up your knitting needles and knitting. What did it feel like? And I just think that neural pathway can be reactivated by thinking about such a familiar hobby that you used to do.

Bill 50:06

Yeah, I did an awesome interview a couple of interviews ago with some

neuropsychologist and a lady who was going into her masters of occupational therapy, and we spoke about how memories and neural pathways. They get rerouted. And if they can't be reactivated, but they're still there, and they're still kind of working but not in the optimum way.

Bill 50:34

They get rerouted. So that they use part of that neural pathway and then they go to another place to just take up space in the brain that is not being impacted by the stroke. And in Episode 26, I think it was I interviewed Dr. Michael Merzenich. He is the world's leading researcher in neuroplasticity.

Bill 50:53

I'm saying this again and again, I say it in most episodes, the reason why you need to do what Sally said at The beginning of the podcast is learn about neuroplasticity, because that is one of the things that you can do the cost of nothing. That is easy to do from your bed and you can do it when you're not yet moving.

Bill 51:13

When you know you're at your weakest when you're at your most fatigue, you can still do visualization, and you are creating neural structures in your brain, just as if you would be if you are actually physically moving.

Sally 51:26

Yeah, exactly. It use the same area of the brain, you know, whether you're doing the action or actually thinking about the action, the same pathway is being created. And that's what worked for an injured Olympic athlete, you know, I was able to perform just as well, if not better, with eight weeks of visualization as supposed to eight weeks of physical training. That mindset is so important. The brain is so powerful, incredibly powerful.

Bill 51:48

Exactly what I did as well as what I did in those three days when I was sitting in my hospital bed waiting for the doctors to do something and get me through into the occupational therapy area and to the rehab area. I was visualizing my self walking again, visualizing seeing my hand grasp onto handrail and my foot moving in the way that it would move.

Bill 52:14

And then I was also watching videos of other people walking and moving. And I was researching, you know, neuroplasticity and interviews about neuroplasticity and learning about it. Just on a computer on Wi Fi, if you haven't got a computer, get one of those visitors who are coming to see you to make themselves more useful by bringing a computer and letting you use it while you're in rehab. So all those things all come around creating this beautiful way to get to supporting yourself in a stroke, recovery and not relying on other people to give you all the answers.

Sally 52:55

That is the key the accountability, the ownership equals empowerment. Once you start feeling empowered like this is your, your problem and you need to find a solution. I think the growth begins. So the audio book, the brain that changes so far, Norman Doidge, I think many of us have heard that I did the audiobook while I was laying on my back.

Sally 53:13

And the stories are remarkable. And he talks about CI therapy. And that was a big one for me, you know, if you can strap your good side to your body and use your weak side, if you can open that door handle with your weak side, at least you're thinking about trying to move that left side and I think that the pathways that you are creating just by thinking is the first step to getting that arm or that leg to move.

Bill 53:36

Yeah, and he references people like Paul Becky Rita I believe. The references people of Dr. Michael Merzenich. And he talks about all the stuff that was being discovered in the early 90s about neuroplasticity.

Bill 53:49

Norman Doidge really beautifully puts it together in a form that enables people to what's the word enables people to grasp the concept of neuroplasticity. Because it shares that information in stories about how patient x did this. And this is, you know, this is the research that backs up what patients actually did.

Sally 54:11

It gives you so much hope when you're in a position where you're paralyzed on one side of your body. There's so much hope in that book. You know, it really

makes you believe with the science and the scientific research that backs it up. It's incredible to know there is an opportunity out there.

Bill 54:25

Yeah. As we start to wrap up, we're coming to the end of the podcast, but there's one area that we haven't touched on yet and that is nutrition. Now, you would have been in the box seat to have your nutrition sorted because of the immense knowledge that you would have had about how to fuel your body for a certain outcome, which is to perform really, really well.

## **Importance of nutrition for Sally before and during stroke recovery**

Bill 54:49

How did that understanding of nutrition support you later on when you discovered that you needed to heal your brain? Yeah, nutrition has always been good. Good foundations as an Olympic athlete. And I've never changed that.

Bill 55:02

The protein aspect I think when you're using so much brain power when your brains recovering was quite essential. And obviously great nutrition, a lot of water, you know, less alcohol, less coffee and less sugar, which is a really big one, which I know you're quite passionate about. The sugar really did knock me around. And I started to get rid of caffeine so I really had to back off those sorts of things.

Bill 55:27

Yeah, they, they put the body into a heightened space of stress and makes you makes you use more energy because they're a stimulant. So they're stimulating you when you're not being active. And it's a different kind of stimulation than it is if you're being active and you're using your body to stimulate yourself.

Bill 55:49

So usually people find that dip afterwards really difficult to deal with and they, some people don't associate the dip with what I had before the dip, which was the Caffeine. And if you have coffee with sugar, then it's a double acting stimulant. And it can take it takes kind of like to that stressed level without you really realizing that you're there without you knowing it.



Bill 56:15

And then once you get off the sugar and the caffeine for a little while, what you notice, after you do try and have a caffeinated, sugary drink is a completely different experience in your body, your body will really go, Hey, I'm noticing this and when I have caffeine, now, I really noticed the buzz and I have a very rarely I mostly try and have decaf.

Bill 56:36

And but particularly when I have sugar, I actually feel it coursing through my veins. I actually probably feel it. And then it goes into my head and I can actually tell you, oh my god, it's just gone through my heart and it's gone up there and it's in my head now and I can feel it.

Bill 56:53

And that's not information that I had before. Before I quit sugar because it was always in my body. I did Never know the difference. So if you're curious about nutrition, and you want to do something that's really good for healing the brain again without any effort, quit sugar.

Sally 57:08

There's so many so many life changing things that occur after such an obstacle that we've all been through, you know, there's so many opportunities to upgrade your life after this experience with being true with the mindset, nutrition, connection with people, you know, creating that time and space in your day, not rushing around changing careers. I just think there's, um, every strokes different for everyone, but really, there's got to be a golden nugget for everyone. I think everyone got a story. And it's up to everyone now to find that golden nugget.

Bill 57:40

Yeah, I agree. Are you one of those people that can say two strokes one of the best things that ever happened to you looking back?

Sally 57:46

Yeah, I am actually been on one of the lucky ones because I'm still yeah, I do say that but I say it very carefully because I'm quite fortunate. But then I think life is a choice as well. And I know when I first was found out I had an AVM the doctor sat me down. He said, You've got 15 seconds to decide whether you're going to be a victim or a survivor.

Sally 58:06

He said, I'm what I'm about to tell you, is going to change your life and you got 15 seconds to commit to being a victim or survivor. And then he went on to tell me how this was going to impact my life. So I'm in the making that promise to the Doctor then, and I've never looked back that things going to change my life. And it's going to change my life for the good because we can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond. And that is the most important thing in life.

Bill 58:32

And I didn't say that if you're a stroke survivor, you must have been able to get to the point we can say strikes the best thing that ever happened to you, I'm very comfortable if you can't say that. It makes complete sense for a lot of people. I'm just talking about it's not the best physical thing that's happened to me. It's not the best financial thing that's happened to me.

Bill 58:51

It's the best thing with regards to my mindset and with regards to how I've grown from that, and how I have seen life and how I've changed the way that I live my life. And, you know, it's not anything to do with, I'm a crazy man and I need bad things to be happening to me and therefore I love it. No, it's not about that. It's about what I've learned that I never would have learned is what I've experienced, and I never would have experienced. And it's not only that, it's how I can relate to people that are in a difficult state that I couldn't relate to before that I was completely oblivious about.

Sally 59:28

Compassion, empathy, you know, character traits that you weren't able to capture until you've been through this experience. And how proud you are to have survived such a, such a tragedy and come out the other side in a strong position. You know, I've raced in three Olympic Games, but I'm more proud at how I manage my attitude through a stroke than I am through three Olympic Games combined. Because taking more mindset, more strength, more mental strength, to get through such a thing that we've all been through.

Bill 1:00:00

Beautiful, what is in store for the future? What's the next big thing that you're working towards? Because you're definitely working towards something big.

Sally 1:00:07

Look, I just want to make this story bigger than me. I think it's great to share our stories and find the golden nuggets. I'm an educator. So I love talking to kids about the importance of growth mindset, delayed gratification, because not that I talked to the kids that it is a curveball coming along.

Sally 1:00:24

But life brings curveballs and I think if we can put the kids that I educate can have a strong mindset, a great growth mindset, understand delayed gratification, and they will be they will find life easier later on because I'll have those transferable life skills ahead of them. So that's my goal to share the word, but also, you know, ensure that all kids that I teach are strong resilient kids.

Bill 1:00:51

Yeah, that's beautiful. We have spoken about some amazing topics were spoken about mindset identity team, embracing your difference, gratitude meditation. delayed gratification, accountability, resilience, nutrition, what a podcast episode?

Sally 1:01:06

We have covered alot for you, we might have to do another one.

Bill 1:01:12

We should do that. I want to thank you for being on the podcast Firstly, but also I want to thank you for sharing your story the way that you do through your community. If people want to find out a little bit more about you, where can they go?

Sally 1:01:26

Instagram, Facebook, and I have a website. So we'd love to talk to any other survivors. I think we need to be a team. Where all experienced something similar. And this is a journey. Every day. We're always looking for that next 1%. So if we can get that next 1% together, that would be incredibly empowering. We'd love to stay in touch.

Bill 1:01:48

Absolutely, we will sallycallie.com is the website. And we'll have all the links anyway in the show notes to all the socials and all that kind of stuff. Sally, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Sally 1:02:05

Thank you, Bill. It's been absolute privilege.

Intro 1:02:08

Discover how to support your recovery after stroke go to [recoveryafterstroke.com](https://recoveryafterstroke.com)