

Stroke Saved My Life - Natalie Mazer

Natalie Mazer had a hole in her heart from birth which caused a stroke that she believes ultimately saved her life.

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Highlights:

01:08 Introduction

02:59 Stroke in the middle of a pandemic

05:09 Natalie Mazer had an Atrial Septal Defect

09:28 Leading up to the stroke

19:19 What caused the stroke?

26:49 Professionals who care about helping people

33:53 Thinking you're better than you are vs actually being better?

46:47 What were you thinking when you had a stroke?

57:55 Stroke saved my life

1:11:53 Music therapy is a great tool for recovery

Transcript:

Natalie Mazer 0:00

I'm just such a different parent right now than I used to be I used to have a lot of energy where I could be very high functioning at work and I could still be very high functioning at home and get everybody ready and out the door for school and things like that.

Natalie Mazer 0:13

And I remember just trying to coerce them and guide them through the door. And of course, they're all chit-chatting at the same time and I'm just overwhelmed that I remember just kind of sitting down on the floor and bawling by the door.

Natalie Mazer 0:29

And all of a sudden my kids were running towards me like Mommy are you okay? Are you okay? Like, what can we do? And that, to me was an epiphany. I was like,

wow, like, my old ways are never gonna work. Like, the new way is really how can we position it? Like we're a team. I'm one of you guys. We all got to look after one another.

Intro 0:56

This is the Recovery after Stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Introduction - Natalie Mazer



Bill Gasiamis 1:08

Hello, and welcome to episode 245 of the Recovery After Stroke podcast. My guest today is Natalie Mazer, a mom of three young kids working as an engineer who experienced a stroke that was caused by a previously undiagnosed hole in the heart. While on the road to recovery from stroke, she also had to endure Keyhole Heart surgery to ensure the risk of further stroke was eliminated. Natalie Mazer, welcome to the podcast.

Natalie Mazer 1:36

Thank you. Thank you, Bill. It's a pleasure to be here.

Bill Gasiamis 1:40

Thank you for being here. Thank you for preparing yourself for the interview. And for my podcast by taking a little nap. Before we started, why was it that you needed to take a nap?

Natalie Mazer 1:57

When I get really tired, unfortunately, a lot of my symptoms come back out, some of it is speech, right? And also, I still struggle a little bit with processing and short-term memory, right? So I think I need that rest. And I need that break so that I'm not like in the middle of a sentence. And then I'm like, Oh, my gosh, Bill, what are we talking about?

Bill Gasiamis 2:25

Yeah. So clearly, you've had a stroke. Tell us a little bit about that part of the process. How did you get to be on the podcast? When was your stroke? What happened?

Natalie Mazer 2:36

Yeah, so actually, the reason I wanted to be on the podcast is because I guess maybe there's a message that I learned through the stroke. And I wanted to share it, and listening to the podcasts from other people has helped me a lot in a little over two-year journey.

Natalie Mazer 2:59

So I had a stroke in August 2020. So really, kind of in the middle of the pandemic. So it was a pretty tough time to have a stroke. There was some, you know, I guess a lot of pressure, I have three kids so like having three young kids at home, and also, I had a very kind of intense work and intense career and so did my husband.

Natalie Mazer 3:31

So it was a lot to juggle. And also during the pandemic, you really, I think a lot of families with young kids were a little bit in the pressure cooker, right? Because a lot of the things that we used to outsource, it wasn't available anymore. It put a lot on the families.

Bill Gasiamis 3:49

Like schooling, like childcare, perhaps.

Natalie Mazer 3:58

And we were lucky to have childcare and even partially in-person school. But still, it's just like, because also like, I think when everyone's working from home, like your team is going through a lot too, right? And you need to be there for them too, so it's just a lot.

Natalie Mazer 4:16

But basically the way it happened is I had trouble sleeping for a few nights before that. And also I've always had migraines. Since I probably in my mid-20s. And I you know at one point, I've even experienced fatigue, especially when it came to kind of like my late 20s, or early 30s. And I'd go to the GP and I don't know how you were but for me, when you know when I was younger and before the kids I took care of my health a lot when I had my kids I still thought it was healthy like in terms of trying to eat and you know, exercise whenever I can.

Natalie Mazer 4:53

But, you know, all the checkups were focused on the kids and that necessarily myself but at one point, I did experience quite a bit of fatigue and the migraines and I would go to the GP and talk about it. And she's like, well, it's got a career and three kids, it's normal.

Natalie Mazer had an Atrial Septal Defect

Natalie Mazer 5:09

So, but later on, of course, I found that it wasn't normal, I should have been sent to a cardiologist, because what I was living with was a congenital heart defect, which is an atrial septal defect and ASD, and mine was about an inch in diameter.

Bill Gasiamis 5:29

Okay, so was it a hole in the heart? Or was it a malformed blood vessel? What was it?

Natalie Mazer 5:36

It was a hole in the heart?

Bill Gasiamis 5:39

An inch in diameter?

Natalie Mazer 5:43

Yeah. So actually, as crazy as it is, every single cardiologist said, we're really surprised you didn't have it earlier. Like, how did you have three kids? But to a certain extent, it's I think, what helps me a lot. And I think I've gone through a kind of a lot of trauma before that, which of course, I didn't even consider trauma until I had to deal with the stroke recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 6:12

Personal trauma is how it impacts your health, your heart, your emotional well-being your physical well-being.

Natalie Mazer 6:22

Totally. But gosh, and I lost my train of thought a little bit. But maybe should I go through how the stroke happened.

Bill Gasiamis 6:29

Yeah. So that's alright I'll take you back. So basically, what you're telling us is, that you're a busy mom, you've three kids, you have a career, and your husband is in the same situation. The house is crazy busy. I imagine that based on what you said, there's not a lot of "me time" it's all about everybody else.

Bill Gasiamis 6:51

And you're doing the best you can to get over the condition of the migraines and the fatigue and all that kind of thing by going to the doctors by trying to get some advice. But that's kind of where things fall over, in my opinion, and not that you can blame your GP about the supposed misdiagnosis which is not even fair to say that, but it's just simply that most people your age, at the time, fit the criteria of being constantly tired, haven't slept enough, not take care of myself, all the usual things.

Bill Gasiamis 7:28

And you're, "too young" for somebody to go, they've got a heart condition, you know, they probably haven't got a heart condition. And we should just err on the side of caution is not the thing that comes into somebody's mind, very rarely does the GP have the facility, the funds, the resources to say, Okay, you feel like this, let's get you every single test you've ever imagined.

Bill Gasiamis 7:53

They don't have that available to them doesn't matter where you live. And it's something that you have to put up with a deal with. So you don't sound too different to anybody else who I had on the podcast who thought they were healthy, thought they were doing the right things, but we're going through just that chronic part of crazy life early on when you decide to have three kids and do all the things that we're supposed to do. So, at some point, you started to develop more serious symptoms, by the sound of it is that kind of how it happened?

Natalie Mazer 8:34

I think it was like maybe I just dismissed the migraines, right? Because I also was, like, during my pregnancies, I was very severely vitamin deficient. So they always give me lots of vitamins. And I was like, Okay, I guess it's just, you know, just the way I am and maybe it has something to do also so I was born in the Soviet Union.

Natalie Mazer 8:55

So it could be that maybe if I was born in this country, I would have had the heart surgery done, you know, at a young age. So I think could be that wrinkle potentially could have been there as well. So yeah, but I think it was more like I was just feeling I thought I was feeling just the regular fatigue of you know, to be honest, the pandemic and like the migraines would come and go and I was like, Okay, at this point, like, I know if I even have any one of my migraines it's, you know, my husband's on duty for bedtime with the kids, right.

Natalie Mazer leading up to the stroke

Natalie Mazer 9:28

So we kind of worked around it. But leading up to the stroke, I did have a kind of really restless night sleeping, which I noticed quite a few people mentioned on the podcast. And then so I had I went through like kind of power through the day off of meetings. And I remember my last few meetings of the day, I was like, Oh my gosh, like, you know, like you're just like trying so hard just to power through it.

Natalie Mazer 9:57

And I was like, Okay, I'm gonna make dinner for the kids pack them in thermoses, and we're gonna go for a walk, we all need to get out of the house, we need to get exercise. You know, that's kind of how we dealt with the pandemic, we would just literally pack dinner and go for walks in the evening after both of our workdays are over.

Natalie Mazer 10:14

And as I'm packing the thermoses I'm like, something's off, like, you know, like, I feel like I'm in slow mo. And then I was like, I almost felt like I was observing myself not being me. And then I started seeing, you know, double hands. I was like, wow, I have four hands this is cool.

Natalie Mazer 10:39

And then eventually, I was like, okay, I think I need somebody to help me, you know, I think I need some help. And, and to be honest, like, in my mind, it probably was just like, you know, like, you kind of lose track of time. So like, you know, how we get in bed and you're in the hospital, they quiz you like, well, how long was this? And how long was that? And I was just like, thinking to myself, I'm like, why are they even asking me these questions? It's like, I do not have the right sense of time.

Natalie Mazer 11:12

And so eventually, I thought, I called out to my daughter who was in her room, but she said she didn't hear me. So eventually, like I kind of walked myself down the counter and I opened the door because I knew my husband was outside with the kids. And I thought I said help. But you know, to my husband, it was something like very ineligible, because I also had trouble speaking.

Bill Gasiamis 11:37

Just a quick break, and we'll be right back to the interview. As a stroke survivor, I understand the difficulties of finding the right information about post-stroke nutrition. That's why I developed the course Five Foods To Avoid After Stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 11:50

For most people are talking about what to eat after a stroke to support brain health and recovery. Very few are talking about what you should avoid eating after a stroke. If you want to support your brain to heal, and are curious about the five foods that may make matters worse when you consume them, then you may benefit from this course.

Bill Gasiamis 12:09

In the more than five hours of interviews, we discuss the five common foods that cause inflammation in the body and brain, and how they could interfere with healing, and how they may make fatigue worse, for just \$49. This five-part series has more than five hours of interviews with full PDF transcripts for download, mp3 for download, and videos that will give you everything that you need to know about the five foods to avoid and why.

Bill Gasiamis 12:37

The modules include eight reasons to quit sugar after a stroke. seven reasons to quit caffeine after a stroke, eight reasons to quit gluten after a stroke, six reasons

to quit dairy after a stroke, and six reasons to quit alcohol after a stroke. And probably that is one of the most important things that you have to and should quit after a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 13:01

It's interfering with your recovery. Visit recoveryafterstroke.com/courses. For this and other specifically designed short and easy-to-understand courses that are made by a stroke survivor for stroke survivors. Once again, you'll get more than five hours of content, all audio is available to download in mp3 format for listening on the go, full transcript of all the content to take notes on or read instead of listen to.

Bill Gasiamis 13:30

Presented by a stroke survivor four stroke survivors. also presented by a trained nutritionist and performance coach, you will also get 24 hours of access, and lifetime access to courses purchased. And you'll be able to interact with yours truly, in the comments section. Go to recoveryafterstroke.com/courses to check them out now.

Natalie Mazer 13:53

And of course, he's like, Oh my gosh, something's wrong. So he like rushed to get me and like he says I just collapsed into his arms and he lowered me down to the floor. And then I was just thinking of like, in my head. I was thinking I was just like overly exhausted. I just like really I just need to sleep this off.

Natalie Mazer 14:15

And so he was also thinking he's like, Oh my gosh, like I need to call 911 but he was like, well, maybe let me give her some water to drink. He gives me water, I can't swallow. Like he tries to give me a straw. So yeah, he called 911 luckily, they were here like we had everyone in the fire department, the police department, the EMTs everyone was here very quickly, which is quite amazing.

Natalie Mazer 14:42

And actually, the weird part is it wasn't scary. This whole experience was not scary at the moment. And all I just remember thinking of like, wow, like everything's just so calm and peaceful, and like the time just slowed down and it's kind of nice.

Natalie Mazer 15:00

And also I remember my little guy who was at the time, he was probably about like, two and a half or so. I remember my youngest son, and he just came over and he held my hand. And that was, gosh, it was the sweetest thing.

Natalie Mazer 15:22

And I have to say that got me through, like just visualizing that event like really got me through all the testing all the MRIs and everything, I would just every time I would feel like, so overwhelmed by the loud machine, I would just think of my little son holding my hand.

Bill Gasiamis 15:40

Amazing, so let me just let me just sort of step back a little bit here. So you've got to the point where you realize there was you needed help with something. But you're also feeling calm, and it was relaxing, because I know that feeling as well because everyone else is running around me like, well, like, things are seriously bad. And they were for them.

Bill Gasiamis 16:08

But I didn't feel like they were seriously bad for me either. I'm just going through the motions and especially my second bleed. I collapsed at the hospital. And I don't remember anything that happened after I got there. And for me, I was just really non-concerning.

Bill Gasiamis 16:32

Nothing was happening that I needed to be concerned about. At that moment, all the concerning stuff happened beforehand. It happened before I got to the hospital. So I think I'm having another bleed, get ready to take me to the hospital, nausea, vomiting, all that stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 16:48

But then after that phase, when I lost consciousness, and I was just about to lose consciousness, and even after I woke up, I don't know how long it was after I woke up. Just still felt real, while you're in the hospital. It's like wow, okay wow, that's alright.

Bill Gasiamis 17:06

I felt quite rested, and I felt quiet I'm not clear in my head, but I felt quiet just not sure how to describe it either. It's like a strange calm, like a bizarre calm that you very rarely experience in life. Well, and I think what it was is my brain had

switched off. And there were no thoughts. There was no processing, there were no concerns, There was nothing. It was just no brain function. Does that sound familiar?

Natalie Mazer 17:43

I don't know about no brain function, I think to me, it was more of like, as if it was a third person watching me go through this. So it was like, I was almost like curious, right? Of how things are gonna unfold, but I was convinced that all I needed was just some sleep, and I'm gonna be fine. Yeah, I just thought I was like, Oh my gosh, I've just been overworking myself. I just need to rest a little.

Bill Gasiamis 18:10

And you went to the hospital? How long were you in hospital? And at what stage? Did they discover the hole in the heart?

Natalie Mazer 18:18

Yeah. So they wanted to keep me longer. Like, because this was COVID time, right? So like, I couldn't see my kids like no visitors, the nurses were so sweet. They snuck my husband in a few times, which is nice. But, like I begged them, I said, can you just like send me home for a little bit because like so they wanted to keep me there for a week or longer.

Natalie Mazer 18:46

But what they agreed to is they released me over, I think, Gosh, I think they released me after, like four days or so. And then they had me come back again because they had to put me out and do like a T which is basically like, they lower like this little camera inside to take better pictures of the heart and they had to do more testing. So they kind of like let me go for the weekend. And then they had me come back again.

What caused the stroke?

Bill Gasiamis 19:19

Did they scan your head did they realize you had had a stroke?

Natalie Mazer 19:23

So this was a very interesting experience. So like the in the ICU, I remember like even the EMTs were like, saying yes, she had a stroke like to my husband before

they even took me and that's why they contacted the basically the intensive care unit so they would be prepared for the ambulance to like, just rush me right through.

Natalie Mazer 19:45

Of course in my mind, I was just like, at that time I feel like that wasn't registering like I could hear them talking but I was just like, I was just like yeah, oh my gosh, let me just get through like whatever I need to get through and then come home, get my sleep you know?

Natalie Mazer 20:03

And the attending doctor, she was very thorough and she's like, she got me through all the tests, she got the fluids going, like whatever she said they were administering medication as if I've had a stroke. And then they did the CAT scans and MRI.

Natalie Mazer 20:20

And that's when they saw it. So it was a stroke caused by a blood clot in my right parietal lobe. And, interestingly enough, my attending neurologist was so freaked out because the whole time she was like, I just want to make sure you didn't have a stroke.

Natalie Mazer 20:42

Maybe since you said you have a history of migraines. Maybe this was just an aura incident. And, when she found that it was a stroke, she was so freaked out, like I could tell that she was like, she felt uncomfortable just coming to see me, which was like, I have to say that was a little bit of a like, I wish it wasn't that way.

Natalie Mazer 21:06

Like, I wish I was thinking more seriously. And this situation was taken more seriously. But you know, when they look at my kind of vitals and my age, and everything else, they're like, You're too young, you're too like, you shouldn't be having this.

Natalie Mazer 21:20

And I think because of that, I don't think I kind of got the proper neurological examination right then and there. And, you know, she kinda like when they found the hole. Gosh, that was probably like day two or so that they found it. Or three, I

can't remember, or three, maybe. I just felt like I just got moved down the cardiology track.

Natalie Mazer 21:45

And, it was really interesting, because I think to me, the acceptance of having a stroke came pretty quickly. Like it was literally like, right there in the hospital was like, Okay, well, I'm alive. And of course, I was like, trying not to think of the risks of having a repeated stroke.

Natalie Mazer 22:07

And I was thinking was cool, whatever, like, I'll get through it. I've gotten through lots of hard things in life, this is going to be okay. I think what though, brought me down to my knees was at the time, of course in the hospital, then I realized that the stroke was much more difficult to recover from. That when my cardiologist did the initial examination, even the initial examination, she said, Well, you might need open heart surgery.

Natalie Mazer 22:34

And I was like, Oh my gosh, because not only that, they find the hole. They also believed that maybe they found this like fibroelastoma, which is kind of like growth on my mitral valve. And they said, Look, if we close the hole, and the growth is on the mitral valve, you could still get like it's going directly into your brain again.

Natalie Mazer 23:00

So I think that was probably like, I felt like the minute I was like, Okay, fine, I had a stroke, I'm alive. I'm so lucky. And I'm so grateful. And then like getting hit with that. And also I ended up having an allergic reaction to Lipitor, which is something they administer to you when you have a stroke, regardless of whether you have high cholesterol or not.

Bill Gasiamis 23:27

Chaotic by the sound of things, which describes stroke anyway, like it's, yeah, it's what you hear it's chaos, always. People that are just trying to make the right decisions. Doctors are under stress, because of COVID. They're probably overworked.

Bill Gasiamis 23:48

In their mind, they have a hypothesis of what happened to them. So they're

running with that hypothesis first. And then they feel bad. And then they misdiagnosed you perhaps. And it's I mean, they're just as human as you and they've probably got three kids, and they probably overworked and you know, a whole bunch of things, and as much as we want to blame people as much as sometimes we do, we get to the point where it's like, wow, okay, let's see if we can start again and just go again and resolve the issue that we found and move on.

Bill Gasiamis 24:38

But that's the complicated part about people who have a stroke, that the cause is somewhere else. That's the thing I've known people who've had brain hemorrhages that were caused by a blood vessel in the head but when they were discovered by the doctors or by the paramedics, the heart had stopped.

Bill Gasiamis 25:06

So they would restart the person's heart. And then they'd be causing more damage in the head. And then the person would crash again. And then the heart would stop. So they were thinking it was the heart, but it was the head, but by the time you work it all out, you know, how do you get to that point of knowing all the details that you need to know about for that person immediately went when the cause of the stroke is from another location.

Bill Gasiamis 25:33

And it's not unfair to treat a heart condition when there is a heart condition, there's opposition there, you know, so, and COVID, they were motivated to get people out of hospitals. I know, in Australia, they did everything they could not to keep anyone for any other condition in the hospital if it was possible. And a lot of people were sent home when they wouldn't have normally been sent home, they would have more time to manage them.

Natalie Mazer 26:03

But like, to be honest, I just wanted to go home, right, I think I just wanted to kind of see my kids. But yeah, I agree with you, I think they logically did the right thing, because they said, Oh my gosh, and they kept talking about it. They said since you're young, we need to do everything possible to prevent another right so I think that's why they just focused so much on Hey, we got to fix your heart. Right? Then, of course, I was on blood thinners and all this other appropriate medication, right?

Bill Gasiamis 26:37

And the one-inch hole in your heart, that they discovered a one-inch hole. They're going you know, they could probably drive a truck through this thing. We need to stop that from happening, you know?

Professionals who care about helping people

Natalie Mazer 26:49

Speaking of that later on, so of course, the hospital cardiologists were not the same, because of our local hospital. So it wasn't the same as the, you know, the surgeons, we have to kind of find a surgeon after that. And I have to say, I am so grateful, I'm so touched by every single cardiologist who has helped me like both the attending cardiologist and it was a team of moms funny enough, they were so sweet and supportive.

Natalie Mazer 27:19

They even like decided to give me anesthesia, before rolling me into the operation room and I'm like, yes, this is so wonderful, like, you know, because you already have a lot of anxiety, like post-stroke, right? They were so loving and caring and also the cardiologist who ended up doing the surgery.

Natalie Mazer 27:40

My husband reached out to him. He had a FaceTime call with him in the evening. Like he wasn't even working. He just said, Oh my gosh, like, let's talk right now want to see images, and then we can worry about, like, your paperwork in my office. It's like, I was really touched by just such an outpouring of support, like and professionals who care about helping people and kinda, save a life. I think that was touching for sure.

Bill Gasiamis 28:13

Yeah, because they can save a life, but they also can help reduce the stress and the anxiety of other people. I think that's not... again, I'm not judging, I don't want to judge anybody. But I think that's not done enough. And the reason I say that is because my wife, like you, you're thinking about your kids.

Bill Gasiamis 28:37

So even in the time when I've had the stroke, my wife is thinking about me, and her kids that are at home, and I'll tell you what she's not doing is thinking about herself. So that sometimes, if there's lack of information, or lack of contact, or lack of communication, or some kind of way of keeping her in the loop, and keeping her calm.

Bill Gasiamis 29:00

We often hear about caregivers who become unwell at the same time, that the person that they're supposed to be caring for is unwell. And that's the worst situation to be in. And if we can find a way to relieve the stress for the caregivers, and for the people that are left behind at home or wherever, I think it's really important to do it if you can, and try and make the condition better so that the caregivers or the people behind at home, are less anxious if it's at all possible, and I know it's not always possible, but I just remember my wife collapsing a couple of times my dad collapsed.

Bill Gasiamis 29:44

My wife collapsed after my brain surgery. My dad collapsed when I was first diagnosed a couple of years earlier. And as a stroke survivor, I'm in the hospital. What I need is, I need everyone else to be healthy around me for the time Being I need to be looked after and cared for. And it's, please be healthy, when I need you the most, you know, so anything that we can do to support caregivers, I think it's really important the fact that your surgeon did that is just amazing.

Bill Gasiamis 30:19

And it just goes to show you again, it's that thing of the care, the medical care doesn't stop after you've closed somebody's chest, or you've stitched their head, or anything, it does continue, and they've got a massive job, a huge responsibility. And they do amazing things you and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the current world that we live in and the medical advancements, you know, we wouldn't be having a podcast interview.

Natalie Mazer 30:54

Yeah, you're right. You know, like that kind of emotional support. And, like an or just like treating you like as a as a human right. And relating to the human level. Oh, my gosh, that's just like, I feel like they can either make you feel. And I think maybe that was my contrast, right? Like, like, in the early on, of course, now I have a very wonderful and supportive and amazing neurologist.

Natalie Mazer 31:18

But like my that remember how it was like kind of showing the contrast of like, this neurologist in the hospital, who was like, Oh, my gosh, like, I can't believe I have to do my rounds. Like, I don't know how to be near you, like you feel it. But I feel like actually, after the stroke, I felt that energy stronger, right, then people and then versus, like the folks who I initially encountered on the cardiology track, and they were all just like, just lifting me, like, in the time where and when I needed that, right? Because it's just like, yeah,

Bill Gasiamis 31:51

people feel people treat themselves badly when they've made a mistake, they feel guilty, and who knows what the reasons are. And it's unnecessary I think a mistake is something that happens, and you can just simply, and even stroke survivors do that to themselves, we all do. And a mistake is just something that you can restart from, and just go again. And The quicker you realize it and just let it go and move on, the better.

Bill Gasiamis 32:19

The better support and service, you can be to the other person, because you made the mistake against, for example, doctors and nurses, I look, I couldn't be a doctor or a nurse, the shift work, you know, the, the, the time of the shift the amount of time they're on a shift the amount of support and love and care that they've got to give to other people all the time.

Bill Gasiamis 32:47

And they've probably got kids that are doing that they're being supportive of just like us regular folk, because imagine being somebody who has to pour out their support and care for other people all the time that they've never met before. And it's a, you need a big reserve of energy to be able to do that.

Bill Gasiamis 33:11

And you need to be able to do that all the time at work, you can never get it wrong. And imagine needing to, you're having a bad day, and you have to be at work, and you have to do neurological diagnosis, and you got to do all these things. It just seems like they just seem like they're the most amazing people in the world.

Bill Gasiamis 33:32

And they get it wrong every once in a while, you know, so grateful for the fact that we have people like that in in our communities on the planet who have decided that they're going to make it about us and people they've never met before.

Natalie Mazer 33:50

It's ridiculous. Yeah.

Thinking you're better than you are vs actually being better

Bill Gasiamis 33:53

I'm not able to have that much time and energy for other people. I'm just not. Now you're you're in hospital, and you're thinking I just want to go home to the kids. I just want to go home to the kids now. I get you're a mom and you miss your kids. But is there a disconnect there with thinking that you're better than you are? Do you have some kind of idea that oh, my gosh.

Natalie Mazer 34:22

Um, I think I'm not sure if it was maybe I think in the hospital, I just wanted a frequent frankly, the real reason behind me wanting to go home and see my kids in the hospital is that I wanted to see them one more time.

Bill Gasiamis 34:39

Wow. Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's, uh, in terms

Natalie Mazer 34:43

of your other question of thinking that I'm better than I I'm better and more capable than I am. Oh, that lasted for me for many, many months. I wasn't Yes, I was certainly in denial with my deficits, and I think especially and I think especially since, like my, you know, like, I guess since I was steered to the cardiology, surgical track, right, so of course, they hooked me up with a monitor, they had to give me a bunch of tests.

Natalie Mazer 35:13

Right. And it was very much prepped for surgery. Right. And I think that's, that's kind of like, so my whole thing is, eventually when I came home I just slept a lot. I was just like, sleeping and sleeping and sleeping. Did I see my kids? Absolutely.

But then I was also an actually, I remember the most shocking thing, like just really wanting to come out of the hospital.

Natalie Mazer 35:37

But then when they came out of the hospital, I was like, Oh, my gosh, I don't remember the world being so bright and so loud. And just wanting to curl up in a ball in a quiet dark place. Right? It's because you're just thinking, right? Sorry, overload.

Natalie Mazer 35:55

Yes, yes. And it took us a while I think I think, you know, within the pandemic, and everything else, like I think I was just so focused on like addressing, you know, the heart, and we did, and then after that, I was like, Oh my gosh, because I'm, you know, I'm at home, I'm realizing that, like, even going for a walk outside, you know, as I got better over time was hard, because crickets are allowed, if everything's too bright, like, I wear sunglasses all the time, I was just like, I couldn't handle more than just, you know, initially just a few minutes outside, right.

Natalie Mazer 36:32

And eventually, like, I tried to go longer and longer. And the thing is, so later on, it almost took a year actually, for me to figure out to properly be diagnosed with all my deficits.

Natalie Mazer 36:49

So I lost some, because they were mostly so actually, while my left arm was numb, right away, right, but, um, so like, from a physical, I think that's what happened, I think they, when they were discharged from the hospital, they were looking more for, like physical deficiencies.

Natalie Mazer 37:06

And my arm was numb, and you know, my fingers kind of had a hard time moving and everything, but it recovered very quickly. Like, you know, from time to time, I'll have like, my shoulder feels a little stiff, even now. But like, I didn't think of it as a big deal. Like I was able to, you know, walk and you know, and the function are, so technically I look the same, but it's all invisible issues that took such a long time to understand.

Natalie Mazer 37:36

So like, from a visual perspective, I lost my perception of depth, which explains why I'm sitting here like, my husband's driving me home, and I'm like, covering my eyes up because I'm like, Oh my gosh, like, I feel like we're about to hit everything on the road, right? Because if you don't see the depths, everything's kind of two-dimensional, flat, and right in your face, right? And also, I lost some of the periphery.

Natalie Mazer 38:03

And also, you know, very much visual and auditory overstimulation. I had vestibular issues. And also, which also took months to discover I acquired sleep apnea, like central sleep apnea, which, like, especially early on, after the stroke, I would dread going to bed every night.

Natalie Mazer 38:29

Even though it's so tiring, right, though so thoroughly wanted to do so like I would want to sleep but the same thing with dread going to bed because especially if, if it was like a very overstimulating day, like with central sleep apnea, you basically kind of like so we take little pauses as we breathe, apparently, during the night.

Natalie Mazer 38:49

But here, you kind of forget to breathe. So you wake up, and you gasp for air and you fall back asleep. And that happens repeatedly, you know, for a few hours before you're finally like, kind of calmed down. You kind of start but to be honest, I didn't even think to mention it to my doctors, because I was like, Oh, this must be something you know, that I just have to deal with. Like, that's what I mean.

Natalie Mazer 39:15

Like, I think to your point, though, I would notice all these weird things. Or like, for example, when I was trying to, you know, put my kids to bed and I would just like oh, like I always would sing songs. I'll tell them all these Nursery Rhymes and I'm like, and I started the first sentence and then I'm completely blank.

Natalie Mazer 39:33

And I'm like, Oh, boy. Or, music, right? I forgot how to read the bass clef. Not the treble clef. But I guess because I learned the treble clef earlier on maybe in my life. I don't know what it was, but it was just, but the funny part is it didn't like that wasn't a red flag.

Natalie Mazer 39:53

I was questioned, it seems like they wrote something wrong. This music page was kind of how I perceived it. Right. So yeah, I think a lot of these invisible issues are really hard to identify for yourself like you almost need Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 40:11

Yeah, it wasn't a red flag that's interesting. So I went through that. So after the second blade, I came home and I couldn't finish a sentence, I couldn't type an email, I couldn't remember who came to visit me, I'd start. I was, I was, I couldn't track time how much time had passed?

Bill Gasiamis 40:32

You know, I was in, I was in this whole weird kind of out-of-head experience, not out of body out of the head experience. It felt like, I've smoked weed a few times in my life. And I felt like I was completely stoned the whole time. You know? And I would have a conversation with my wife about what I'm feeling.

Bill Gasiamis 40:52

And she would be wondering what was happening. Because clearly, I was behaving differently. And I was skateboarding, I don't know. And she would say, Well, I don't. Is that normal? Is it part of the stroke? Is that? Are you having another one? Where are you? Where are we at? And I was, I don't know.

Bill Gasiamis 41:11

And we were just kind of have to wing it, we do have to hope that it wasn't another one. And many times we went to hospital because we thought I was having another stroke. And it wasn't another stroke. And it's, it's just a mess. And I remember that one of the first things I did after I came back home after the second hospital harbor hospital stay was I went to see my counselor.

Bill Gasiamis 41:35

And she had noticed the difference in the way that I was behaving cognitively. And she said to me, have you ever heard of a neuropsychologist? And I thought, No, I've never heard of that. I don't know what that is. And you said, Well, it's somebody who will check your cognitive ability and give you an idea of if there's any deficits there. And I thought, oh, okay, that sounds like a good idea.

Bill Gasiamis 42:01

We'll go and send us psychologists. And maybe we can get a few more answers

because no one told me what to expect when I went home after the second blade. And I was in a pretty bad way. Then I went to make an appointment with the neuropsychologist. And again, what we didn't realize was that I could make a private appointment if I wanted to. But we made a public appointment through the hospital's public system.

Bill Gasiamis 42:28

And the waiting list was about nine months long. Oh, my gosh, I didn't know. And we just thought, okay, yeah, we'll take that one, no problem. So I struggled with the deficits for about three or four or five months. And it's, they started to get better as time went on, but we just kind of put up with it. And I put up with it, and my wife put up with it. And we just didn't know how to deal with it. And we were looking for help. And we didn't know how to ask for help about it.

Bill Gasiamis 43:05

That's the other weird part. I didn't know the question to ask my neurologist, or any of the doctors to say, What do I do about this thing? Where do I feel stoned all the time? Or? How do I even describe that to a doctor? And what do I say? So we didn't even have the words we didn't have that converse, that ability to make the sentence to express our concerns.

Bill Gasiamis 43:32

Because we're dealing with neurological terms, we're dealing with a weird Brain and my wife is not inside my body. She's outside of me. And she's observing me, she knows I've had a stroke. So certain things are kind of acceptable, when we can accept that Bill's had a stroke, and he's behaving differently or speaking differently.

Bill Gasiamis 43:52

We kind of understand that part. But then what what do we do about it? So that's the important thing is kind of the caregivers who are listening. And perhaps even the stroke survivors who are listening, need to be able to kind of find a way to get the message across. I'm struggling with something with this with that, who else can help me that's why I have the download from my website, seven questions to ask a doctor about your stroke.

Natalie Mazer 44:19

I read those read I have to say, I'm, I think I might have learned about your

psychologist from your podcast or your website. Yeah. Is. Yeah. And I also, like, I think what was inspiring about your podcast for me, it still is, is the fact that you always emphasize on, like, you have to really kind of own your recovery.

Natalie Mazer 44:43

Right. And it's and frankly, I would even add not be afraid to own your recovery because, for me, I've always like I think what didn't help was I'm just like, oh, you know, I can take life, you know, head on, like I've been in difficult situations in the faster and, and I've dealt with them.

Natalie Mazer 45:03

And you know, when I've experienced loss like losing a loved one and things like that, and with that you just like you kind of surrendered to the situation you accept it, of course, it but you can do something about like, I've always felt like everything I could always do something about like I could say, Okay, well, you know, instead of being sad, and you know, maybe, of course, you go through the sadness and the grief.

Natalie Mazer 45:27

But like, you can also turn it into something more positive to maybe help others or kind of celebrate that person's life or things like that, like so you could do something about it. I think what was different here was that I didn't know what to do. And I didn't know what was it, like so to me, I was like, well, I'll just buckle in, you know, pretend everything's good. And pull out of the room.

Natalie Mazer 45:53

But like, didn't work. And I was just like because I went back to work, I go to virtual workers were still the pandemic. So I went back to virtual work. And my gosh, that was humbling. And of course, I, you know, put my smile on and I was just like, Okay, I'm just gonna perform.

Natalie Mazer 46:11

Because, you know, to a certain extent, you also, you know, my career was always very important to me, it was very passionate what I was doing, and, frankly, like, I could only still tolerate a very limited amount of time with my children, right? Because of all that audiovisual vision.

Natalie Mazer 46:30

Yeah, and here, I'm thinking, well, actually work sounds like a great thing to make

me feel like I'm, you know, my life, I'm snapping back. I think in our culture, we also really celebrate this quick turnaround story and quick success story. And everyone's well and, you know, happily ever after.

What Natalie Mazer was thinking when she had a stroke

Natalie Mazer 46:46

And, I think that was no thinking of like, well, also, like, I don't know how this is going to offset my family dynamics, my kids my this, right? So it was like, I gotta become productive for the family. And I gotta snap into it. Even though like now thinking about it an old life therapist. They were like, what were you thinking? Like, how were you even possibly functioning? You know, at work? And of course,

Bill Gasiamis 47:13

thinking, of course, you're not thinking, of course, you're not functioning, of course, you're just putting on a brave face. And you seem like a smiley, happy-go-lucky person, usually. So everyone is expecting Natalie to come home, that Natalie to come to work. And when you do, the fact that the fact that you said and you look, the way that you look, the fact that you said you had a stroke means nothing to these people.

Bill Gasiamis 47:40

They don't know what a stroke is. They don't understand that it's Hang on a second, Natalie had a stroke. She it was not a broken heart surgery. She's not, it's not a broken leg. It's not six weeks, before you'll be back to work. It is a very long time. It's a big recovery. And we are as stroke survivors at the beginning, we're just as ignorant we just as ignorant we don't know. Right?

Bill Gasiamis 48:05

So yeah, and I feel like you have a lot of energy to give anyway, you're, you seem very energetic, even. Just like you the way that you express yourself is very bright, bubbly, and energetic, right? So putting on your personality, just your normal Personality gives people a false sense of the situation and what happened and what it's like, you know,

Natalie Mazer 48:34

one colleague said what if you back though, and I was just like, I was like, just play down? And I was like, yeah, like, I played it down, like, yeah, like, I'm back, like, I'm gonna get through this. And, of course, the first meeting of the day, I, I, you sit in the meeting, you know, kind of welcome back.

Natalie Mazer 48:53

And then you know, and then the talk about a few topics. And then a little later, I had to dial into a next call. And, actually, I asked to, like, maybe not have the camera on, right, because at the time was just like, even if I had the camera on, I would put a blank like Word document over it.

Natalie Mazer 49:11

So I wouldn't visually overstate overstimulated. And so the second meeting, they're referencing the previous meeting, and I'm just sitting here thinking, I don't remember any of this happened.

Bill Gasiamis 49:25

Wow. Yeah.

Intro 49:27

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

Intro 49:52

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. To stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com, where you can download a guide that will help you. It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 50:11

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.

Bill Gasiamis 50:30

In stroke recovery, the strokes are over, there's a race to get back to normal, quote-unquote, normal. And in that race to get back to normal, a lot of things are overlooked. And people feel like if I just go back to where I was before, then everything will be okay.

Bill Gasiamis 50:49

Because of this, we're trying to convince ourselves that we're okay and that it wasn't as bad as it is. And perhaps we're thinking about mortality. And we're thinking about all the things that went wrong. And we're thinking about all the bills and all that kind of stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 51:01

But at some point, I feel like you discovered that you were going about things the wrong way. So when you discovered that, how did things change for you? How did you then approach your stroke recovery? How did you do things differently?

Natalie Mazer 51:19

Oh, gosh, I went back, I went back on medical leave eventually. Right. I think, I think initially, I tried hard to you know, I actually when that happened, by the way, in the meeting where I forgot what happened. Yeah, I just got a stack of notebooks. And I wrote everything.

Natalie Mazer 51:38

And I would prescript what I would say in meetings and all these terrible, like crazy things, right? And it's like, of course, I relied a lot on my long-term memory. And I was such a big planner. So I already had a lot of things pre-planned right before the stroke.

Natalie Mazer 51:52

So at some point, I was just so exhausted, because I would you know, fall asleep, you know, in the chair and all sorts of things and have my migraines. And like I was completely not functional with my family, you know, as a member of the family, right? Because there's just not much energy to go around with like, the fatigue is really bad rind. Yeah. And, sometimes I'd have trouble speaking.

Natalie Mazer 52:21

So even when I wanted to say something in the meeting, I just kept my mouth shut, because I was like, you know, I think at some point, right, as those things

accumulate, you'll realize that and of course, then I went back to the attendee neurologist, and she said, well, well, for one would need like speech therapy, and that's twice a week, and I'm just thinking to myself, I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I just came back, like how, like, there's no way that my job would allow me to take two days to go through speech. So I kind of dropped that.

Natalie Mazer 52:57

I was like, Yeah, I'll keep my notebook. You know, I'll keep my notebook thing going. And, you know, it's just like, a so it's amazing that you just, you know, cuz I was thinking, I was like, well, maybe eventually, we'll all just resolve itself, right? Because I don't think we want to think about it that way.

Natalie Mazer 53:15

But I think eventually, you know, you're listening to your podcast, and also trying to do some Google searches. And even simple things like I would even like Google, like, how do you parent after stroke, right?

Bill Gasiamis 53:28

Wow, find a thing.

Natalie Mazer 53:30

It's like, it's true. Like, I remember having a moment I'm just such a different parent right now than they used to be. Because I had a lot of energy like, I think you mentioned I just used to have a lot of energy where I could be very high functioning at work and I could still be very high functioning at home and get everybody ready and out the door for school and things like that.

Natalie Mazer 53:51

And here I am. I'm like, we started with my husband with like, Well, how about we have a goal of you, but this is after I, of course, I went back on leave the second time. They like that one of my goals was I get the kids ready and out the door for school. Like not driven them yet, but because right I couldn't even be a passenger on the highway in the car. Yeah. So I got them ready for school once a week, right? That was my goal.

Natalie Mazer 54:21

And I remember just trying to coerce them and guide them to the door. And of course, they're all chit-chatting at the same time. And I'm just overwhelmed. And I remember just kind of sitting down on the floor and bawling by the door. And it

looked like all my kids ran running towards me like money. Are you okay? Are you okay? Like, what can we do? And that, to me was an epiphany.

Natalie Mazer 54:46

I was like, wow, like my old ways are never gonna work. Like, the new way is really how can we position it? Like we're a team. I'm one of you guys. We all got to look after one another. And it's done such a humongous transformation in the positive direction, with my children, and just like, they listen to me now like

Bill Gasiamis 55:18

Right, okay, really isn't that amazing? So, you've stopped becoming the person who does everything, and you're recruiting people to do their things for themselves. So that, and at the same time, you're allowing them to learn how to be independent, and also not dependent only on mum for everything. Yeah, yeah. That's brilliant. That's an amazing outcome comes from desperation.

Bill Gasiamis 55:52

And it came from this terrible situation where you're balling on the ground, but that's kind of that's like, you might not describe it like this. And it's okay if I'm not describing in the same way. But what I'm trying to demonstrate is like, that's almost a rock bottom moment.

Bill Gasiamis 56:07

And then from rock bottom, there's no further to go, you have to change and you have to not, I can't go back to being the way that I was before because it doesn't work. And I'm going to end up being unwell for longer. And without me here, there's no point not being. So I've got to change my ways. And an what an amazing lesson to get from such a potentially terrible situation, right?

Natalie Mazer 56:35

Well, with the work I also feel like I went to rock bottom. Before I decided to go on leave the second time, right then, and actually go and, and get actually, so they took me through this intense evaluation. And the person who was doing the evaluation, said, Okay, well, you have processing issues, you have short-term memory issues.

Natalie Mazer 56:58

And she says, I also think you have visual issues you should go see your ophthalmologist, and you will probably need visual therapy too. And then she said,

I would also highly advise on a neuro-psych evaluation. And I was like, Oh, interesting. And I have to say, then, when I remember just hearing that, just oh my gosh, was it? So relieving?

Natalie Mazer 57:21

I was like, Oh my gosh, I'm not crazy. Because, like, so because we also recently moved before the stroke. So I didn't even have a GP. And then eventually, like every GP I'd meet, and you know, when I say, Hey, I'm looking for GP because I recently just had a stroke and all this other stuff. They didn't know what to say. And this one GP, said, Oh my gosh, I have another young patient who had a stroke. So she said, I understand you. But she thought that a lot of my symptoms were PTSD, not actual physical deficits.

Bill Gasiamis 57:53

Stroke-related deficits.

Stroke saved my life

Natalie Mazer 57:55

So of course, it's kind of interesting. I feel like in my journey, I almost went from like, physically repairing oh, by the way, actually, also stroke saved my life, because of that large hole in my heart, but the cardiologist said that one of my sides of my heart was already enlarged.

Natalie Mazer 58:13

So that could have only lasted a few more years. And that's about it. Right? So, um, I kind of went from like, physically repairing my heart to kind of start healing my heart. Then eventually, like, you know, because my GP initially said before I went to the neurologist the second time, she said, Well, maybe some of this is PTSD. So I started therapy.

Natalie Mazer 58:39

And then it's, I would have to say, I'm very grateful to my therapist because I feel like it's my therapist who kind of made me realize that I really need to, you know, get it evaluated properly. And media, you know, should focus on my health, but not try to pretend nothing's wrong and keep the wheels, you know, moving.

Natalie Mazer 59:02

So then I was, and I know, in the podcast, you talk a lot about the importance of mental health, and I couldn't emphasize it more. It's just like, it's just like, we shelf so many things down our entire lives. But I think when we have to, when we, you know, end up having a severe trauma for us to move forward, even physical recovery, we got to process it all and it's Yeah, yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 59:31

It's a big, so people you hear about a lot of people who, who go into therapy, people who I've coached, who will say stuff like I it's, I've had this massive burden on my shoulders, you know, and it's like, okay, I have this massive weight on my shoulders. Okay. So even, even if it's metaphorical.

Bill Gasiamis 59:57

How is that going to support Walking again, if you're learning how to walk again, because you're gonna have strict deficits, and you have a massive weight on your shoulders, metaphorically, it's going to be harder to walk, just simply.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:12

And when you hear people shift that and when you get when they get through that feeling of having a massive weight on the shoulders, oh, my gosh, I felt like the load has lifted or shifted, well, then they're going to be lighter on their feet. It's just a logical thing, and it's going to support the recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:32

So that's why I emphasize mental health recovery. That's why I emphasize the emotional recovery. The physical recovery has to be done together, maybe not at the same time. And with the same amount of effort on all of them, maybe at the beginning of the physical recovery gets the most effort.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:52

And then maybe slowly as the physical recoveries, getting to a point where we're seeing changes or things are improving somewhat, or you're moving forward, maybe you can shift to the emotional recovery and start giving that some effort and some time. And then the same with mental recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:12

And keep shifting the amount of time and effort you put on each one just to suit the needs that you have at that time, in at that moment in time. And then continue with whatever you need. But keep cycling through them all mental rent, mental

recovery, emotional recovery, physical recovery, I'm coaching a gentleman now who's recovering from a stroke, is missing half of his skull, because he had a brain hemorrhage and the brain was swelling.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:43

So they wanted to remove the skull to let it swell. And then once it's settled down, they put they'll put the brain, the skull back in. And of course, there's a whole bunch of fear around his condition, the fact that he's missing half of his skull, etc. And he's missing out on being outdoors. He was He loved the outdoors.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:04

And anosike. He's so angry, and he's so upset that he can't go outdoors. Well, that's what they think they can't that he couldn't do. So the homework after that particular coaching session was to find the location where you'd love to go and see if that's wheelchair accessible. And then do a little bit of homework to work out how you're going to get there. how long you're going to stay there, how you're going to attend that particular area, that beachside area.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:36

And then, how long you want to be there for how long you're going to take to get home, and what you have to do to get home safely, etc. So prepare some drink, learn where the toilet is going to do all the things that you need to do so you can get out there. So that I know he's having his emotional recovery, I know that without that, he's going to be at home for an additional day thinking that nothing is possible anymore.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:03

So even though he's doing rehab, even though he's doing all these amazing things, they weren't certain about whether or not they could get out and about. So contact your doctors, contact your local taxi service, see if they've got a wheelchair taxi or something like that, you know, whatever you have to do.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:22

And that small thing attends to a really big need in the heart, in the emotional center, to feel like you're back in your space in your world where you love things where you enjoy things where you get happiness, where the dopamine starts to fire off with a serotonin starts to fire off.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:42

And we're all the feel-good hormones and chemicals start to fire off again, they help the brain recover. So that's why you can't go into stroke recovery with a heavy burden on my shoulder. Maybe you can start the recovery with the burden unshod or the heavyweight and shoulder.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:58

But at some point, to make your recovery move further, you have to remove the heavyweight. And you've got to go to counseling. And you've got to speak to people that help. And your husband and your wife and your kids are not the people to go to because they are not equipped to deal with all the shit that they have to deal with.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:20

As well as your stroke and as well as your emotional problems. They're just not equipped. You have to seek help from other people.

Natalie Mazer 1:04:27

They're already carrying double the load, right? Because you're out of commission.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:32

Exactly. You know, and they're there for you, of course, when you're having a tough day and you can say, Yes, I'm feeling terrible, like darling, I'm stuffed, I can't do anything. Oh my god, you can cry in their arms, you can do all those things. That's why you have to kind of also wrap it up for them and leave them the opportunity to have their own space and their emotional recovery and their own and their mental recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:57

They're thinking about your potential loss and thinking about your deficits and all your challenges. And they're trying to pretend that everything's okay. So that you can feel okay. But we're all? Well, that's why I keep saying we all have to take responsibility for our recovery, you can't, you can't expect. You can't expect to go through something as traumatic as heart surgery and stroke surgery.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:26

And think that everything's going to be okay, you will only work for a short amount of time. And then, and then you have to do, you have to evolve. And I feel like that's what happens to a lot of stroke survivors. The podcast is, there was a

really tough time, there was, we came back and things started to change and move and shift.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:48

And then if you give, if you have the opportunity to speak to somebody who's 10 years post-stroke, as opposed to somebody who's only one or two years post-stroke on the podcast, I ended up finding out how things have moved on 10 years post-stroke, and the acute phase might last for 234 years.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:12

And then, and then there's a shift that happens, and then the new body, that they coexist, in, that they exist in life, continues to move forward. And they continue to get back into some kind of a routine, some kind of a way of solving problems uniquely, some kind of way of being part of the community, getting fulfillment, but it all comes. But it doesn't come by being passive. You can't just sit around and wait for it to happen to you, you know.

Natalie Mazer 1:06:48

Yeah, but I think I know, one of the messages that I was hoping to share, too, I guess, based on my experience, like would the person who is always so hard on herself, right, and always feels like, like, I can, you know, I can get through anything like and let me just kind of shove it all down, and then they will all you know, get better. All right, because because I feel like it worked for me in certain things, right?

Natalie Mazer 1:07:13

And it's and I think, interestingly enough, you know, how people say, they get advice from kind of their older self to the younger self. For me, it was the total opposite. As I was going through the bookshelf, I found a notebook from the time when I was in my 20s. And I was writing some poetry.

Natalie Mazer 1:07:30

And I read this poem, and it was like, it touched me so deeply because it was all about surrender. And what I realized was, you know, I might not have a hard time surrendering to circumstances, but I couldn't surrender to myself. Like, I think that's the battle, the internal battle that I was happening was happening.

Natalie Mazer 1:07:53

And, of course, I learned pretty early on that comparing the before and after is

just like, oh, sure way to get to depression. But, you know, and I was like, Okay, I feel like I'm not comparing before and after, but still, I could not surrender to the new me, right? And there was a frankly, like, part of me was even kind of, like, sometimes I'd mentioned what I was going through. And then, of course, people don't always know what to say.

Natalie Mazer 1:08:20

So it gets a little awkward. And then other times it just like, you know, you kind of put your face on and pretend nothing happened and you're just, you know, happy-go-lucky, right? But that doesn't work either. And it's like, really kind of surrendering into myself and, and, and kind of learning to love the new me because I think we're so focused on like, I was so focused on fixing, getting back to normal, like, the old, the old life, like kind of trying to fit into my old life.

Natalie Mazer 1:08:52

But I like I don't know, at least in my, from my perspective, there's probably no old life like there's in and I was trying to, like constantly thinking to myself, like, you know, I'm always like, okay, difficult situations, there must be a lesson like, what's my lesson? And I think my lessons were definitely to be vulnerable, for example, my old self would have never gotten on the podcast and talked about a medical issue or a difficult experience.

Natalie Mazer 1:09:19

I've gone through like, No way. That's something that only I knew and my husband and that's about it, like, potentially even like my relatives that know about it, right? And like so like doing something as vulnerable as opening up is just something that I realized that that's one thing I need to start embracing more and, and being vulnerable, and how good things come out.

Natalie Mazer 1:09:44

So that was my lesson number one and my lesson number two, I feel like was also took me a while to figure out it's really kind of surrendering to oneself, and learning to love and embrace. The new you Right? And, and it's not easy to do it actually, I think I attributed to a lot of meditation and funny enough.

Natalie Mazer 1:10:09

So I've always done yoga but more as exercise. But meditation, I always knew I had to do it. And Bill like, no matter how much I tried, I just like I'm sitting there

shore, like I'm pretending I'm meditating like no, my mind. Yeah, but I started with literally a one-minute timer and I tried to like, Okay, let me just try to get through one minute and then increase it more.

Natalie Mazer 1:10:34

And now I like I can get through the day without meditation because I need that to calm my, you know, neurological system. And it's like, and I think when you meditate, you start, you know, you there's like, you just opening that time for reflection. And I think, like, so my, my big takeaway is like, it's okay to like, permit yourself to not be okay, and give yourself permission to, to even like, figure out who is this new person?

Natalie Mazer 1:11:03

Like, what are you like, what are your capabilities like, and don't compare? Don't judge yourself like, and also, like, I think what helped me is trying to pick something up to do that maybe I've done as a child, but I haven't done it in my adult life. Because, because it's because it's just so soul-wrenching when you start to do something that you're good at in your adult life. And now you're like, oh, my gosh, like.

Natalie Mazer 1:11:34

So actually, as like, kids, I had a couple of years of piano. And it is the pandemic kit. I was like, so determined to start learning the piano with my daughter. And so something that I kind of made a point that was like, Okay, well, I have, like, my baseline of like, learning the piano was so low.

Music therapy is a great tool for recovery

Natalie Mazer 1:11:53

But maybe that's something I chip away at every day like I just do a little bit every day. And that's been so amazing. Because when I look back, I can that's one thing, I can say, hey, I do it way better now than before the stroke. Yeah, I just think it's like speaking of that, kind of like self-motivating things, right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:15

Yeah. They bring you joy writes, music therapy is, has been studied, it's a very well-known thing to help people in recovery, whether you're participating in music by singing, whether you're playing an instrument, whether you're, it

doesn't matter how but music therapy is a very big, positive thing to help people in recovery from trauma from any type of health condition, right.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:44

So you're doing that at the same time, you're also retraining your brain, you're using Neuroplasticity, you're gently starting to get used to, again, the auditory stimulation, you're gently starting to get the visual stimulation, and the auditory stimulation happening at the same time.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:05

So it's like training yourself to get to a point where you're, again, comfortable with experiencing optical and audio, stuff stimulation at the same time. And, and then physical stimulation, because your hands are moving as well, and you're teaching somebody you know, so the whole thing is a real great recovery tool for anybody.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:37

But for stroke, especially because you're activating all these different parts of the brain, you know, all at the same time, and they are supporting each other, and they are rerouting and they're perhaps bringing back to life neurons that have gone to sleep a little bit or a little bit not working the way they used to.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:55

So it's a great tool with regards to meditation. So one of the things that people struggle with meditation is when they do it, they do it with the head. And they think that it has to go a certain way. And they think that When thoughts come into their head, that it's doing it wrong, it's not necessarily doing wrong.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:15

The trick is to observe those thoughts and just not make any meaning about them and just let them come in. Go. Hmm, that was interesting. And let it go away. And then go back to your breath. Just check in with your breath. Okay, focus on the breath, focus on the breath.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:30

Now, another way to kind of enhance your meditation is to put your hand on your heart. And just to ask your heart, what do I need? What's the thing that I need the most right now?

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:44

That's interesting, okay, or specifically, ask your heart. What do you specifically need right now, at this moment, and then just close your eyes and with the background music or whatever you use to kind of get you through a meditation job? to listen, and just see what comes up, and you'll be amazed what comes up.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:05

And even if it's a guided meditation, perhaps you set a before the meditation starts, you set a little thought about what you would like to get from the meditation. And it might be I'd like to get calmness, or I'd like to get this. So you set an intention. So that the meditation has a place to kind of do its work, rather than just generally meditating.

Natalie Mazer 1:15:35

Yeah, I found, like, doing guided meditations was a good way for me to ease into getting into that practice, right? Because I feel like, I don't know, it was just always so hard for me to quiet my mind, then, like, initially, I was like, started like one minute of just focusing on my breath. And after that, when I was, you know, going beyond one minute, I was like, Oh, I think I need a guided meditation, right, just so somebody to tell me what to do so that I can kind of not go off the rails.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:09

So if you're up for it, let's do a little bit of a test, I just want to see what comes up when I go and take you to this place. Right. So what I'd like you to do right now if you're up for it. Well, the first time I've done this on a podcast, is just to put your hand on your heart. Okay? Right, and just close your eyes for a second. And just breathe. As you breathe, just ask your heart. What's the most important thing for it right now? And just see what comes up. And just let it speak to you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:02

And when it's given you some information, just allow yourself to open your eyes and just come back to the podcast interview and just tell me, if you feel like telling me what I shared.

Natalie Mazer 1:17:15

I don't to be honest, I feel like the first thing that popped up was just calm. You know, I think? Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:26

So one way to specifically get the mind quiet is to specifically ask the heart for feedback. Interesting. And that immediately takes the internal voice out of your head and redirects it to the heart. And it allows the mind to not respond.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:48

Because it's not being asked, you're not asking your head for feedback or information. You're asking your heart. And if you do that your gut, your gut is going to give you feedback as well. If you go to your gut, and you say to it, what do you want right now, it'll have a different voice, and it'll take longer to respond. And it'll give you different feedback from what the heart does. And then, if you went to the head and specifically asked it, it would give you a different response as well.

Natalie Mazer 1:18:21

Wow, I'm gonna, I'm gonna try that. Right.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:27

So when you do that, that's how meditation that's when you when you're doing meditation and set an intention to, for it to be a heart-full meditation. Instead of a mindful meditation, make it heartfelt. Meditation, you have a completely different experience.

Natalie Mazer 1:18:49

That's interesting.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:50

Just something to consider. For all those listeners out there who think they've by can't meditate, and they can't do it, and they've tried it and whatever. Everyone can meditate. Absolutely. It's just a matter of whether or not you're prepared to go to that place. And that's the thing about the emotional recovery, you know, you need to be prepared to go to where it's a little bit difficult.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:15

And once you go there, it lifts the suffering from that space. Because you've gone there, you've both you've, you've faced it, if it is it a fear or a pain or a previous trauma, and part of going there is what makes it dissipate and not have a hold on your life so much anymore. So it has been, what three years since your stroke?

Natalie Mazer 1:19:49

About two and a half. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:51

So how do you see things moving forward from here? What does your daily life I Found Your Way Forward look like?

Natalie Mazer 1:20:04

Yeah, so, you know, I think kind of like, similar to the sentiment I shared of, like, I'm letting my I'm, I think I'm finally in a place where I'm being gentle with myself and giving myself the time and the space to, to discover kind of, to discover that new me.

Natalie Mazer 1:20:25

But, you know, for now, my goal has been to, you know, to be to play the mom role. And of course, I started a few interests, for example, I started painting again, and I mentioned the piano, I've been reading so much, I think I've been just really fascinated by psychology and mindfulness and, and kind of yoga and in that area.

Natalie Mazer 1:20:50

And so I've kind of, I feel like I'm in the state where I'm kind of filling, you know, feeding my soul. And kind of letting for the first time in my life.

Natalie Mazer 1:21:03

Whereas before I liked I always like almost always lived in the future, I had a, you know, five-year plan, 10-year plan, like even in my job, like I was, you know, leading innovation, so I had to live 10 years ahead, you know, even work and that was my comfortable because I always derived comfort in being in discomfort. And I feel like for the first time, I'm letting myself just heal, and kind of really naturally discover my new self.

Natalie Mazer 1:21:33

But in the meantime, I'm just kind of working through seeing how much I can regain. And I think because I was in denial for so long, I hurt my progress a lot. Right. from, like, actually regaining my deficits perspective, right? So I think it's now focusing on unseen, how, you know, how much more I can improve. And, and also just kind of, you know, kind of, you know, loving the new me, and loving life.

Natalie Mazer 1:22:07

And I am strongly convinced that if I continue to be in on that quest for like, really

feeding my soul and searching on always being open to what kind of arises, I have a feeling life will show me what my new path is and what my direction is,

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:29

I am certain of it, I am certain life is going to do that for you. The man that you met here today, or that is on the podcast with you now, was not this is not the same person that was going through life at 30. Age 3748. This is not somebody who I haven't recognized I've got no idea who this person is.

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:53

It's such an amazing place to be a podcast that I coach, and a leader in, creating the tools that I was missing in the gap to fill the gaps in stroke recovery that existed. I'm I see myself in the mirror, somebody who's writing a book about stroke being the best thing that happened.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:21

This is not a person that I know that I recognize that would have come out of continuing life the way that I did it 37 Before the stroke if it wasn't for that stuff. I would not be in these types of conversations with people coaching people from around the world to create a community that makes a difference.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:43

Like I was just so self-centered, I was just about my problems about all my thoughts or my you know, there was none of that I wasn't evolved at all. But that's why I'm certain you just following your heart and doing what you're saying. And taking and putting you first and doing what gives you joy and brings you joy, you're going to bring joy to the world. You're going to bring joy to your family, you're going to be a great example of how to live a life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:24:13

You're going to inspire people beyond what you can imagine. And you're gonna look back in 10 years and you're gonna go wow, like Is this me because I have these moments. I pinch myself I can't believe that I am, who I am. And the connections that I've made and the impact that I'm having. And it sounds like I'm bragging and I bloody am bragging you know, this was not my path, and what a path I would rather this than the other path that I was on.

Bill Gasiamis 1:24:45

So I'm certain that if you're if you put yourself first and you do it from a way of

from love loving yourself and learning about yourself and being curious and open, you just described the key to a successful life, if that's such a thing, like, you know what I mean? Like, that's that, that you know what it is, it's a successful way of being. It's gonna bring you immense joy and happiness.

Bill Gasiamis 1:25:25

And people around you will benefit, and you'll be the center of love. You know, you'll be an example of how life is another way of how life can be lived, you know, and it's a life that's out of your head. It's not a head-based life, it's a heart-based heart-led life and lifestyle. And then just,

Natalie Mazer 1:25:56

I love how you describe that. That sounds wonderful. Like, I never really thought of it. That's true, right? I think before I was very much based on strict planning, you know, always on time, you know, pre-imagined every 100 scenarios and be prepared for it.

Natalie Mazer 1:26:12

And now it's just like, just learning to be that was a big. And you're right, I feel like I, like if I think about it, I probably feel like from a happiness point of view. Now, I feel probably closer to Carl was in my 20s. Then how it was, you know, in the last, however many years, right, yeah. Yeah, it's, it's very interesting. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 1:26:46

It's so lovely to meet you and get to know you. I appreciate you reaching out and being on the podcast. I love hearing your story. And I wish you all the best for your recovery, your ongoing recovery.

Natalie Mazer 1:27:00

Thank you so much, Bill. It's such a pleasure.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:03

That's a wrap, Natalie. Wow, what an amazing conversation. Thank you. Beautiful things. And I truly do believe it, you're just describing the ideal way. To go about your recovery, you are. The book that I'm writing has been written because I interviewed 10 People who said the strike was the best thing that happened to them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:34

And they are all describing what you're describing. And it's, for some of them, it was immediately that they thought that for some, for some of them, it took five years, 10 years, whatever. But the reason, they're still living with deficits, is they're still living with all the things that stroke had done to them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:54

But the growth, the personal growth has been tremendous. And they, like me don't recognize themselves. They're completely different in the way they go about life. So what's going to be interesting for you is to listen back to this interview, and hear yourself, speak about yourself. That's gonna be cool.

Natalie Mazer 1:28:18

I have to admit, I was a little nervous, because it was like, Oh, I hope I don't have trouble speaking or lose my train of thought.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:24

You are perfect. I'm going to edit this is going to go live, maybe tomorrow the next day. So it'll be available very quickly. So listen out for it. Reach out anytime there's anything that happens, do you just let me know? And I'm gonna let you get back to the rest of your day or night or whatever you got there.

Natalie Mazer 1:28:44

Before I let you go, though, I just honestly like from the bottom of my heart, just want to say thank you for your work. Like I think it's just, you know, it's really like, I don't know, it's just like, I remember I came across your web because like, I remember initially going to heart.org just to see like, you know, weather conditions.

Natalie Mazer 1:29:04

But like with processing deficits, like I remember, like, I probably like didn't even like, though, the site was so busy, I probably even skipped most of the information was like, I didn't feel like there were any tools there.

Natalie Mazer 1:29:15

But like, I know, just when I came to your site, and like, just by being able to listen to other people and their stories, like it really normalizes a lot of the experiences and it's just like, it's just so powerful because you feel like, you no longer feel like, Am I making this up? Is something wrong with me? Is this in my head? Right? It's just like it. So thank you. Thank you so much for your time.

Bill Gasiamis 1:29:43

All right for the time. I don't have a problem with time, I'll tell you. So it was it's exactly the tool that I was missing. And part of it is every time I speak to somebody, I have my therapy session, right this is this is what My guests don't realize it's a free therapy session for me. It helps all of us. So I get to meet amazing people and learn from them and hear the stories and all that kind of stuff.

Bill Gasiamis 1:30:17

And every podcast episode is roughly the same. But there is such a you, there is such a need for it, right? So I'll explain something to you. So I started in 2017, like you when I thought I was good enough to do everything normally and go back to life normally. And I struggled, and I struggled, and I couldn't get it done.

Bill Gasiamis 1:30:39

And I wasn't putting out a lot of episodes. So it was only in the last, say, three years that I've decided to put out one episode per week, or as many weeks of the year as possible. And I've managed to do think 52 weeks for a couple of years in a row now. And I'll just give you an idea.

Bill Gasiamis 1:31:03

At the beginning, maybe 20 people a month are listening to the podcast, right? No way, which is normal, which is normal. But yeah. But that heart hard for my heart to deal with only 20 people, how am I caught, you know, surely more people should listen to it. So last month, there were more than 8400 people who listened to the podcast last month alone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:31:29

So it has grown from 20 people listening per month, to 8400 per month. And as far as I see it all the episodes are the same. But the demand for it is only increasing. It has not stopped going up at all since the moment I started.

Bill Gasiamis 1:31:59

So I'm grateful that people want to be on the podcast and let's face it, you know, it's not just me doing this is a community that's doing that collectively, putting their stories out and making a difference to every person. And this, and this is the beauty of me. Okay, because I brag about myself, but then I'm a co-collaborator with another 250 people.

Natalie Mazer 1:32:28

But what I think what you're doing that's so powerful, is you're bringing people together. And I think just even like normalizing the fact that you are not over 65 Right? And that's like, but it's true.

Natalie Mazer 1:32:40

Like, like the that's like the like I remember just asking, like in the hospital asking us like, like, how am I going to go back to my life like, and like she's like, like, she's like, well, just, you know, you're walking like your arms a little numb, but it's okay. It's working. It's like, if I was a retired elderly person, it's one thing here I've got like, a career and three young kids like it's a very different

Bill Gasiamis 1:33:13

and even even for older people. Yeah, they do. They aren't tough. Okay, they've because they've had longer to be in their identity.

Natalie Mazer 1:33:25

Oh, for sure. I'm sure that identity crisis is maybe stronger than what we experienced.

Bill Gasiamis 1:33:31

It's so huge, okay, because I don't have a fixed identity, in the sense that I am. And then I label myself with my work, I label myself with all these things. I used to do that. But I don't do that anymore. I am not the label that I give to myself, I am not who I introduce myself to when I go to a party. And what and what that means is that I'm like you said, I'm open.

Bill Gasiamis 1:34:05

Now I have the unique experience of living in the body that I'm living in right now in the way that I'm living right now. And as far as I'm concerned, not all of it is fun. But

Bill Gasiamis 1:34:22

I get to experience two versions of my body. And the part that gets frustrated about that is the part that compares to the previous way that my body was experiencing life. And, that comparative comparison makes me feel a little bit like I'm missing out at the moment.

Bill Gasiamis 1:34:47

But the reality is, I'm not missing out on anything. I'm doing more amazing things than I've ever done. And I need to keep reminding myself of that. And if we think about it Our version of stroke and thankfully our condition after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:06

It's nowhere near the type of experiences that perhaps Stephen Hawking, the great physicist, was experiencing. But even in his most debilitated way, he had a tremendous impact on the world. And remained and became a famous physicist, and was leading

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:31

and was leading the way in his field. And all that he had that worked for him was his brain. Yeah. Right. So it's like,

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:44

he gets to be a person in a body and live normally. And then he gets to be a person living this completely different version of how the majority of people on the planet live. And yet he has his biggest impact, then. Yeah. And we think that we're struggling because we are living with a left side deficit, or whatever our issues are, that we create in our head that are just

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:15

stories that we tell ourselves, right? So Stephen Hawking's quote, is in the first chapter of my book, at the beginning of the first chapter, it says, Do not be disabled in spirit, as well as physically.

Natalie Mazer 1:36:28

Oh, my gosh, is that was that something? He said? That's so beautiful. Yeah. That's him, you know, it's so beautiful that you bring up that his, like, the big thing is his brain that's like, my whole life, I always thought was like, Oh, my brain is my most valuable possession.

Natalie Mazer 1:36:43

And it's like, because because he gets me through things, and it makes me successful and this other stuff, right? And then, like, to me, it was like, Oh, my gosh, having a brain injury, like that hurts so much on so many levels, right? I was. I was just like, and I think that was part of the reason why I tried to shove it down so deep because I was like, I cope like that.

Intro 1:37:02

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Intro 1:37:36

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Intro 1:37:57

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Intro 1:38:23

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