

The Link Between Cardiomyopathy And Stroke - Mike Smith

Mike Smith was 38 years old when he experienced an Ischemic stroke and at the time he self-diagnosed the symptoms as Bell's palsy.

Instagram

Highlights:

00:57 Introduction

03:41 First Signs of Stroke

10:06 All The Dumb Things

15:19 Cardiomyopathy And Stroke

20:52 Why Did This Happen?

26:43 Survivor's Guilt

32:00 Stop And Smell The Roses

42:11 You're More Than Your Job

50:05 The Importance of Counseling

1:01:55 Psychological Breakthroughs

1:12:50 Counselors Having Counselors

1:18:19 Finding The Right Therapist

1:21:52 Knowing When To Slow Down

Transcription:

Mike Smith 0:00

I think it took about a year of just kind of introspection and things after the stroke to finally kind of say to myself, you know, I never before until now took the time to realize what I have in my life. So it's like I was working, working, working constantly, when I was a workaholic, stroke happened. I used to pride myself on never going on vacation. And it's like, I look back and I go, why, why, why?

Mike Smith 0:30

And I look at what that was doing to my physical health, also to my mental health, you know, as being a reporter. There's no glory in that.

Intro 0:44

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

Introduction - Mike Smith

Bill Gasiamis 0:57

Hello there, and welcome to another episode of the Recovery After Stroke Podcast. This is episode 198. And my guest today is Mike Smith. Now Mike is somebody who experienced an ischemic stroke that had an underlying cause of a heart condition that he wasn't aware of until the stroke happened.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17

So it's kind of a blessing that the stroke happened because it revealed an underlying heart condition that is now being managed and taken care of. And if it wasn't for the stroke, he never may have been aware of the heart condition.

Bill Gasiamis 1:33

Now, it's an interesting conversation. We talk about a lot of different things. But one of the major things is that shift in the pace of life that Mike leads now, he went from doing a job that was really stressful and difficult and was way too many hours that had encroached on his personal life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:55

To a job that is now got barriers between his work life and his home life, and also a job that he really loves and enjoys and is less stressful than what he was doing before.

Bill Gasiamis 2:04

Now, if you've been listening to this podcast episode, for a little while, you would have heard me that you know that the recovery after stroke podcast has now got a number of five-star reviews from a bunch of different listeners. And I really, really appreciate it.

Bill Gasiamis 2:20

And I want to thank everybody very much for leaving a five star review. If you're somebody who's listening to this podcast, and you love the show, or you think it's very useful, and it's going to make a massive difference to other stroke survivors, because it has already made a massive difference to you.

Bill Gasiamis 2:37

Please go ahead and leave the show a five-star review on the platform that you listen, whether it's Spotify, or Apple Podcasts, or Google Podcasts, wherever they allow for a review to be left, go ahead and leave some feedback, comment and let people know what you think of the show.

Bill Gasiamis 2:57

That will make the algorithm send the podcast to more people who are looking for this type of content. And it will make life easier for those people that are on the very early stages of stroke recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 3:10

And are looking for a way to get on top of all of the challenges and the issues that they are experiencing as brand new stroke survivors, hopefully will inspire them and give them the opportunity to also feel like there's some light at the end of the tunnel. Now that's enough for me, and it's on with the show. Mike Smith, welcome to the podcast.

Mike Smith 3:33

Thank you. Hello, hello.

Bill Gasiamis 3:36

It's lovely to have you here. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

First Signs of Stroke

Mike Smith 3:41

Well, it was November 29, 2017. Never forget the date. I was 38 years old. I woke up about four o'clock in the morning and had a numbness, like a tingle from about halfway down my right bicep down to my fingers and thought that I've slept on my arm and it was asleep and like, I just thought Oh, it'll wake up.

Mike Smith 4:19

And it wouldn't wake up just kept tingling. That feeling continued. And so I remember just kind of shaking it. And I remember saying out loud. What's wrong with me?

Mike Smith 4:34

But I remember it coming out as like, "What wong" And so I repeated it. I was

thinking that can't be and so I was able to roll out of bed kind of get up and go to the restroom and look in the mirror and I could see the droop on sort of the like lower right part of my face.

Mike Smith 5:04

And I had drool, basically like the entire side going down my neck. So I kept trying to tell myself it was Bell's Palsy. Because I was thinking, certainly I'm not having a stroke, or I didn't have a stroke. I was 38, though they do run in my family, for older people on my mother's side.

Mike Smith 5:28

And so I figured, oh, I'll just rest had been going through a lot of stuff at work. And I was thinking, Oh, I was debating whether or not to go to the hospital. And I was thinking, No, I should go.

Mike Smith 5:45

And you know, when you have a stroke, your cognitive ability is impaired. And I remember getting dressed, and kept dropping everything. Like shoes, it took forever to get the shoes on.

Mike Smith 6:04

And then I made the decision to not call 911 but to drive myself to the hospital. No, don't do that. But I remember getting to the door. And I think the reason and I don't know why I thought this but the reason was, I had a very nosy neighbor.

Mike Smith 6:26

And I didn't want, if I called an ambulance, she would like snoop or find a reason to get into my apartment or something, I don't know why I was thinking that. But I got to the door, got dressed, got the keys, locked my door.

Mike Smith 6:48

And of course, you're taxing yourself, cognitively every time you're doing this. And also, there's the danger that you'll have another one. But I'm not thinking about that. Because to me, this is Bell's Palsy, it can't be anything other than that, I'm just gonna go find out what's wrong, they're gonna give me something I'm going to come home, I'm going to sleep it off.

Mike Smith 7:08

That's what I thought. And so I dropped the keys about five times trying to lock

the door, walked to my car, sat in the car and could not remember why I was there took probably about 10 more minutes to figure out what I was trying to do.

Mike Smith 7:24

And I was like, Oh, I'm going to the hospital drove. I know you're not supposed to do that I drove green lights the entire way. By the way, I was living in Amarillo, Texas at the time, green lights the entire way.

Mike Smith 7:42

Even got on the interstate and pulled into the hospital parking lot, which is where it's dangerous but also funny what happened next is that I got on my car and I realized that I was parked in a towaway zone. So I got back in my car and backed it up and re-parked in a place where I would not be towed away.

Mike Smith 8:09

I walked into the ER and I went to the front desk. By that time I just could not, the aphasia was setting in so it's like I could not say it, I could think it, I couldn't say it.

Mike Smith 8:21

And so at the front desk, the woman said Hi Sir, can we help you? And I just wanted to tell her, something's wrong with me. But I just kind of pointed to the side of my face and side of my arms went like that.

Mike Smith 8:37

She threw me into a wheelchair literally and said, sit down. She's like, do you have your information? I gave her my driver's license. And so she called back to the ER she's like, I got somebody coming back he's a 38 year old male. stroke symptoms, and I'm like stroke? No. And so that's when I guess the journey began. So yeah, that got us to where we are eventually today.

Bill Gasiamis 9:10

So what made you an expert on Bell's palsy again, how did you self-diagnose that?

Mike Smith 9:20

Well, okay, I had a friend who had a former coworker. I should mention I was in media at the time. So I was a reporter. When the stroke happened, I was a television producer. But before that I was a news reporter for about 13 years.

Mike Smith 9:37

And so just a very stressful environment. I have a friend who used to get this, it happened to her twice. whole time I worked with her and happened to her twice where her face just went numb. It was a stress reaction. I was like oh, that's what she had.

Bill Gasiamis 9:56

Yeah, perfectly reasonable. I get it.

Mike Smith 9:59

I mean you know, like, why go to medical school when you have co-workers who you've seen have stuff.

All The Dumb Things

Bill Gasiamis 10:05

Hello. And in like a minute, you know exactly what's going on. And your story is so familiar, I know there's people listening going, oh my god that was me, because that's exactly what I was doing.

Bill Gasiamis 10:18

I went into the ER, the second time I had a bleed, and I couldn't get the words out. The first time I had the bleed, I went in and told them, I'm all good, I just can't feel my entire left side.

Bill Gasiamis 10:33

And they did exactly what they did to you, straight into the scanners, or wherever they took us, you know, to get to the bottom of why this person is acting like this. And because I had three bleeds, I can appreciate all of the dumb things you did, including driving yourself, because I also did that.

Bill Gasiamis 10:53

I also did that, I also didn't know what I was doing. And then had to remember what I was doing and then get moving to the job at hand. So it's so common, but we minimize our problems when we are cognitively "normal".

Bill Gasiamis 11:18

When we're not having a stroke. So, you know, we get up, our foot hurts, we automatically assume we stepped on something or we walked incorrectly, or

that's my shoe or whatever. But when you're having a stroke, you're doing that normal stuff of minimizing everything, plus you're having a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 11:33

So it's near impossible to actually make a sound decision. Yet something was telling you. Even with all that uncertainty, and that "it's definitely Bell's palsy" was still getting you to the ER, you still got there. What was it? What was it that still made you go?

Mike Smith 11:56

I think, just knowing that they run in my family and my grandmother had passed away of one about this would have been five years before. And she and so I remember. I mean, she had one. And then in rehab had another sort of like a larger one.

Mike Smith 12:18

And I know that some of her siblings had them too. And I just remember, I don't know if it was maybe the facial droop that kind of made me go. Better safe than sorry. But it's like, I just know, it's Bell's Palsy.

Mike Smith 12:34

And part of it was just, I just had so much to do when I was just like, at that time that I was working on, like multiple projects at the time. And I was just like, there's no time for a stroke, like, No, we can't do this, not now.

Mike Smith 12:51

Right. So, and I think it was just kind of like a better safe than sorry, but I think there was just from the beginning when I saw my face when I heard myself talk. That was the other thing when I heard myself talk, and I was just like, this doesn't sound like me, something's wrong.

Mike Smith 13:09

And also I know when my coworker had Bell's palsy it did not affect her speech. So I think that was the thing that made me go just kind of go get looked at to see if it was something else.

Mike Smith 13:22

And I knew deep down I knew. I know what this is. But I guess I was just kind of trying to hold on to that. Pre-stroke normal of like, I'm just gonna go on they're

gonna give me something, I'll rest. They'll just tell me go sleep.

Bill Gasiamis 13:40

Yeah. So after the initial visit to the hospital, they admit you and how long have you in hospital for what do they do? What do they discover about your suit?

Mike Smith 13:53

That's another interesting story. So that was my first experience with telemedicine. So, this was 4:30 in the morning, I guess was the time I got to the hospital. And I was diagnosed as having a stroke from a doctor on a video camera from North Carolina.

Mike Smith 14:16

And they were having me talk to this guy, like move my mouth and I'm like, where is he? Why can't he come in here? They're like, well, he's not in the hospital. Like, where is he? And he's telling me he's like, well, can you smile? I'm just like, who are you? And he's like, yeah, it looks like a stroke and then they were like yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 14:43

That's so bizarre. Yeah, I get it. I had doctors all over me you know, push my arm, you know squeeze my arm.

Mike Smith 14:52

I had nurses that were doing it. They're like can you push. And they were looking kind of like they're trying to look at my face up close, like when I would talk and try to move and like, I would have to like, basically push this side of my face up. And so they knew, but they were like, We have to get it confirmed by him who was not there.

Cardiomyopathy And Stroke

Mike Smith 15:19

But I remember then they took me to the MRI. And that's where they confirmed where it happened. So there were there were confirmations. It took a while, I think I was in the hospital about two weeks with them trying to determine a cause of what happened. And what they eventually came up with was cardiomyopathy.

Mike Smith 15:48

So they could not figure out why, they said my cholesterol was okay, which

surprised me because my diet was not the best. My blood pressure was high, just because no rest and I was overweight, you know, just stress and things like that. And it had been kind of creeping up. I never had problems with blood pressure until maybe like about five years before.

Mike Smith 16:10

And so I knew that had been creeping up. So that didn't surprise me. But they were like, we still can't figure out like, what exactly is going on with your heart. So the ER doctors kept saying your heart is so weak, we don't know why it's so weak.

Mike Smith 16:26

And so more testing, and I mean, they did the stress test where they didn't want me to run. So it was like you just kind of lay there and they inject you with something that I can't describe it. But it basically makes you feel like you're gonna blow up. It is the most uncomfortable feeling.

Mike Smith 16:50

And they didn't stress tests like that they did the esophageal forgot what it's called.

Bill Gasiamis 17:02

While you were awake.

Mike Smith 17:04

Yeah, I mean, they did it, they put me under for it. So I was very groggy when it happened. So like, I remember seeing everybody in the room like around me, but I don't remember feeling anything. And so afterward, it hurt my throat hurt for a long time. They did that, they're trying to find like they're trying to look behind my heart to see like, if there's something back there we can't see.

Mike Smith 17:32

And so what it was was cardiomyopathy and enlarged left ventricle, and so that weaken the wall. And so my pumping strength was low. And so what's been determined, or what was told to me was that you have something called your ejection fraction, which is how strong your heart pumps.

Mike Smith 17:52

And that's the amount of blood that leaves your heart pumps throughout your

body. And it's supposed to be around 50% to 60% for regular healthy adult, the morning of the stroke, I was at 12. And so they basically said there was blood clotting in your heart. And so a piece of that clot broke off and caused the stroke.

Mike Smith 18:16

So if you had not had the stroke, then you wouldn't have known about the heart and you probably just wouldn't have awakened one day and we would have been like what happened? He died in his sleep. So you think about it that way. It's like, oh, gosh, it's like, this thing. altered my life in so many ways actually warned me about something else that was going to be even worse.

Bill Gasiamis 18:45

Yeah. I've nearly done 200 episodes of this podcast. So many different ways to experience a stroke. It is ridiculous how many ways?

Mike Smith 18:57

And yeah, because and I'm sorry to interrupt you. When the doctor was telling me you've had a stroke. I was thinking like, oh, but my left side was fine. Because you're always told you're gonna get that paralysis on the left side, or something or that's what I was always told. This side. I didn't know it was the right side. They're like no, stroke effects, depends on where it happens in your brain.

Bill Gasiamis 19:23

Yeah. It just boggles my mind every time I hear a new way that somebody has had a stroke. And this is another one and it's kind of insane and intense. And it just goes to show how many things can go wrong in the body. The great thing about your situation was that at least it revealed the issue behind it and then you're able to attend to that issue and then recover from the stroke but also attend to the cause behind that which is great.

Bill Gasiamis 19:57

But scary I imagine and at 38. I was 37. So, I did a lot of the, oh, you know, what does it mean for my life and mortality and all that kind of stuff? My kids and the rest of it? What's your family situation like? And did you do all of it the whole, oh my god, I could be dead and all that stuff?

Mike Smith 20:26

Well, I'm single I was living about my nearest family members were my parents, they were about 910 hours away by car. So they had to drive up when it

happened. And so when I was sitting, when I was actually sitting in the ER, waiting for the MRI, after the doctor on the weird little camera thing screen told me that I had a stroke.

Why Did This Happen? - Mike Smith

Mike Smith 20:52

I remember saying to myself, so why did this happen? Why did this happen? And so I kept thinking about my speech. And I was thinking I was a television producer at the time, I was like, What am I going to do? Because that is nothing but talking, interviewing people. I'm filming, I'm moving camera equipment around, I no longer carry heavy stuff. What does that mean? Like, I can't sit at a computer bay and edit, like, what does it mean?

Mike Smith 21:25

What am I gonna do and I was thinking like, you know, what can I do? Am I going to have to go like live in like a home or go home? It was just like, you're thinking, you know, as someone I like to tell people, and I'm not heavy into astrology, but I do think there are characteristics with their zodiac sign.

Mike Smith 21:49

I'm a Virgo, and so I'm that person that's got life planned out for the next 35 years. This was not in it. So now it's like, I gotta recalibrate, and recalculate and rearrange and go, so what does this mean now? And then am I gonna get my speech back? Which I didn't know at the time if I was or not. And it's just like, what do you do? What do you do? And I think it just was kind of a feeling of this is the kind of stuff you expected to think about when you're 68, not 38.

Bill Gasiamis 22:34

Yeah. And it's interesting, the thing that you said about planning your life out and looking forward, and none of us plan or expect something bad to go wrong with regards to ill health or anything. And I've even met stroke survivors, which I've coached through through the the inability to totally accept the fact that something happened to them in their 40s.

Bill Gasiamis 23:03

And as a result of that, you know, that's almost worse than the actual stroke itself. It's because now I can't get them to shift from experiencing the emotions that

“stroke happened to me”. Why, like, “to me” it’s like, Who are you where stroke shouldn’t happen to you? I’m not saying that we want it to happen, but it’s like, what you’re immune from life? Or you’re immune from life experiences? Because you had this plan that didn’t involve being unwell.

Bill Gasiamis 23:37

And that’s the real interesting thing. I never went there personally. I was just floored that it happened. But I never went to I never went to no hang on a sec, you know, like I’m a bad person and this happened to me for a bad reason or I’m getting paid back for so I never did any of that stuff. And I also never did the whole the feeling sorry for myself but I did do the why me and my why me was not about the why why did it happen to me it’s like what can I learn from this?

Bill Gasiamis 24:15

What’s the purpose of it? What am I supposed to learn from it? Did you do that part of it? Or was the why me the negative version of it which was feeling sorry for yourself and trying to automate somehow? You know, be feel like it should never happen to you because your’re Mike?

Mike Smith 24:38

Yeah. Well, the why me for me, the negative part, I will say was the strong negative part was very brief, because it was that time. Those initial days in the hospital, I will tell you that first day in the hospital, it took them a while to calm me down because just the overwhelming rush of all those thoughts of what happens next am I going to be able to talk can’t communicate really with the nurses to tell them what I need.

Mike Smith 25:08

And so that manifests itself as just uncontrollable crying for probably about five hours and they had to come in and just be like, you need to calm down, because they were like your blood pressure’s still off the charts. And they’re like, We don’t want you to have another one. But they got me to rest and to sleep. And I want to say I took like a short nap. And a friend came by who was in town, who happened to know my parents, and she came to my bedside.

Mike Smith 25:45

And when I woke up, I was just kind of like, okay, and she just spoke, we didn’t talk, but she just kind of talked to me about like, you know, hey, you know, we’re

here and this and that. But the long-term negative for me was almost a survivor's guilt, I guess is the way I could describe it of my deficits, like when I meet people today and tell them I had a stroke, they're like, what?

Mike Smith 26:16

I noticed that I certainly live with what the stroke, basically warned me of which is the heart condition. But you know, I'm able to talk to you now, normally, you may notice that when I talk, sometimes I switch pronouns, which is weird I'm talking about he/she that kind of thing. But that's about the only thing that's left from that.

Mike Smith Survivor's Guilt

Mike Smith 26:43

But I've met other people my age and older who've had, what I would term would be similar size strokes as me who are using canes and things like that. It's just like, there's a feeling of I came out of this, okay. Why didn't that person who I met, come out of it with the same thing? And there's a feeling of kind of like, how am I okay, andd they're not? Does that make sense?

Bill Gasiamis 27:21

It makes complete sense. I was in therapy about that.

Mike Smith 27:25

Yeah. That's the thing that still kind of bothers me today, when I meet stroke survivors. And I see them like with visible obvious deficits, and I'm just like, it's almost like you don't want to tell them you had one too.

Bill Gasiamis 27:43

Yeah, they look at you, and you look at them, and they look at you and you go. And then they might be feeling bad about their situation. And they're comparing themselves to you, or they might be doing the why me? Why did I get this bad. And they only got it that bad. And they're not trying to be negative towards us.

Bill Gasiamis 28:02

But I get it. And I think the survivor's guilt I got over it. When I started to become proactive about raising awareness for stroke survivors, raising awareness for myself, interviewing people and putting their stories out there, coaching people that were going through that, I think that's when I got over it, I got over it in that

situation, but I absolutely hate it when I find people have had a stroke, and their life is altered and it's unrecognizable from what it was.

Bill Gasiamis 28:38

Now to them, though, what I say is, regardless of that, I still believe in you, I still have faith that you'll be able to get back to life. And that you'll be able to adjust and find a new way to live your life and still have a fulfilling life and make a difference. And be a great example. And when you die, you'll be able to look back and go. No regrets. And I've I've moved on so. So I'm over the why me the guilt part of it. And I've just turned it into okay, how can I use my situation to make life better for other people? And I never did that before. I was never that kind of guy. So that's maybe why me.

Mike Smith 29:26

You slow down a bit and you take you take time to look around and go oh, wait, what am I? What's my place here? What am I doing? What's my intention? And I tell people about a year ago I started kind of referring to poststroke is like version 2.0. So it's like I'm not gonna be that person I was before. Physically I'm certainly not. There's things that I can't do that I could do.

Mike Smith 29:57

But you do look at it and say, Okay. Let me make the best of this time I have here. I think there's more of a view. I mean, if you've had a stroke or any kind of traumatic event like that, you come close to death. I mean, what could have happened to me in that drive to the hospital? You know, it's, I could have had another one. And we would have never known why I ran off the road. So it's like, you know, when I think of that, and it's like.

Intro 30:30

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 actually recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, and doctors will explain things that obviously, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery.

Intro 31:00

If you're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you it's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke. 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.

Mike Smith 31:30

Think about how close I came I think of what the stroke warned me of. So now there's this condition that it can be controlled with medication and diet and exercise. But it's almost like the stroke told me, Hey, you got this thing that you kind of need to handle live your life, but just know you got this thing that you kind of have to handle. And it gives you a different perspective.

Stop And Smell The Roses Despite Cardiomyopathy And Stroke

Mike Smith 32:00

I always tell people like I stop and in America, we say smell the roses. Sounds like you take time to look around. And I think it took about a year of just kind of introspection and things after the stroke to finally kind of say to myself, you know, I never before until now took the time to realize what I have in my life.

Mike Smith 32:34

So it's like, as I was working, working, working constantly, where I was a workaholic before the stroke happened. I used to pride myself on never going on vacation. And it's like, I look back and I go, why? why? why? And I look at what that was doing to my physical health, also to my mental health, you know, as being a reporter. There's no glory in that.

Mike Smith 33:01

If you don't stop and take time and take care of yourself and look around and just take a moment to breathe and just look around and say, Hey, I've got this around me. I've accomplished this, why not just savor that for a moment before going on to this next thing? I never was that person before. Now I am I always preach to people my age about going to the doctor because I never really did before this happened.

Mike Smith 33:29

And that's probably why this you know, I always think to myself, like I had a dad I started taking blood pressure medication would I even be in a situation, that kind of thing. So I always tell people my age, go to the doctor, you're never too young. I always also tell them especially younger people. It's like, you know, you get vacation time at work.

Mike Smith 33:51

You need to take it it is for you. Is there you got to utilize it. Just take that different perspective and look at life as a different way. Now I'm just trying all kinds of stuff that I never would have tried before. I never would have had the guts to do like a change careers and everything. It's certainly been interesting. It'll be five years in November.

Bill Gasiamis 34:17

You know, reporters are the ultimate bullshit artists. Regardless, I mean, and I'm not doing the political version. Like, I'm not doing the Donald Trump fake news guy kind of stuff. Because they get on camera and pretend that everything is perfect, and all they have to do is deliver the story, the story, the story, the story, and I met a reporter who did an article on me her name was Emily Rice and she's the health reporter or some kind of reporter in Australia on one of the major network news.

Bill Gasiamis 35:05

And, they were talking about how there was an article that came out that showed the risk of stroke increases dramatically for people that work more than 50 hours a week, and I was one of those people. And washers interviewing me, she realized that she's one of those people. And you could tell that the coin's dropping, she's talking about how my 50, 60, 70 hour a week work week contributed to my stroke, and she's going and doing the numbers. And she's realizing that she's one of those people.

Bill Gasiamis 35:49

And that was interesting to see that coin drop in her head, and then how she just put on the bullshit artists face again. And she went straight back to the camera, and she delivered her story. And then she sent me a clip of it and everything. And then it was like, and God knows what time she started that day. And God knows what time she did her last feed, and last cross and last, you know, drop of a story.

Bill Gasiamis 36:16

And it's like, wow. And then, because it's something that you do at work, then I feel like sometimes that's when work can creep into your real life. And then take habits from work into your real life. And then you're doing the same things, not realizing that it's just infiltrated your real life. And there's no separation between the you at work who is meant to put on a show for a camera. And then the you at home who is supposed to let that go for a little bit.

Mike Smith 36:52

Yeah. And, I was in print journalism at first newspaper, which it's all the same, it's all those hours and just I can't even. There are some times I remember not even really like sleeping, maybe like two hours, I mean, just getting by and when you're doing it for years, that just adds up when you just think about what that's doing just internally to your organs and your brain chemistry, everything like just.

Mike Smith 37:26

But like you mentioned about work life separation again. I was that person, but before the stroke when people talked about things like wellness, I would laugh, I'd be like, wellness, like, what is that? Like, you know, you sit in the room and meditate and go, like, people talk about meditation? Are you kidding me? Like what? But now I understand that it can be so many different things, meditation could just be doing something that you love for a while that is not work or not something that you're obligated to do.

Mike Smith 38:00

And so for me my meditation is in certain hobbies. So I've always loved languages, and so I'm picking up different ones. Since the stroke I'm learning Portuguese currently I've learned German, I already speak Spanish. So it's just become a hobby. And to me, that is fun. It's not stressful. Interestingly enough, some people would find grammar practice in another language be very boring.

Mike Smith 38:36

I find it very interesting because it's almost like a an equation in a way when you're putting together sentences, with a new language, but about work-life separation. That is something that I am a huge proponent of now. And I always mentioned even to my bosses like and to coworkers and sometimes I don't understand this, but I tell them so when you're a reporter, or when I was a reporter, when you work that many hours, who do your friends tend to be? The

people you work with, right?

Mike Smith 39:15

So when you're not on the job, what are you doing? What are you talking about? The job, right? So then it becomes everything is just meshed into your there's there's no separation, there's no delineation between. Work Life, home life. What I do now, is I do not hang out with people that I work with. I tell them that all the time. They don't get you know, you're getting drinks after work.

Mike Smith 39:47

That's great. Have fun. I don't do and it's not always telling us not personal. It's just that there is a space and a time that we're together. And then there's a space and a time that I need to have for myself. And so if there's, if we're together 40 hours a week, if there's something that you couldn't figure out that you needed to tell me in 40 hours, wait till the next 40 hours, because I'm gonna spend the weekend with you. It's not personal. It's just that work is work. Life is life.

Bill Gasiamis 40:21

It sounds like you have an identity outside of work. One of them is a work identity, you do those things at work. And then when I leave work, I have my, my true ID, well, not my true identity, the other part of my identity, which is not work-related, which is filling in my cup, which is not draining my cup.

Mike Smith 40:40

Exactly, so it's almost like, I mentioned a career change, I'm now a teacher. And I always say I always try to make sure that grades are done. Whatever is school-related is done at school. I rarely, rarely ever, unless I have to have to bring work home. And so that was a big challenge during the pandemic, when we were teaching from home, because now it's like, those spaces are now like this, my classroom is now on a table in the corner of my living. So now that we're back, I can do more of the separation.

Mike Smith 41:21

Just yeah, yeah. So. But even then, when we're doing that at home, it was, I made sure that all of the school-related stuff that I did was at that table in that corner, I didn't take it to the couch, I didn't take it to the bed, you know, anything like that. I just kept it in that spot. So that was the teaching quarter, everything else happened somewhere else.

Mike Smith 41:46

So just finding ways to keep those things separate, because you have to have a period where you just recharge, and you're not constantly dealing with something that, you know, a lot of people always say, you know, I love my job, I love my job. I love my job, too. It can be very stressful. So why am I going to invite that stress into my life? 24 hours a day. Just not realistic.

You're More Than Your Job

Bill Gasiamis 42:11

Yeah, you're more than your job. And it's scary when somebody only identifies as their job. And when you hear a lot of people that have had a stroke, their identity gets hammered, initially very, very abruptly. And the people that it gets hammered with the most are the ones who if you ask them, you know, who are you? Or what are you do they say I'm a reporter. And that's about it.

Bill Gasiamis 42:37

And they don't say, I also enjoy the football or the baseball, or growing flowers or whatever, they don't have any of those things. And it's like, Well, no wonder you cup, such a hit, when the stroke took your ability to speak or your the stroke took your ability to walk, because you only ever identified as the thing you did. Not the other ways that you occupied your mind.

Bill Gasiamis 43:05

And you've got to then try and reintroduce and bring back into their lives, you've got to bring back those things that they used to do before their job became all-encompassing. And I think it's, and I'm not sure what it's like as being a reporter. But I think it's not true that everybody's job requires them to work 1214 16 hours, I think if it does, it's a the, the not the right job for you and your employer is a terrible employer. B You're not efficient enough, you're working inefficiently and you don't know how to do your eight hours of work in 8 hours, you're doing it in 16.

Bill Gasiamis 43:54

I'm only getting paid for eight.

Bill Gasiamis 43:56

And potentially, you're also you're also because you don't have those other things

to do in your life. You're filling that empty space with work. And you think it's because your boss is making you or you think it's because the workload is too much. So it's a big conversation to have because there's no point working to your grave and then not having a life you're supposed to work to have a life to experience these other things that money supposedly makes possible. Otherwise. What's the point of it?

Mike Smith 44:37

Yeah, it's like you it's almost it's like a cycle just a never-ending cycle. I noticed with me, it's like I would bury myself in my work because I would figure I have nothing else to do. So let me think about work. And so then it becomes I'm constantly thinking of work. And then, it takes something like a stroke unfortunately to make you go, gosh, look at all the time I wasted.

Mike Smith 45:04

You know. And then like as a reporter, we used to tell ourselves like to be ethical about things like you don't get involved in things in the community. So there's that extra layer of like, this is all you do. If you want to go do something else than go fish in the middle of a lake somewhere, you can't like get involved with people. And you know, it's a remain objective.

Mike Smith 45:26

That's what we would always tell ourselves. And so it was just kind of this is a very lonely world. And I mean, I spent 15 years and it, and since I've gotten out of it, I mean, like, I always tell people I went into teaching, they're like, isn't that more stressful? I'm just like, No, it's like, I have 150 kids, that I don't have to take home. schooling, I get to send them home to somebody else.

Mike Smith 45:59

Like, I get them for just, you know, 85 minutes a day, you know, that kind of thing. So it's like, that's, that's the perfect thing, because they keep you young, they keep you honest, I teach middle school. And it's just kind of like. There's a never ending variety, to what happens in a day. Every day is never the same as the day before. And it's like, I and I was telling a coworkers like, it's interesting. It's like, this is the job that I always wanted. I thought reporting would be it. But reporting grew to be so routine, and so stressfully routine, and it just was not fun anymore. This is fun, what I do now.

Bill Gasiamis 46:48

And yeah, it sounds like it's serving your purpose a little bit more. Do you have more opportunity to feel like you're making a difference, because you're teaching children and they're taking that those lessons into their life, and then that's going to impact society in a positive way, and them in a positive way. And all that type of thing? Is that part of it?

Mike Smith 47:12

That's part of it. Always the first day of school, I always tell them the story of my stroke. And I tell them, what happened to me. And I always tell them that story, you know, not to say, for no other reason than to say, the brain is a very powerful, interesting thing. I have watched it happen, I'm still watching it happen, the recovery from this. But also, I know that you're never going to tell me that you can't do something.

Mike Smith 47:45

Because I can tell you kind of what your brain can do. I'm kind of experiencing it. So don't tell me, you know, I can't do this, I can't do that. Like maybe you need to do it a different way. Maybe the way I'm teaching yours, not something that you're used to or something that works for you. But we can find a way to do it. Because of your brain, it's possible.

Bill Gasiamis 48:10

And that's why you needed to hear when you are a reporter going through all of the tough times of reporting 24-hours a day, 7-days-a-week by the sound of it is Mike is reporting emotionally taxing? Because my idea of a reporter is somebody who is the bearer of bad news, the majority of the time, that's kind of how I see the national news in the evenings.

Bill Gasiamis 48:35

And the people that report, they come to work to report something. But the media landscape is about reporting bad events most of the time. And that's why I can't tune in and watch that type of stuff. Is that how you see? Is that accurate? Am I right or wrong?

Mike Smith 49:00

Well, I would always tell people, there was an appetite for the bad news. I wouldn't say that, you know, it's like if everything was puppies and rainbows

people wouldn't tune in or read. But out of all the things that, you know, we knew that we had to report, think about all the stuff that like you couldn't say that you knew off the record or things that you saw that maybe you couldn't print in a paper because it would be appropriate that kind of stuff.

Mike Smith 49:32

So all of that just kind of loads on your brain of just kind of like, Ooh, there's all this stuff I can't say. And then I have to sanitize it to say it in a way that is appropriate. To me that was always the tricky part of like, I gotta say this, but I can't slant it. I have to say it but I gotta use words in a way that you know, tell you what happened without making it, skewing it. That was always tough.

The Importance of Counseling After Cardiomyopathy And Stroke

Bill Gasiamis 50:05

Police officers at least in Australia, I know police officers get the opportunity to debrief and to get some counseling about something that they've seen. Same with paramedics and other first responders like, firefighters, you guys get the opportunity to do that? Because you see the same stuff they see.

Mike Smith 50:27

We didn't, and I think that that has changed, because, again, I've been out of reporting for about five years. But I was just talking yesterday with a friend of mine, who was a TV news reporter in San Antonio, Texas. And you've heard about what happened in Uvalde, Texas school. So she had been covering that. And I sent her a message just last night saying, Hey, how are you doing?

Mike Smith 50:54

Because I remember those days when it's like it's just wall to wall coverage, having to talk to people who are grieving in trying not to grieve with them, because you have to remain the objectionable viewer, the whole thing is like, and that's tough. I said, How are y'all doing? And she told me that their new station brought in counselors for the reporters. I said, What?

Mike Smith 51:18

Like that is huge, because even five years ago that probably maybe 10 years ago, certainly, that was not happening. And so she was saying that, Oh, yeah, she's

like, you know, at the end of the day, you can go in and talk to a counselor, it's confidential, about just kind of what's going on sort of like a debrief and a destress and I said, Oh, wow, that's amazing.

Mike Smith 51:41

So I know now with the focus on just kind of wellness and things like the thing I used to laugh about with wellness, but people realize now that that's important, especially in that profession, because you're right, police officers do get to debrief and paramedics get to debrief. And as a reporter, you do see things that, you know, you see the same things they see.

Mike Smith 52:05

But thing about reporting is that you got to move on to the next thing, and it just never ends never ends. And so but my friend was telling me, at least at her new station in San Antonio, that they have counselors, or the stations running counselors on staff to talk with them at the end of the day when they do these horrible stories and have to come back and then sort of reintegrate into their world. So not to take it with them.

Bill Gasiamis 52:39

So now have you sought out some counselors? And have you done that kind of work to help you move through the phases of stroke and recovery and your heart issue?

Mike Smith 52:52

I've always said I want to, I have not yet. And I don't know why I know it would be good to.

Bill Gasiamis 53:03

What's stopping you?

Mike Smith 53:04

I don't know, it's like a part of me is like, I think I've found ways to help me deal with it, although it's not going to be permanent. And, for example, I do still have just kind of occasional periods where it's like, I think about what's going on, especially, like, I might go to get a doctor's checkup, and maybe like, things aren't progressing. Like I thought, and I'll go into like, maybe like, a couple of days, just like, dang it. Those are the only times where I just kind of go like, what is the future?

Bill Gasiamis 53:47

That's the perfect time to have someone to talk to.

Mike Smith 53:49

That's what a friend of mine told me just like, he talked to somebody, I'm like, I think I'm fine. And I mean, you can't walk around like think you're fine all the time. Usually, when you think you're fine, you're not. I don't know but it's like, it's not stigma, and I'm always telling other people to go.

Bill Gasiamis 54:15

You got to practice what you preach.

Mike Smith 54:17

I do I do.

Bill Gasiamis 54:20

I do get it. They I'm not judging them. By all means. You totally know I'm not judging you, right? But the thing is about what we do, what I do this for is to just bring light to these reasons. These silly things that we don't do that we're supposed to do, and to make at least some other listeners feel not the only ones who are making the same decisions that we made, you know, the same silly decisions that we made, you know, just to take away a little bit of the guilt about all these decisions, right?

Bill Gasiamis 54:52

And then, maybe this is enough to jog your memory next time to go, you know what, these next two or three days Maybe I'm gonna go and chat to somebody about it. So that I can have a different perspective. And so that I'm not doing it alone. And that that's kind of what helps me I came from counseling before I jumped on this call. I've been in counseling for 25 years, nearly, you know.

Bill Gasiamis 55:19

And I didn't do it because I thought there was something wrong with me or I was crazy or anything like that, I did it because I needed another voice, another person's perspective, to help me get beyond my own limitations in my own mind, which used to be the things that caused me to stay stuck in a situation I didn't like for a long time. Okay? And it helps to unstick me from those situations.

Bill Gasiamis 55:53

And instead of being there for a long time, I'm only there for a short time, and therefore I don't waste a lot of time. So that's why it's, that's why I do it. And it's like, interesting, because the people that you go and speak to they don't judge you either. They just give you options and things that you couldn't see yourself as being options, because you don't know what you don't know.

Mike Smith 56:22

When did you first go? Like, how soon after?

Bill Gasiamis 56:27

My first step stay in hospital was seven days, I reckon. Three days after coming out of hospital, I was in counseling. Okay. And that was 10 years ago, that was in 2012. But I had been in counseling already from probably the age of 25. So another 12 years before that. And not every week, and not all the time. Sometimes it was just random. And sometimes it was back to back in that I had regular appointments so that I could keep up a little momentum.

Bill Gasiamis 57:07

And then when I felt like I was in control of things a little bit or managing, I would just do the odd session here or there. And by the time my counselor died a couple of years ago, I remember one of the last conversations we had, she said to me, How long have you been seeing me and I said, you know, I've been seeing you for probably more than 20 years. And she was stunned.

Bill Gasiamis 57:35

And I was stunned when I even said that. But we had gotten to the point where she intimately knew me and I and I intimately knew her style. And I needed her style, I needed to go there, because I knew that she would have my back no matter what. And I was never, there was never an emotional conversation like you have with family sometimes where they go, Well, you just need to go and put your socks up, or you just need to go into this or you just need to do that.

Bill Gasiamis 58:05

It was never about that. It was always about listening to me, guiding me supporting me encouraging me. And then giving me a different point of view. Which I needed. Because even though she was my counselor for 20 years, she was still a stranger. Our relationship never crossed over into anything else. It was always counseling, and professionalism. So, you know, when you go to back to a

significant other, and you have a conversation with them about that problem at work, they give you solutions, and you don't want them? That's why I go to counseling is to not get solutions. It's just to get listened to in a way that's completely not telling me or not judging me or not solving my problems for me, you know?

Mike Smith 59:04

Do you feel you can say things to your counselor that maybe you couldn't say to like, a spouse or parent.

Bill Gasiamis 59:14

Oh, yeah. So many things.

Mike Smith 59:16

Okay. And it's all confidential.

Bill Gasiamis 59:20

Yeah. And I talked to my counselor about the people that I love in ways that I would never tell the people that I love those things. I would never speak to them that way because, it's in the heat of the moment. And, it's nasty and rude and mean, perhaps, and they don't deserve it, even though they're part of the problem sometimes. And it's a way for me to unload without ruining my relationships. And without always feeling like I am the one who's right because one of the best things that ever happened to me was, I would go to my counselor after about five or six years of her getting to know me and me getting to know her.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:09

And I would tell her about all the problems that everyone else was causing me, you know, everybody was causing me all these problems. And then one day, she said, Is there a possibility that you're the problem? And I'll be blunt, I told her to get fucked. That's what I said to her, that's an Australian way. And I said it in a loving way to her like we had rapport, right? So I said it to her in a way, which was like, how could you possibly say that I'm the one at fault. And she just sat there. And she just listened. And she smiled. And then I walked away and paid her abruptly and, you know, stormed off. And then our next session, I said to her, I think you might have a point there, you know. I thought about it over the last two weeks, you might have a point.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:10

That's all so it's basically, you know, for me, it was that very kind of unattached conversation. There was no emotion. I mean, she was a lovely emotional lady, but there was no emotion attached to the situation. So it was just very clear, philosophical, psychological conversation, you know, about the actual problem. And there's no complication by bringing in my emotional attachment to the situation. Because she's an outsider, she's not in my family.

Psychological Breakthroughs - Mike Smith

Mike Smith 1:01:55

But do you feel that there's like, I mean, I guess it's the term breakthroughs, like when you have like, do you feel that those would come about, how long do you think it would take for those to come about without a therapist or would they?

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:13

They may not, because the therapist brings you into an awareness of something that you didn't know, you needed to know? And one of those things that I didn't know, that I needed to know was that I was the common denominator to all these issues, I didn't know that I needed to know that. Now, she had the rapport with me to break me down in a way and tell me that just at the right time, knowing that I might react negatively initially.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:53

But negatively in a way that was from being blindsided by this information that I never thought was possible I'm the problem. And then once she lay that on me, and I had two weeks to think about it. And then that breakthrough happened, the Coin Drop, and then I was like, Oh, wow, like, the one thing in common in all these arguments and problems is me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:31

And then it's about Okay, now that I accepted that after that next session, it was like, okay, so how can we move you, beyond anger, beyond feeling victimized all the time and beyond getting emotional all the time, about things that perhaps are not things that should make you emotional and angry? And what I started to do then was learn, okay, so if I'm AB reacting What do I need to know about the other person to calm me down when they say something that I didn't like?

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:10

And what I needed to know about the other person was that they probably had a bad day. They're doing the best they can with the resources that they have available to them. That they are just human, that they have fears and stresses and anxieties and worries, that they are not being personal. They're not taking it out on me personally. They are just also lacking resources to know how to respond properly.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:38

So basically, what that did, is that mirrored to me that those people are going through the same problems and challenges that I'm going through. And when I'm reacting negatively, I'm not doing it on purpose. To give that person a hard time I'm doing it like I'm doing that because I am lacking resources I need to learn more skills to handle all my challenges in life.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:04

And then I was able to go, Okay, so there's probably a couple of courses that I need to pick up and do. One was, for example, in emotional intelligence course. And learn what about that is, the other one was about how to alter my mindset from being a negative mindset to a positive mindset. The other one was to understand how sleep makes me cranky, and less able to process difficult situations and how I needed to go to bed earlier and sooner and do more sleep and do less 17 hour work days, you know, I needed to learn about meditation, for example.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:48

So I did a course about that and learn what it was and how it was useful to me. And she used to give me ideas about things that I could learn that would start to help fill my cup instead of feel like my cup was being drained by everybody else, and that they were the cause. And then it also made me feel like I was part of the loop that was causing those negative conversations.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:15

And if I change myself, how, how does that change the conversation with my brother or my mom, or my dad. And one of the biggest challenges I had was the conversations I was having with my brother, because I was the youngest. And he was the oldest. And we had the teenage thing. And the thing we did when we used to grow up when we were growing up together.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:41

And instead of moving into adulthood, and becoming different individuals and different adults, we still played the, you're the younger brother, routine. And you can't say that to me as the older brother, you know, and you'd have no respect for me and all that kind of junk. And, I realized that what I needed was more resources to start being adults. And move our relationship from being brothers that were bickering and fighting all the time, who loved each other, to being adults.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:14

And having an adult relationship as brothers, not a teenage relationship as brothers in my 20s and my 30s, you know. So that's what it is, it's kind of bringing light and awareness on to a situation where I simply do not have the skills. I'm not knowledgeable enough, I'm not resourced enough, I have not studied enough. And I haven't done enough introspective work to say what my flaws are. So I can improve them. And I'm bringing somebody else in to shine a light, lovingly and gently without judging me. And that has my permission.

Mike Smith 1:07:54

An objectionable person because a family member is going to be biased.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:00

And they don't have permission. So that's, that's why I would encourage everybody to see a counselor because that's the role they play. And you know, what? It's so lovely when you build, because now I have another counselor, unfortunately, after my counselor passed away, and amazingly, in her 80s, 83 At work, not good for the person who she died while in practice with. But she was living her purpose.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:35

And she was a great example of how to live your life. And that her work was never done, even though she wasn't working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, she chose the hours and the time that she would spend counseling people. And now that I have another counselor, I go there with the same needs in mind, but they are different because I have built up 20 years of skills and now I'm learning the skills that I need as a 48-year-old that I'm going to need for when I'm 58 and 68 and so on so on. Still building and building the toolbox.

Mike Smith 1:09:25

Doctors asked me if I needed someone and I think I can't remember what I told them last time. I was just like, Oh, no. But I mean, I I've been meaning to that's the thing and when other people tell me that they're going I'm just like, Oh, that's good. That's good. I don't go in there are things I mean, like I said, I tell people I'm fine, but it's like I know in my in just kind of like my private thoughts, it's like, I never come to the realizations like, you know, may not live to be 85 or 80 or 75.

Mike Smith 1:10:11

You know, it's like, how many years do I have? You know, and I know that that's something I need to kind of talk with someone about. The people who I would normally talk to about it are going to, like you said, approach it, you know, if you're, if you know them, they're going to approach it in sort of a biased way of just kind of Oh, and I mean, that's good. But I mean, you need somebody to kind of, you know, am I being ridiculous about this? Or is there something else that's causing me to feel this way? I'll have to do it this summer, I'll have to do it. I have to do it. A good

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:53

A good counselor is like a good teacher. Actually. That's what, okay, and they're teaching you about things, just like you're teaching children about things they don't know, they need to know.

Mike Smith 1:11:03

See, and I'm having to do and maybe that's why, because you wonder, like, do counselors have counseling? It's like, I'm, I do that on a daily basis. Like, I mean, like teaching middle schoolers, and I'm moving up to high school next year. So like, it's, oh, my goodness, like, that age group is drama, drama, drama, like all the time. And it's like you're giving them like life lessons about, you know, my biggest thing was, late work, like, I would always tell them, I taught American history, so it's like, I don't expect you to remember what happened at the Battle of Saratoga.

Mike Smith 1:11:47

But I do expect you to remember that it was due the assignment was due on March, whatever. So it's like, that's when you turn it in. And you know, and if you want to say why just understand that deadlines are life. Like, I come from a world of deadlines, where you know, I had to meet them every day, you will have to beat

them every day.

Mike Smith 1:12:07

Also, I you know, it's like, just, I think the example I gave was, tell your parents to tell the power company that, you know, I'll get that bill to you like, sometime, in a couple of months, see if you have lights, or I'll pay that car note in October, see if you have a car, it's like, these are things that are real life things. And it's like you I think we spend so much time as teachers kind of doing that. That I think it's like, like you said, it's like we're the counselors. It's like, you don't realize that you also need counseling.

Counselors Having Counselors

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:50

As a coach, as somebody who coaches, people, stroke survivors to get beyond the challenges that stroke causes. I mean, I'm a better coach, if I'm also being coached and counseled. So think about, if you allow me to be your coach for 30 seconds, what I'd say to you is, think about that thing. That's the problem that you have that's been bugging you for five years. And if you don't address it, ever, whether it's just going to go away, and in 20 years, it's not going to be there or not? It'll be there.

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:28

But if you have the tendency to not do anything about all of those little problems, for the next 20 years, they'll all be sitting there waiting for you and never addressed. And then in 20 years, it's kind of becoming a point of, now I'm overwhelmed. Which one do I start with? And the most important one that's causing you the most grief might be not getting dealt with, because you have to get through all of these other ones first, and you don't realize that they're in the way.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:03

So what I hope I've done is as I get to a new problem in life, I hope that I've dealt with and put to bed all the ones that have plagued me up until now. So the when the new one comes on board, which because we know that something's always going to come on board, I've already dealt with all those other ones and I can just focus on that one challenge and just overcome it.

Mike Smith 1:14:26

So like clearing, like, cleaning out.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:31

That's it. Yeah. And then, you go into work, and you're a better teacher, and you're a better example, and you're a better role model. And you're a better person to yourself and to your family and to everybody. And it's not that you become perfect because apparently if you ask my wife it's just that you stop becoming overwhelmed by all the stuff, and you have energy to focus into the one thing, because you have that clearing that's been happening and now and now. And now you've got, and also you learn the skill of how to clear and you get better at it. And you let go of things sooner, and you put them to rest quicker.

Mike Smith 1:15:25

That tendency to hold on to stuff, and then it's like, you'll think about something and be like, Oh, I remember when they said that. That happened to me the other day. And I was just like, God that was 1999. Like why am I still thinking about that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:15:44

I was so good at arguing with my wife, I could argue with her for two weeks about something. But when the two-week period came around, I didn't know what the original argument started from. And now, I've told her my aim is when we have an argument, it's to end it within a couple of hours. And not drag it out for two weeks where I don't even remember what it was about, I just got good at arguing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:16

And that has saved me. We argue about lots of things, right? But that has saved me so many weeks of being shitty and upset and angry at her for no bloody reason. When she's amazing, and she doesn't deserve for me to be upset with her and angry at her for two weeks for no reason. And over something that's minor. And that's kind of what I've done is, I go back, I take out my frustrations in counseling in a constructive way where I'm getting great feedback.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:51

And I'm being told, is it you Bill? Is it maybe you Bill? Is it maybe you? And I noticed it is me, it's her too, but it's also me. And I can only take responsibility for my actions, I can't take responsibility for hers. But when I give her an example of

how to take responsibility for your own actions, I create the space for her to also step up and take responsibility for her actions, you know? And then that reduces the significance of that whole situation.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:20

So what I do is I say, look, I'm going to, right from the get-go, I apologize for my part, and how I was stupid or silly or wrong in this situation. And then that takes the steam out of it. And then that allows her to go you know what, I was probably wrong too. And then we we get to this point where we've just diffused it. And that's what I've learned in counseling. I've learned to defuse things that bothered me for a long, long time and sucked up my time and energy in things that were not constructive. Like, how could that person say that to me? And hold on to that for two weeks?

Mike Smith 1:18:14

I'll have to, I don't even know like how to look for one. I'll have to find one.

Finding The Right Therapist

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:19

You know how you have to do it? You have to interview them.

Mike Smith 1:18:22

Yeah, so someone said it's almost like you have to try several before you find the right one.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:27

Like shoes, get some good recommendations. And then you go and have a session with them. And you tell them about what you're here for and what you need. And you see whether or not they're a good fit or not. And then if they're not, you cut ties with them as quickly as possible so that you don't get caught up in the whole thing. And it's taken too long. And now you're disheartened because you've gone to two or three sessions and they haven't felt like they've been constructive or whatever.

Mike Smith 1:19:00

But you'll know, like when they're constructive. You'll be like, okay.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:06

You'll know that, you know, something's not clicking here, you know, it doesn't feel right. And I don't feel like I can open up to this person or whatever. And you'll know that okay, that's a sign that you just need to keep the search on, but that's how I found my two counselors. And the reason why I stayed with the first one for so long was because I think I gave myself the best opportunity to choose the correct counselor and she was the perfect fit for me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:19:40

And then I was able to even when I had a bad session, and I thought that she did a terrible job that they I was able to get beyond that and go back and know that ultimately what I'm getting is a good out cuz it's like going to the gym and feeling like I had a bad gym session by going to the gym is better than not going it's the same kind of thing. So, I mean, food for thought.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:16

That's why we have these conversations or stroke survivors like how do we get ourselves to move beyond what's happened to us as a stroke because sometimes stroke never leaves us. I'm numb on my left side all the time, it's never going to leave me. So even in 30 or 40 years, I know what caused this numbness and I want to move on from it and live a productive life regardless of what strike did to me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:43

I don't want it causing me problems for 40 years, even though it's going to be there, I don't want it to be the thing that stops me from moving forward with my life, it can't happen, that's just not something that I can allow to happen. So that's why I do this podcast, it's to learn from you and hopefully give you some something that you haven't thought about before to think about so that we can together move forward, you know.

Mike Smith 1:21:19

I have to do that I'm gonna have to get a therapist I've been meaning to my doctor suggested it but I'm like I'm doing fine. But, you know, it's like the universal response. I'm fine and nobody ever is.

Bill Gasiamis 1:21:44

What's the one thing that you've learned from stroke-like has it taught you anything?

Knowing When To Slow Down

Mike Smith 1:21:50

I think the biggest lesson is just there's that thing of you know, before the stroke I was constantly working, working, working, trying to achieve something and I think the stroke is what actually made me kind of take a moment to just it made me pause it forced me to pause for about a month and a half. And to just look around and just be like, I've got so much already most of the stuff that I've been trying to get already have so it's like take a new perspective on life.

Mike Smith 1:22:30

Just enjoy it take time for yourself and just make sure that you are handling what you need to handle and don't put too much on yourself. I've just I no longer keep loads and loads and loads of work on myself anymore. I spread things out I'm trying to learn to better enjoy my successes for a longer time instead of just always you know getting something going okay now what now what now? Just kind of like take some time to look at that accomplishment say oh I did that but that that's a view of life that I've ever had before this happened I wouldn't have even thought about looking anything like that like I said I had life planned out through at least 65 And then this comes along and goes No sir.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:43

So is the anniversary of your stroke something that you celebrate now? How do you deal with that? Because I know some people celebrate it but some people don't.

Mike Smith 1:23:55

I would say year one two and three, I wouldn't say I celebrate but I always would mark it, and you're just kind of like what I've started doing it because I want to say around year two and this is when I it since it falls around or Thanksgiving holiday in the US usually have some time, I will just kind of take like a little quiet road trip by myself and just kind of go just thinking that's how I think if I had just a long drive, it just to a place I want to go just by myself I don't take people with me I'm not gonna you know, not gonna have a party or anything to like throw a parade over.

Mike Smith 1:24:42

I do take that time and I think in the first couple of years, I think I did give it

equal weight to like my birthday. But now it's just like another date. It's like kind of like my second. It's like version 2.0. That's when it rolled out. And so this is just kind of like a do take that day, November 29, and kind of time around it to just kind of reflect and think about like, man, five years ago, or four years ago, or what have you. It's like, I always take time to think about those moments of that first morning, where it's like, I didn't think I was gonna be doing anything about anything like what I'm doing now. And I just always been very thankful of like, the difference between what I thought life would be like and what it is, I always mark that in a mat. You know, like I said, I don't, because I mean, I go to Vegas or anything like that, but I do. I do take some time and just kind of think about the difference between what I thought life would be like and what it is.

Bill Gasiamis 1:26:01

Sounds like you've moved from planning that into your head to living it from your heart. Yes. Yeah.

Mike Smith 1:26:12

That's perfect, perfect way to look at it. It's perfect way to look at it. And I do have friends I know people who do the, strokaversary thing, that's for them, but for me, it's just kind of, I do always think about that morning. Because I'm big on like, anniversaries and times and dates and valleys. Remember stuff like that. And I know, it's always like when I wake up that morning on the 29th, I remember this time, four years ago, five years ago.

Mike Smith 1:26:49

I was in the hospital, I had just been diagnosed. I was just so bleak. Look at me now. It's like, living on my own. I've changed careers. Teaching kids every day. Standing up in front of kids and talking every day, which I never would have thought I would have been doing, this just to some of the things I'm doing now that like, I just didn't think were possible. I honestly thought that when I had it was got to move home and move back home with my parents and just that. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:31

You've come a long way, man. Congratulations. And for people listening, that's the whole thing I'm trying to get across here is that, you know, there's that moment of stroke, which is really terrible. And then there's the days after that, which are hard, and you've got to overcome problems and whatever. There's a possibility for rediscovering yourself and shaping your life and doing something

that you didn't expect. And then you can reflect back in five or 10 years time. And then go, well look how far I've come and look how much I've changed and look how much better my life is. Even though I'm living with the deficits that I'm living with, even though I have these daily challenges of their physical. I'm still making progress and moving forward and having a meaningful life. And that's it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:27

What else can we ask for? On that note, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Mike Smith 1:28:40

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:28:40

Well, I told you this was going to be a great episode, we really got stuck into the benefits of psychological counseling, after stroke, and it's beneficial for everybody who's going through regular life. This is really good to have somebody to talk to, to help you get through some of the stuff that's in your head, that you need some resources to overcome. If you're watching on YouTube, please like, comment, share, subscribe, hit the notification bell to get notified of new episodes. I answer all comments. Every time somebody interacts with the show, it makes a difference to the way the algorithm writes that episode.

Bill Gasiamis 1:29:19

And it puts it out to more people. And hopefully, it's putting it out to the people that are looking for this type of content to help them on their own stroke recovery journey. As always, thanks for your positive feedback. You're amazing emails that I get from all over the world about people who appreciate the show. Thank you for listening and being part of the show. Thank you for joining me on the show. And being my podcast guests. Everybody who interacts with the show one way or another. I really truly appreciate it. Thank you so much. It makes it all worthwhile. I look forward to seeing you guys on the next episode.

Intro 1:29:53

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Intro 1:30:48

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Intro 1:30:55

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Intro 1:31:12

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