

The Power Of Suffering - David Roland

David Roland is the author of The Power Of Suffering, a book written after he experienced a Stroke that lead to his career as a Psychologist coming to an end due to stroke and the effects of previously undiagnosed PTSD

Socials:

www.instagram.com/davidjroland/

www.simonandschuster.com.au/books/The-Power-Of-Suffering/David-Roland/9781760850128

www.davidroland.com.au/the-power-of-suffering/

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David 0:00

You know, if we look at the major religions, they've all talked about suffering as a means of growing or developing wisdom, or a form of redemption. So this idea is actually as old as the hills. As far as we know, humans have been experiencing this in some way, forever. But certainly, you know, in documented history, there's plenty of examples of that.

David 0:25

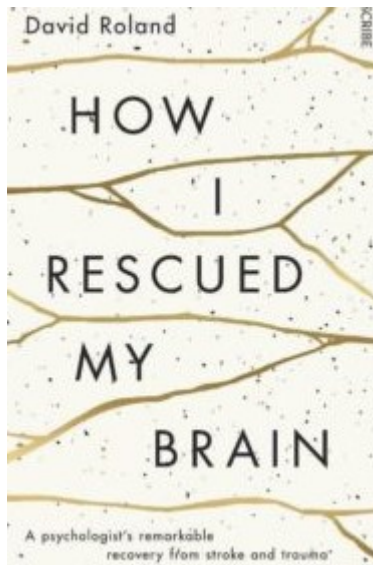
But now we've got a title. And we've got a research field like scientific papers and so on. So we can actually say it really exists. So but when I was working as a clinical and forensic psychologist, we just saw Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as

a bad thing. And the idea was that you had to get back or try and get back to the level you're at before.

Intro 0:51

This is the Recovery After Stroke Podcast, with Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Introduction



Bill 1:02

Bill from Recoveryafterstroke.com. This is Episode 109 and my guest today is David Roland. David is the author of the book *The Power of Suffering*. He has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and is an honorary associate with the University Center for Rural Health at the University of Sydney. He is a founding member of compassionate mind Australia.

Bill 1:24

And David experienced a stroke and later wrote his first book, an autobiography called *How I Rescued My Brain*. Today's episode is about his experience with post-traumatic growth. Now when you get to the end of this episode, whether you're watching on YouTube, or listening on your favorite podcast app, please do me a favor and share this episode in other groups you hang out in.

Bill 1:44

This will help someone that is doing a tough at the moment, feel a little better about the journey that they are on. Also, if you feel this podcast makes a massive difference to you, and the stroke community, please do me a favor and give the

show a five-star review on iTunes or wherever you download your podcasts from. Now, It's on with the show. David Roland, welcome back to the podcast.

David 2:06

Thank you, Bill. It's good to be here. And we're both still here. How about that?

Bill 2:11

That is an amazing thing that we're both still here.

David 2:14

We're doing something right. Yeah, you're in lockdown, aren't you?

Bill 2:18

I am in lockdown. We've gone into stage four lockdown the last couple of days and we've been in lockdown for what seems to be forever but it has gone relatively quickly. This second lockdown has been a little bit more frustrating. A lot of people are going through some difficult times there's a lot of people that are going to lose their job. And it's not dissimilar to what we went through as stroke survivors when we had a stroke and couldn't work, couldn't earn money and find ourselves in a really difficult position financially.

Bill 2:52

So it's not unfamiliar to me, but it's unfamiliar to a lot of other people and I know what's going to come of it for some people. will be this traumatic experience, we'll leave some underlying trauma there and, and there's a lot of talk around about whether or not governments are taking into consideration the long term psychological effects on people who are going through this lockdown and then how they're going to come out of that. So I think it's a perfect time for us to have a chat.

David 3:30

Yes. And I think what we want to impart here today Bill and I can certainly impart and you've had the experience to of losing everything, being in a very scary situation, and survived and actually grown. And so I think that's the essential message for today. It's very scary, very distressful time for many people. But you and I are testament to the fact that you can survive and you can grow from the experience. Even If it doesn't feel like it when you're in that survival stage.

Bill 4:04

Yes. And if you're coming to this podcast and you're the first person, it's the first time you've listened to one of those podcasts. This is Episode 109. Right? But there's 108 other episodes of people who have gone through stroke, and overcome great odds and survived and thrived and done a whole bunch of amazing things. So they are all amazing stories, and they're all at different stages. But I like the way that you organized your story in your latest book.

Bill 4:30

But before we talk about your latest book I want to talk about the last time you were on the podcast was Episode 37. And we spoke about How I Rescued My Brain. The book had just written that I had found in a bookstore in Melbourne that I picked up and as soon as I took it outside, I started reading it was about nine o'clock in the evening. And when I got to the first i don't know i think it was three pages in I was in tears and crying.

Bill 5:00

And I was with my wife, and she just didn't understand what was happening and why I was in tears. And it was basically because immediately what I did was, I understood that you were somebody like me, you had been through something similar to me and I related to your story, but at the same time, as I felt some sadness, and sorry for you, in a way, I also really loved my experience.

Bill 5:29

And that reliving of my experience was what I didn't realize was a little bit of underlying trauma that's coming to the surface to bubble up and release itself. And then gives me an opportunity to chat to my wife about it and, get beyond it, and it's an ongoing journey. What are you been doing since then?

Life after a stroke

David 5:50

I guess we're talking 10 years now since the stroke. And I'll also add that there was psychological trauma before that which came out of my previous work as a clinical and forensic psychologist. And one of the big losses for me, besides the effect of the brain injury was I lost my former career, I can't really go back to working how I used to, to work.

David 6:15

And it took me, you know, about 18 months post stroke to realize that I really had to pivot. You know, like you were saying, We've done this before, we've had to change direction. So I was largely for the first five years after the stroke just getting well, as good as I could be. And that's when I discovered that writing was autobiographical writing was one of the healing things that you can do.

David 6:41

And in *How I Rescued My Brain*, I explain a bit of the brain science behind that why that is healing. It helps us to make sense of the experiences that we've gone through. But the unexpected thing that happened for me Bill was and it's not in *How I rescued my brain* is that I decided to take up dancing as a new activity for brain health.

David 7:07

Now, I've always been a musician, and I used to play in dance bands. But I was always used to being on stage rather than on the dance floor. And I just learned or read that dancing was one of the most effective ways to activate your brain, and particularly, partner dancing. So in the very beginning, a friend told me about five rhythms dancing, which is five different reasons it starts slow, gets faster, and then it slows down again.

David 7:37

And the idea is, with that type of dancing is to take your head out of the dancing, so allow your feet to move first. Or if you like, let your feet or your body do the talking rather than your head. And you know, I had to overcome a lot of self consciousness being in a room for lots of other people that were just very uninhibited and going wild at different points.

David 8:01

But remarkably, what I found as I got used to it and became less self conscious, was that all the grief, the sense of loss, the trauma, despair, you know, all those really strong feelings. I hadn't realized how lodged in my body they were. And as I would move to the music, so my body's doing the talking rather than my head saying, I'll do this move.

David 8:24

It was like a corkscrew of energy just coming out of me. It was so visceral and so real. And I just did not expect it at all. And I would go in a week after week and it

was such a healing experience, that after a while, it felt like I'd really emptied out of all that gunky stuff. And I started to experience joy. Joy became the motivation then to keep it up. But I actually wanted at that point, I thought I'd like to start holding a woman again because I've been divorced by this stage.

David 9:00

And I wanted touch again, but non sexual touch. And I wanted to do Latin style dancing because I just really love the Latin rhythm. And the first year I went along to the local salsa classes, and it was really, really tough because I could get the rhythm, but I couldn't remember any of the patterns that we learned. It's like I would do an hour of class.

David 9:25

And if you told me just name one thing you've learned in the class I couldn't, and I had huge mental fatigue is, you know, stroke survivors we know. So I did that for the first year. The second year, I managed to learn a few patterns. Remember a few patterns. And then the third year, I felt confident enough to go on the social dance floor because I could remember a handful of patterns and very slowly worked my way up.

David 9:52

I mean, you know, the Latin dance, scene they don't play music super loud, but every now and then I have to go out and give my brain a bit of a relief and come back in again. So now I dance with joy. And last year I went on a trip to Cuba, the dance trip with my local teacher. And we even made a video. I've got now a video of me learning some of the Cuban dance styles and then doing a sequence with one of my main teachers at the very end.

Bill 10:25

I saw that video it was a great video. And one of the things that stands out to me, of what you just said is that it took you three years to get to that point. And it's very similar to a comment that was made on episode 106 by Kelly Studebaker who's a power lifter and she does powerlifting with one side of her body because the other side of her body doesn't work so well.

Bill 10:49

She has a deficit on the left side I think it is and therefore her arm can't grip a barbell, but she talks about how it took her five years years to get to that point

where she felt comfortable to compete. And she never thought about competing. She just thought about doing the process of lifting heavier and heavier weights and learning how to do that with half of her body, effectively.

Bill 11:17

And then when she got to a certain point, somebody challenged her, I think it was and it made her go, well, okay, maybe I can compete in some way, shape or form. And she did. And that was a real big moment for her. So I want to emphasize the time that it takes and it took you three years. So what was it like to go to Cuba, and finally, put the cherry on top of this whole experience?

David 11:45

Where you got to understand that Cuba was another challenge in itself. I hadn't done long haul international travels since the stroke. And it's a big trip from Australia to Cuba with a stopover in Canada. And I knew that Cuba would be noisy. Because they, they love their music, they play music everywhere. And it's a Latin society, so they stay up really late.

David 12:10

So what would happen is, you know, we would have dance classes for two hours in the morning. Now, there's no way I could have done two hours of dance classes at all, let alone once a week, you know, in the beginning one hour, it just completely knocked me out. So amazing that I could do two hour dance classes almost every morning, the three weeks that we were there.

David 12:34

But then in the evenings, you know, you'd go out at 10 1030 because that's when things kick off and go to a show or a dance or dance club or a live concert. And, you know, dance away. Well, I just couldn't keep that schedule up. But I made sure I did the dance classes in the morning because the teachers were just so superb.

David 12:55

You know, the quality of teaching I knew would be rare to find in Australia so I made the most of that. And I would go out in the evenings, you know, every second evening, something like that, you know, others in the group, we're going out more often. So that was the big challenge for me was the mental fatigue and every now and then particularly towards the end, I get real overload and I would

just have to hibernate in my room. And the dance teacher understood that you know, I needed some quiet so she often made sure I had one of the quieter rooms where we were staying in people's houses.

Dealing with post-stroke fatigue

Bill 13:34

Yeah, that's amazing. I go through the same kind of experiences with fatigue and the fatigue sometimes interferes with my progress in that I want something to progress quicker, and it doesn't and then I get frustrated and annoyed. And, and then that creates a little bit of a loop of you getting stuck in feeling sorry for myself again. How do you deal with fatigue? And how do you come to terms with what is your process of dealing with it?

David 14:08

Look, it's a difficult one, isn't it Bill? You know, because, you're the same as me, I think, you know, you're achievement-oriented, curious, you like getting out in the world and doing things. So it doesn't come naturally just to pull back. I have to pull back more often than I did pre-stroke. So I recognize my patterns of fatigue.

David 14:32

I know which activities to do, which time of the day, like last year, I was pretty much writing the whole year. And I would start work, you know, sort of around nine in the morning, and I clock off. I have a big lunch break with an afternoon nap. That afternoon nap really, really helps the clock off, you know, around 334 in the afternoon, and I'm totally mentally shattered by that point. So I felt That managing my mental energy cycle is one thing.

David 15:05

And then the other thing is keeping up intensive exercise. So whether dancing is actually very intensive. But also I would go to the gym or I do a lot of swimming, sometimes swimming squads or swimming in the ocean. And for some reason, I don't understand the biology of this, but if I do intense physical activity, and it doesn't have to be for a long time, it seems to clear my head quite a lot and get rid of quite a bit of fatigue. But typically in the evenings, I can't do anything that requires a lot of concentration. So it's really just getting to know yourself and finding those handles or levers, which lift you up, you know, when you come down.

Bill 15:50

I can relate to that being able to get through a certain amount during the day and then almost being completely wiped out at night is very familiar. I've got things to do and there's a to do list. And, the things early on in the day get done on the to do list but then some of them have to creep over to beyond that four or five o'clock mark, they just don't get done. They have to get done the next day and no matter what.

Bill 16:15

So I never have big to do list but I have noticed myself being in a space of something not getting finished for 2, 3, 4 or five days just because it just can't get done. And it's not because for lack of trying or I don't want to do just absolutely, positively physically cannot get done. So that's familiar. The exercise thing is interesting because before COVID I went and joined a gym, and I thought that I'm doing it for the social part, but also for the exercise part.

Bill 16:48

But I don't want to commit to a gym membership or long term thing or three days a week only half an hour. A week on a Saturday morning because That was going to give me, that physical version of exercising. And it was going to give me all of the benefits that I get from that and then the interaction with other like minded gym kind of people.

Bill 17:14

But then it would take me three or four hours to recover from that physically, but my head would be okay, as in my head would be okay for that day and the day after no problem. It was this very different version of experiencing my body one way, half an hour of pretty intense exercise would wipe me out physically, but not mentally. And then other days. sitting in front of a computer would wipe me out mentally and physically.

David 17:44

Yes, So I think you've found a pattern that's working for you. with how things are, I mean, you know, Cuba showed me how much I've advanced. You know how much I could handle noise And, you know, I'd have sort of mini breakdowns as I say, I just have to withdraw. Which is almost impossible in Cuba because there's music, or they talk really loud as well.

David 18:14

But I, you know, you asked me, you know, is that the cherry on top it was, it was the cherry on top because I did that challenging thing. I've always wanted to go to Cuba. Originally it was to play the music, learn the music, because I played a lot of guitar. But now it's more the dancing and the social interaction. You know, I learned a bit of Spanish and I was trying to practice my Spanish so that it was achieving that goal. But it was also the joy of dancing and learning from just amazing dance teachers and being around a culture which celebrates music and dance and the arts more generally.

Bill 18:55

Yeah. There's a lot of work being done. I know people are searching and studying the area of music, in rehabilitation and in therapy, as well as dancing and all that type of thing. So I know there's a lot of positives to come out of it and it makes sense because dancing releases endorphins and you know other feel good hormones.

Bill 19:23

And I imagined so does music listening to it evokes memories and pleasant times and amazing things. So it just makes sense that these things help and I get a lot from music and sometimes when I can listen to music, I like to listen to the music that I used to listen to when I was a kid that is high in energy, you know, really something that I would have been doing at a nightclub while I was dancing, although I'm not able to specifically dance right now because I don't often dance alone at home.

Bill 19:53

I might with my wife, but I don't alone at home is not where I used to do that. But the music still puts me in that place, and allows us to allows me to release some of those feel-good hormones, you know, and I might do some crazy moves like this from time to time. So it makes sense. I'm glad that you did that. And you went on that trip. Because it does remind me of some of my experiences as well, which is that big goal that you create out there in the future, and then you just somehow work towards to get to, and I think stroke survivors should have that big, long, distant goal that they focus their energy to get to, even though it might take them a long time to get there.

The change in David Roland after surviving a stroke



David 20:42

Yeah, and I would point out that the Cuban goal wasn't a goal. In the beginning. It was just about getting Well again, and you know, it's an exercise to do with brain health and but it led into this new direction, which I hadn't expected. So I think that moves us on then to the new area that I've just written about in my new book, *The Power of Suffering*, growing through life crises.

David 21:06

Is that we do change. After we survive the intense suffering that we've been through, we do change. And we can change in a lot of positive ways. It's remarkable. The number of people I've spoken to who've had some sort of loss, whether it's a physical loss, or it's a social loss, or it's a financial loss, or it's a loss of health.

David 21:30

They've lost something that I never expected to lose. And it's devastating in the beginning. And for some people, they, you know, for many people, it feels like how am I going to survive this. And my, you know, my simple tip there is really just point your nose in the direction that you think you need to go in that day. And put one foot in front of the other and give yourself you know, do it gently.

David 21:55

So give yourself Pat's on the back and allow the fact that you don't always have a

great day. And you know, that was like that for quite a few years. I've started to value relationships a lot more like with my daughters, with my friends with my family, I realized how important they had been, you know, the social connection through my survival period.

David 22:24

And I just valued them a lot more. And I also noticed that I was enjoying just simple pleasures, a lot more than expensive pleasures, like it wasn't like I needed to go on an expensive holiday. Not that Cuba was cheap, but that was the first expensive thing I'd done. But it was for the experience of connection and the joy of learning and you know, the music and then also that opening to new possibilities, like I was saying, you know, now I'm a full-time writer and speaker and I could not have imagined that 10 years ago.

David 23:03

So we opened up to new possibilities. And we also sometimes grow in spiritual ways. You know, I know that I'm much more value-driven now. I think it's the greater good, I think of myself in the bigger picture. You know, my sense of spirituality is thinking of growing the way and shrinking the eye. And, you know, for some people, you know, religion and Orthodox religion is really important.

David 23:33

But you can have other forms of spirituality, which help guide you. One of the stories I've got in my book is of the senior chaplain of the New South Wales Ambulance Service. And I got to know him and tell his story. He went through major trauma and became a minister of religion and then wanted to help paramedics.

David 23:56

I wanted to interview him because he said, You know when chaplain turns up to the scene of horrific accident or suicide or death of a child or something like that. What can you offer people at that moment? And really, it boils down to human presence, just bringing your human presence. And you don't have to say anything wise, you don't have to say anything smart.

David 24:21

And often what we do is we hold back because we're afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. But you know, as I show in, when I tell that story, and he gives a few

examples of, of incidents that he came across, you just have to turn up and you just sometimes just need to sit with a person and it could be in silence.

David 24:43

And then you know, after time, you know, you can have a bit more input when you're helping somebody go through a major crisis. So there's about five or six ways that this is in this area of post-traumatic growth research that I discovered which typically people can grow in might be just one thing, or it might be the whole lot.

David 25:06

And what I'd also like to add is that you can grow in these ways, but there still can be difficulties in your life. It's not like magically, everything is really hunky-dory. Like you can still have some aspects of trauma, you can still experience periods of distress or despondency. Or, like you said, and like I experience we get frustrations because we'd like to do more than we can.

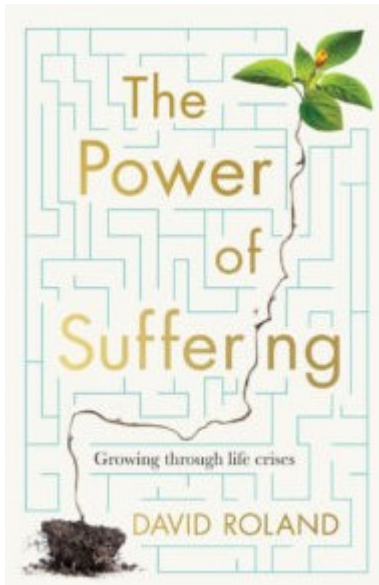
David 25:31

So it's like we walk alongside those things, rather than them being like a wall in front of us. We can still grow, and we might still have this difficulty that's alongside us, you know, like the weightlifter you were describing earlier. She still got one side that's partially mobile, but she works with what she's got. Rather than thinking I can't do anything because of this, you know, physically mobility that I've got

Bill 26:00

Yeah, it's fair if she thought that as well, it would have been fair. Yeah. Except she just decided that she's not gonna allow that to get in a way. And she also needs amazing things. And she's worked out a way to create some kind of a process that allows her to still knit even though one of her hands can't really do the job of holding a knitting needle correctly.

The Power of Suffering



Bill 26:22

So she finds new unique ways to overcome challenges that a lot of people have and it and she brags about the stuff that she does, which is really cool, because she's not bragging about it from the point of view of I knitted this with my one arm that works well. She just brags about the fact that she made a hat that's out of wool, or whatever it was. So it's pretty amazing now. That's the book *The Power of Suffering*.

David 26:57

Growing Through Life Crises.

Bill 26:59

I love your book covers, there's a lot of thought that goes into them. The last book cover was that one there, which shows the ancient Japanese art of repairing things with gold. Because often, the way the Japanese see it is, is that when something is broken, and you repair it and you make it a pretty repair, it makes it even better than it was before. And that is the experience that I had with my brain. And tell me a little bit about this book cover because it's got what looks like a maze on it.

David 27:33

Yes. So if you can just take your finger away from the bottom there Bill, you'll see that that plant has been pulled out of the ground. And so that's the experience you know, when we get hit by a major crisis or life upheaval, it feels like we've been, you know, taken our roots have been taken out of the ground where we were.

David 27:55

And then you know, this is maze of trying to get through life which you know, we've never had any training for these things that happen to us. And sometimes people around us or often, They don't know what to do either. So there's this maze that we go through. And once we get through the maze, we start to blossom in new ways.

David 28:17

So that's the idea of the book cover. The cover designer came up with that, once knowing the message with the book, and I think it's a great illustration of the main theme of the book, which is, there is the survival, which is really, really hard. Then there's the recovery period where you start to make sense of things. You develop new routines and new ways of supporting yourself and those around you get used to that as well. And then you start to blossom in some new ways that you never expected.

Bill 28:49

You talk about post-traumatic growth, intimately right now, as a psychologist in your working life in the past. Were you aware of that concept? And were you able to have those types of conversations with people that came to see you for support?

David 29:06

No, I wasn't Bill. And I think this is what's so exciting about this relatively new field, as a research field, you know, if we look at the major religions have all talked about suffering as a means of growing or developing wisdom, or a form of redemption. So this idea is actually as old as the hills. As far as we know, humans have been experiencing this in some way, forever.

David 29:36

But certainly, you know, in documented history, there's plenty of examples of that. But now we've got a title. And we've got a research field like a scientific papers and so on, so we can actually say it really exists. So but when I was working as a clinical and forensic psychologist, we just saw Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a bad thing. And the idea was you had to get back to the try and get back to the level you were at before.

Intro 30:04

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? Doctors will explain things but obviously, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 30:29

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation. Stop worrying, and head to 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.

David 31:07

One of the founders of this research field is Professor Richard Tedeschi is a psychologist in North Carolina, or North Charlotte, in the US. And he uses a really good example. He says, you know, if a city has been hit by an earthquake, and buildings are broken and infrastructure is destroyed, but people still need to live, they need still need to exist.

David 31:35

And if this city is in an area where earthquakes have happened or could happen, it doesn't make any sense once you know it can happen to rebuild the city exactly the way it was before. Like try and create the buildings the way before the infrastructure the way they were before you actually now know that you have to build it in a new way so It becomes resilient to future shocks.

David 32:03

And this is the idea of growth where growth is transformation. It's not bouncing back to how things were exactly before, but growing in a new direction. And I think this is going to be the big lesson coming out of the pandemic, is, you know, we use this expression new normal, is we're not going to go back to how things were, we're going to transform in some ways, and some of those transformations are going to be really good.

David 32:32

But unfortunately, we have to go through the struggle first. Because the struggle opens us up, you know, creates vulnerability. We realize how uncertain life is. Unfortunately, the way it works is we have to experience the emotional pain to try you know, be motivated to find new ways of being. And one of the things we need to understand is that life is inherently uncertain. There's an element of fragility to it. We can control everything that happens to us.

Bill 33:03

The Buddha talks about suffering as being as having a large component of ignorance associated to it. So my ignorance of not understanding how I can ride a bike or not seeking out how to learn how to ride a bike again, allows me to suffer the feelings of never being able to ride a bike again. So, putting away becoming curious about what might come, what I might be able to achieve with regards to getting back to riding a bike will allow me to have some successes in that area and therefore I am less ignorant and therefore my suffering will decrease.

Bill 33:50

That's the way at least that I took that story from the buddha and I brought it into my life so that when I hadn't ridden my bike for four years after the stroke, because every time I got on, I couldn't feel my left side, I would fall over and injure myself and hurt myself. I found new ways to try and overcome that. And one of the ways was to get a potentially a bike that had two wheels in the back, so that balance wasn't an issue.

Bill 34:21

But what I found was that my left leg, when I was pedaling, would get really tense and tight and fatigued. And as a result, it would be very difficult to get home so I might get to my destination, but getting home would be really painful. So that wasn't working. And then of course, electric bikes were invented. And the battery operated pedaling system allowed my left leg not to get fatigue and also to have a greater amount of support on the way home.

Bill 34:52

And that made me getting back on a bike without two wheels in the back just two wheels possible again, and after about five years I overcome the challenge of how do I get back on the bike. Now, if that didn't work, I might have got a bike that takes me on shorter trips, or a bike that I have to lie down in. What I'm trying to

get at is that initially, I avoided the whole thing for about four years, and I suffered the entire time, little bits of suffering.

Bill 35:22

But every time I saw somebody riding a bike, and I remembered that I couldn't do it, it caused a little bit of tension, a little bit of anxiety. So then I've overcome that ignorance in how I could do something was what was getting in the way. I overcame that by learning and becoming curious about how to move on and continue the passion or continue that thing that I used to do from my childhood.

Bill 35:55

Regardless of what all was experienced on my left side, you know, and that and Kelly, the weightlifter is the epitome of that as well. She reminds me of that kind of way of overcoming. It's just about getting curious. There is I felt there was more pain before the overcoming of that problem, it's better after you overcome that problem or find a solution to that problem. How do you talk about that to people, which is that they're scared that they might not find the answer, therefore, that will be painful. But there's sort of existing in a world of pain because they're afraid.

David 36:36

Yeah, it's great, great question, Bill. And I really wanted to address that in this book, you know how people can stay stuck in their suffering and not move on. But first of all, I just want to touch on the difference between pain and suffering. So we know that physical pain, we've got pain receptors in our body is necessary for survival.

Physical and emotional pain according to David Roland



David 36:56

Because we step on something sharp and it cuts us we need that pain sensation go to our brain say you've stepped on something, you've got a cut, you need to fix it. And it's the same with emotional pain. You know, we're designed to have grief. Because we can only have grief when we love somebody or we connected to somebody, or we love our job when we lose our job.

David 37:19

That's part of how we're made. So we need to accept that there's a level of pain which is going to come from loss or hurt, you know, like being heartbroken is a very physical experience as much as an emotional one. So this pain is quite normal and you know, it can take some time for that pain to ease up. If we've lost a loved one. It may be that we never completely lose the grief. But we can move on and develop maybe new connections.

David 37:52

So the second thing is acceptance. So when you had the left-sided, paralysis or immobility or loss of strength, you got stuck in your suffering because well, I can't ride and you stay stuck in your suffering around that. And riding for I think you said four years. So we need to accept, this is how it is now. So if I've got left-sided weakness, I've got to say, okay, it's been around for a while.

David 38:23

So this is how it is now, what can I do, given that I've got left-sided weakness, and in your case, you really wanted to get back to cycling. So you found ways of doing that and that eased your suffering. It hasn't necessarily fixed up your left side of weakness, although I mentioned that strengthen, but we ease our suffering through acceptance and then saying, okay, that's how it is now, what can I do with that?

David 38:51

And it could mean you find a new way of doing the sort of things you did before like you with your bike riding, or Kelly with the weight lifting or in my case, you know, I found something completely new, which was dancing. So, and I was able to get back to ocean swimming after a while as well, because in my case, I had trouble with my balance.

David 39:13

So lifting my head up and down in waves actually made me incredibly dizzy. So we can find new ways, or we can find adaptations. And that's how we start to release our suffering. So we might have the limitation which is real. We've got to accept that and say, okay, this is what it looks like, this is what it feels like. This is what it sounds like. What can I do now?

Bill 39:39

Yeah, that really strikes a chord. That's amazing. It's exactly what you said. It's that adapting that makes sense now, but it's the first time that somebody has said that to me that it's about how you adapt. It's not only about how you evolve and how you grow, but it how you adapt and allow yourself to adapt and also experience joy in doing things that you haven't potentially done before, that you didn't think could be joyful.

Bill 40:09

And I found a lot of those things. And I do a lot of those things. And one of them is podcasting. And that's a classic example of me diverting my energy because I'm a very highly energetic person diverting it into something else. That also creates this, where it's more about, like you said, it's about we rather than just me, and it's about how do I create this podcast that's going to make a difference to all stroke survivors.

Bill 40:39

And then what came of it was, you can also make a difference to people that release a book about recovery, that I can interview and then that will help other stroke survivors as well as me and then this thing just grew out of nowhere and it came to me in the most bizarre place you know, came to me in the hospital going from surgery to a month-long stint in rehabilitation so I can learn how to walk again. So, I'm not sure how it came to me while I was sitting in that place called the transit lounge. But it did and it never ever went away. And I didn't know how to do a podcast. What it was how you get it online? I had no idea. I just knew that that's something that was going to happen.

David 41:25

You've said two great things there. Bill. If I could just comment on that. The first one is, you're a bit crazy for doing Podcast I mean, you got in before everybody started to do podcasts, so good on you. But now you've open to new possibilities. And exactly that point. We don't know what that new possibility is going to be.

Why on earth did it come to you this idea of doing podcasts and when you're in the transit lounge, I don't know. You don't need to know either. So that's the first thing.

David 41:59

The second thing Is that, what was the second thing? I still got some of that memory issue. I forgot what I was gonna say now, I got so excited about you deciding to do podcasts, oh the second thing. The second thing, another way in which people often grow is and it actually helps them move through this suffering. So it's both a strategy and also an outcome is to offer personal service as some form of personal service.

David 42:35

And you know, all the stories that are in my new book, every one of them and I didn't know that we're going to do this now offer personal service because of what they've been through. So one of the stories is Steve Gallic, who was in a motor vehicle accident where his wife and one young son died. And his second young son Steve was in about 28 when It happened.

David 43:01

His second young son had a very severe brain injury was in a coma. So Steve became his son, Peter's carer. And Steve himself got a fractured neck. So he wasn't well either. But now he rehabilitates native wild animals who are injured. And he's a professor of economics. And he is working his way up through the federal government service.

David 43:26

And he was like one of the hard men. He had no idea he was gonna go out and rescue animals. and to see him feeding baby Joey's with a bottle, which I got to do. And I got some video that just really, really moving. And he says animals have given me so much. He said he didn't have a lot of support after his accident. And he said, I want to support animals in ways that I wasn't supported and I get more from them caring from them and that feels like a gift to them.

Bill 44:02

Wow, that is just amazing. I said exactly the same thing. That's partly why the podcast exists because I wanted to bridge those gaps for people who didn't have the information that I needed. You know, in 2012. In 2012, there was no

information about how you can support yourself. It was sort of starting to emerge. And there was new areas of research about neuroplasticity, and all that type of thing was happening. But there wasn't a lot of information out there about it.

Bill 44:28

And I just struggled with not knowing and not being able to find unique solutions to really challenging problems. And I thought, if I put it together in a podcast, and I bring enough stroke survivors on and they share all their one unique thing, but there's going to be a massive database of unique ways to overcome really complex problems by the experts, the people who have done it themselves and have been through it themselves. It's so fascinating to hear, that he experienced that same emotional recovery that I did. And he did it with rehabilitating animals that is just fascinating.

David 45:15

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, he just it just happened that he remarried and they were driving along a country road. They live outside of Cambria in the countryside. And they thought they'd run over an Echidna. Because it seem to be struggling on the side of the road. Turns out they hadn't. But then they picked up the Echidna and took it along to you know, a place to be rehabilitated.

David 45:41

And it just started from there, that you know, they're on a country property and his wife is a GP so she's got those medical skills. And they've just developed an amazing rehabilitation facility for native animals mainly kangaroos, wallabies, wombats. And now does research into koalas and stress in koalas. And during the recent, like summer bushfires, they were getting inundated with, you know, burnt animals, and they were featured on the news and all that sort of stuff.

David 46:15

And they got a lot of donations. So you know, there's remarkable stories like that, where you just don't know what this new thing is going to be. But often, it's a sense of mission, or a sense of personal service. And I want to emphasize that, offering your help to others, even when you're feeling fragile, or uncertain, actually lifts you so it's altruistic, but at the same time you benefit from it.

Bill 46:46

Yeah, that's what I've found. The podcast has given me way more than I feel like I

have given to the podcast and each episode takes about three or four hours to get done, and costs money and does a whole bunch of different things. So even then the investment seems to be just absolutely worth every single time and moment and dollar that it costs to get to that point. After doing it since 2015, I've got better at it. And as a result, it's more efficient. And therefore, the podcasts get out a lot easier, but they still take a little bit of time, and I'm very comfortable with that. It's all good. Now in your book, you've got about what is it about seven or eight stories?

David 47:30

No it's 10 or 11 stories, 11 if you include myself, yeah, I put some of my anecdotes in them new anecdotes that weren't in the old book. But each chapter has got a story. You know, a different story. So I take you through these different stories. So you enter these people's lives. You sit there with them and me, and we hear their story, we hear how they survive, we hear how they've grown.

David 47:59

And there's a huge range of stories. I mean, one of the ones I like was the African refugees that I interviewed and sat with in their living room into lumbering Queensland. And they came out as refugees from Chad in Africa. Another one is in Roberts, the Rugby League Football, who is an amazing individual in so many ways.

David 48:23

I wanted to spend time with him because I wanted to know what it's like when you hold a secret, a deep secret and you're afraid to let that secret out. And in his case, if listeners don't know. He was like one of Australia's best rugby league football, has represented Australia. And he was homosexual in the days when, you know if you came out as homosexual, especially in sports, you would be vilified.

David 48:55

He got death threats and all sorts of things. So he eventually came out with that secret and you know, suffered some negativity, but actually mostly positivity, that he also had another secret that I wasn't expecting. And that was illiteracy was illiterate. So it wasn't until he would go to his 30s that, you know, and his football career was over and he was running a sportswear business.

David 49:23

He happened to be walking past NIDA, which is the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney. And he always had this idea that he liked acting. And he just went in there and said, you know, like, I know I'm a bit all but you know, do you think I could do some acting classes, and one of the main teachers came out and spoke to him and said, well, let's see. You come and do a private class with me, you know, one hour a week, and after a six weeks or something, we'll decide, and he ended up getting into NIDA and then developed an acting career in Hollywood. So there you go.

Bill 50:04

Wow. Isn't it amazing? So in your mind, what's the problem with holding a secret that nobody knows about, that's yours for life? What's the problem? What does it do?

Why secrets can cause health issues



David 50:19

There are two things we might as well use as an example. He actually always felt, you know, comfortable with being homosexual. He didn't, himself feel anything wrong with that. So, you know, there's lots of people that have got something that they see could be wrong with him. And they try and keep it secret or try and keep it hidden. So he's homosexuality, for him wasn't a problem, or is a problem for a lot of other people.

David 50:46

You know, like when he would go on tour. You know, he had to share a room with

another teammate. And it had to be a teammate that was you know, comfortable with being with Ian and there always was one because he's a hell of a nice guy. And but the second secret was the one about his illiteracy. Now he experienced shame because of that.

David 51:12

Now, this is where secrets are really bad for our health, our physical health, because it decreases our immunity, our immune system. And it's also bad for our mental health because shame makes us feel bad. It makes us feel less of a person. It makes us feel like we can't fully fit in. And it makes us feel like we can't be our authentic selves.

David 51:36

You know, you and I know, Bill that when we're with other stroke survivors, it's really easy just to be ourselves and to laugh about, you know, the challenges that we have and the mishaps and so on. So, what would it be like if you or I had these strokes and we could never actually talk to people about it. We had to hold all those difficulties or uncertainties we had because of our stroke to ourselves.

David 52:04

So that's, that's why secrets are bad. Now Ian says now that he should have spoken out, told somebody about his literacy much earlier. But it was when he went to acting school, that he learned how to sound words, because the teacher said, Oh, you've got to be able to read to do an acting course. And they showed him about you know, phonemes how, how, you know, words are made up of sounds, he never knew that. And I tell the story, in the book about why that was why he missed out on all of that.

Bill 52:35

Yeah, that is just fascinating. I have started reading the book and it is gripping it really is because you do such an amazing job at setting the scene and then making me want to know more. So for anyone that's interested, check it out, just google The Power of Suffering by David Roland, and you'll get a whole bunch of opportunities to go and buy it from somewhere and find it somewhere.

Bill 53:00

Especially from online.

David 53:02

It's also an audiobook Bill. And it's read by Lewis Fitzgerald, who's an actor, so he does all the voices so amazingly well, like these times I listened to it, it feels like it's somebody else, his story, and it just sends shivers up my spine. Sometimes he does such a lovely job.

Bill 53:22

That's a relief because David, I can't read books really well. So that's a big relief. And I really enjoy listening to audiobooks, especially when I'm in the car driving. So that's cool. Now, I just wanted to touch on a couple of things before we sort of start to wrap up and tell me if you can give me your insight or your thought into the process of post-traumatic growth and the power of suffering because I have this experience that I've voiced a couple of times and it's that stroke is the best thing that ever happened to me.

Bill 54:01

And that comment can really upset people. Some people will listen to those who are going through stroke or had a stroke or have deficits because of stroke, whether they're one year, five years, 10 years, it doesn't matter. And they will completely push away from that comment, and they'll want to have nothing to do with it. I put it out there, and found that there was a lot of other people that say that, and I interviewed them.

Bill 54:26

They're not interviews that are available on the podcast, they're interviews that were done offline. And there are some similarities and a pattern to how people get to the point of being able to say, stroke was one of the best things that ever happened to them. And of course, it reminds me of the power of suffering. So do you find that telling people that it's okay to suffer can polarize an audience and why? Why does it do that?

David 54:58

Well, I think

David 55:02

I think you've touched on some great things there. Walter Mikac who launched the book for me, at our local bookstore just before COVID shut down, because all my public events got canceled after that, but he said, How brave is David Roland to write about the very thing that most people do not want to experience.

Bill 55:26

Now let's talk about who Walter Mikac is because coming from him. That's a big comment.

David 55:33

Yeah, so Walter was a young man with a wife and two girls. And when we had our last major gun massacre in Australia, which was at Port Arthur in Tasmania, both his wife and two children was shot dead. And so Walter wasn't actually at the site when it happened. He was near by playing golf. So he came to find his loved ones dead.

David 56:02

Now, Walter. The next day, he went back to Melbourne. The next day he wrote to the Prime Minister of Australia. Just thought, I've got to write this letter. It's really bugging me on his flight back to Melbourne. And the Prime Minister of Australia that time was John Howard, and said, we've got to do something about guns.

David 56:25

We've got to stop this happening again. And the Prime Minister rang him the very next day after receiving a letter and said, I agree with you. So Walter then became one of the faces of increasing changing the gun laws in Australia so that we would be far less likely to have the gun massacre like that. And he now says, you know, hundreds of thousands of lives are probably been saved because of that changing gun laws.

David 56:56

So Walter knows suffering. So I think You know, it seems so counterintuitive. And when people going through intense suffering, I don't think they want to, or they can't comprehend the message that there could be good outcomes from this. In that early stage, we just really have to keep them safe. We need to provide their basic needs, you know, like you were saying, we need to provide information, there wasn't information, you know, do practical things that were going to help the person stay as well as they can be.

David 57:31

And then after, that is when we can start talking about, okay, you might want to open up to new possibilities. Or you might gain some wisdom that you didn't have

before. At that same book launch, where Walter launch the book, there was another man who's just a few years younger than me, and he had a brain tumor and survived. And he said, David, you're just telling my story.

David 57:58

He said, I now feel like I'm in new person, I don't feel like I'm the person I was before is this I am so grateful I had that brain tumor and survive, you know, and his wife has had to adjust to the new him. You know, everybody's had to adjust to this idea that this man is really pleased he had a brain tumor. He's actually a painter. He's a very, very good painter.

Bill 58:25

It's just fascinating. It's such a lovely thing. It's such a great topic. I love the fact that you're a psychologist. I love the fact that you've chosen to bring this type of knowledge from your background, and with your stroke experience into the world so that other stroke survivors can benefit from knowing these things. And it just to me, it's made a massive difference knowing that you exist in that way. And I reckon you would have been an awesome guide beforehand because it seems like you took your work personally and that affected you personally.

Bill 59:03

And now you've found a way to harness your previous skills in this new direction. And you've taken your life's work and you've just transformed that into this other place and making a massive difference. So, thanks for that, and well done for doing that. Tell me how has this experience made you less likely to be traumatized in the future because you spoke about in the past, you've spoken about being traumatized by all the years of listening to traumatic experiences that other people have gone through. So how have you been able to override this because I imagine that every time somebody buys your book or you sign a copy, somebody shares a traumatic story with you again,

David 1:00:01

I think the thing to say is that I'm much less afraid of suffering, much less afraid of traumatic experiences, other people's experiences. So if somebody's been through something terrible, I don't feel afraid of their distress, like I might have before, you know, before I had a professional ear, but now I think I just bring just a greater sense of humanity to other people's suffering or their distress.

David 1:00:31

And one of the reasons why it's easier is that I know I survived. And I can see that they can survive, and that they can even grow from it. Even if they can't see that there's the possibility of growth at the time. And I think when we bring that type of presence to other people, they feel it doesn't have to be spoken. It's not like we need to say, Are you going to grow from this? Don't worry.

David 1:00:56

No, we just say, you know what do you need? you know, there's a certain presence that we bring when we're a survivor of intense suffering. And we don't need to fix it for them that's really important, they can be going through distress, there may be nothing to be fixed there and then, and we don't need to try and fix it. Sometimes we just got to ease off and say, yep, you're really distressed. I get that.

Bill 1:01:25

I learned to be a coach. Somebody who helps people achieve stuff basically is what a coach is, and they can help them achieve lots of different things before stroke. It didn't matter what they came to me with. It was about creating space to allow that person to explore how are they going to achieve the thing that they wanted to achieve, or stop doing something that wasn't serving them or learn new skills or change their job or whatever it was.

Bill 1:01:52

And I remember early on in my coaching career, I used to try and solve their problem for them by giving people advice, do this or just do that. And maybe if you do this, you'll fix your problem. But of course, that was my filter on how problems get solved. And at the beginning when they never achieved the outcome, I would get frustrated thinking that I wasn't doing anything.

David Roland's professional mindset before the stroke

Bill 1:02:18

And it was really difficult to be a coach of that nature. Because most people won't achieve an outcome in one session or in three sessions or in five sessions. Sometimes it can take a lot longer, and there's a lot more things to overcome. Is that something that you used to maybe do knowingly or unknowingly? With

regards to when you were early on in your career? were you hoping that you were going to solve people's problems as a psychologist?

David 1:02:49

Yes. And you know, as a mental health professional, that's what you're trying to do is to fix people's problems. Only we accept that people are not going to change unless they want to change. You know, that's that's the first step. But you know, given that they come to see you for some difficulty, we think, Okay, I need to sort this out, I need to get them, you know, well get the maintenance done and get their engine fixed up.

David 1:03:14

And you know, they can go back to how they'd like to be. And as he say, it's not always as easy as that. And in fact, we're not always the right person for that person either. So yeah, we can create a lot of suffering for ourselves by having this high expectation. And now I don't have that expectation. And I think, you know, I talked about the book in the book about being an expert companion.

David 1:03:40

So it's more about being a companion to someone and the expertness is about when not so much offering advice, but asking good questions. You know, like, what do you need or, you know, how's what's happening now for you, affecting you? So they need to discover the answers. And there's a sense of timing in that too, you know, when you ask questions, and sometimes you can make an observation, you know, we always need somebody that we trust, to make observations.

David 1:04:12

There's a couple of friends when I was going through my stroke recovery, they'd say, gee, you're looking good today. And I knew they really meant it. And I knew if I said that it was real I thought oh good I'm making some progress. So it's making observations, asking good questions, and sometimes offering new perspectives. Yeah, so you can't do what you used to do. Okay. There's some other things that we might be able to do. Just posing that idea that there could be other things that you could do.

Bill 1:04:46

I remember early on, when I was probably 24, 25. I was seeing a counselor,

psychologist, she's an amazing lady from Melbourne. And one of my things that I used to cause a lot of suffering in my own life, about was how everybody else was an idiot, stupid, rubbed me up the wrong way caused me drama has caused me problems. And after seeing this lady for I imagined a number of years, and I still see her. So it's been a 20 year relationship. And I don't go for the same reasons. But of course, it still really helps me to go because she's amazing. And she asked me this most amazing little question, and it changed my life. And she said to me, is there any chance that it's not them, and it's a you?

David 1:05:37

I never thought of that.

Bill 1:05:38

I had never thought of that. And I did not want to accept that at the very first moment when she said it. I swore at her, and I pretty much walked out. And then when I went back a couple of weeks later, I had come to terms with the fact that that was one of the most biggest gift and biggest blessings that I had ever experienced from somebody in that kind of environment. And I asked myself that question many, many times now, and it has saved me a lot of suffering and a lot of heartache. Though it's been fascinating, catching up with you and talking to you again. It's always a pleasure. I'm so glad that you've got this second book out. If somebody wanted to get in touch with you or find out more about the book, where can they go?

David 1:06:27

Well, if they just search the name of the book, or my name, and Roland spelled R O L A N D they'll find lots of online sources, I've got a website, which has got quite a few things on it as well in a YouTube channel. So, you know, I'm on most of the social channels. And that's the best way for people to contact me or through, you know, the publicist or the publisher, you know, which is all that detail is on the website. So just my name, DavidRoland.com.au.

Bill 1:06:58

Awesome. I'll have all the links for everybody who's listening so that you can find them really easily.

David 1:07:04

Thanks Bill.

Intro 1:07:06

Discover how to heal your brain after stroke go to recoveryafterstroke.com Importantly, we present many podcasts designed to give you an insight and understanding into the experiences of other individuals opinions and treatment protocols discussed during any podcast or the individual's own experience and we do not necessarily share the same opinion nor do we recommend any treatment protocol discussed all content on this website at any linked blog, podcast or video material control this website or content is created and produced for informational purposes only and is largely based on the personal experience of Bill Gasiamis.

Intro 1:07:46

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Intro 1:08:11

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Intro 1:08:35

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