Yoga For Stroke Recovery – Rachel Jarmusz

Rachel Jarmusz had a stroke at age 25 a few months after her baby was born. She practiced yoga as a way to help support her physical recovery.

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01:11 Stroke at 25
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Transcript:

Rachel Jarmusz 0:00
This is a bigger thing than just me doing yoga. It's something that people do want to learn and something that people should not ever feel like they can't do it and like that's my mission is to just get stroke survivors to see that they can potentially exceed any expectation that they might have had of where they could be. They can keep going and that's what yoga does it gives so much hope.

Intro 0:30
This is the Recovery after Stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 0:43
Rachel Jarmusz, did I say it good? Welcome to the podcast.

Rachel Jarmusz 0:51
Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 0:52
The Australian accents got a way of kind of sharpening off and rounding off and blunting off words. So I thought I'd better just check in I didn't want to make it sound too, Australian. Hey, tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Rachel Jarmusz had a stroke at age 25

Rachel Jarmusz 1:11
Okay, so I had a stroke. 14 years ago. I was 25. And I was on a roller coaster, and got off the roller coaster and could not get my balance could not quite find my center. I didn't know what was going on. So their emergency first aid came towards me and called 911 saying she was having a stroke. Honestly, I didn't know what a stroke was. I was 25 I had just had a baby. It wasn't something that was on my, you know, health list or scare lists or whatever. So then I'm paralyzed on my left side.

Bill Gasiamis 1:52
So did you feel unwell on the roller coaster? Or did you just go unwell, when you got off?

Rachel Jarmusz 2:07
I didn't notice anything on the roller coaster no. Just when I stepped off the moment, I took a step off, it was like, I don't quite know how to describe it. It's almost like you feel drunk or incredibly high. And you can't like, the world is just like moving and you're not. And I kept telling my husband at the time. I need to sit down. I just needed to sit down and I sat down on the concrete because like, it felt like the world was like, moving around me. It was a weird feeling. It was very strange.

Bill Gasiamis 2:48
What was the underlying cause?

Rachel Jarmusz 2:51
It's a carotid artery tear and then the next day, like it went on, I had a massive

stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 3:00
So the day before the roller coaster ride, did you notice anything that you might have thought was a little bit weird?

Rachel Jarmusz 3:12
No.

Bill Gasiamis 3:16
Could the roller coaster ride have created the tear? I know we're speculating. But I'm just curious about how a perfectly normal 25-year-old gets on a roller coaster and then comes off and then gets diagnosed with having had an ischemic stroke. Right. It's just I know what happens, but it's just so it is odd.

Rachel Jarmusz 3:39
Yeah, my neurologists ended up saying that it wasn't that rare to have a carotid tear from a neck turn or sneeze, or something violent. The weird thing was that he said it should have just torn and healed because that happens. In my case, I had just given birth. And I kind of think that I was on birth control.

Rachel Jarmusz 4:05
And that played a part in my body's ability to heal and like the blood was thicker, it formed a big clot and broke off. So that, to me is what they like because they did so many tests. Like I didn't have high cholesterol, I wasn't overweight, I didn't have high blood pressure, none of that. So like what the heck happened? I mean I don't know, it was like a lining of the stars that just my blood was just thick enough to just come up, and yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 4:40
So then where are you taking the hospital from the place you were and then admitted into hospital? Yes. And how long did you spend there?

Rachel Jarmusz 4:55
I was in the hospital. I think it was about maybe three or four weeks, I was in the ICU for a week. Then I spent another three weeks just in the hospital. Then I went to, like inpatient rehab for 30 days. And had to do like that whole stint to learn, you know, everything. And then I went.

Bill Gasiamis 5:27
How old was the baby?

Rachel Jarmusz 5:30
Two months.

Bill Gasiamis 5:38
That would have been difficult. Being a young mom with a baby at home, and then you have to spend quite some time away from the baby, or was the baby with you? Were you able to at least have the baby with you?

Rachel Jarmusz 5:54
No, he was not he left with some family out of the state because my husband and I at the time were not from that state. So both of our families were outside of the state. And that was honestly, probably the hardest thing about the whole thing was that your life just changes in a second, you know, everything's different the next day, like, what the heck?

Bill Gasiamis 6:20
Yeah. And then what was it like, getting back from home after a month and transitioning back to being a mum after you're being cared for? But by a month, you're not completely recovered from a stroke and you have to be a mum.

Rachel Jarmusz 6:39
I remember the day that I came home, from rehab, and like, I saw a pair of my shoes on the floor. And like it immediately, he made me start to like, feel depressed, because I knew that I couldn't wear them. And they're sitting there as if I had just left, like, you know, to go out to the store and come back and everything was different.

Rachel Jarmusz 7:01
It was almost like an out-of-body experience. It's surreal like you don't even know what to do. And strokes are so weird, because like, you don't ever really recover in a way like I think I kind of thought, like, I'd go home and get a few good night's sleep. And I'd be like, fine. That never happened. So it's just kind of an ongoing realization. Like, I'm different. My life is different. And it's a hard pill to swallow kind of it was hard. It was hard. It was very hard.

Bill Gasiamis 7:43

Yeah, absolutely. It's what you said, How long has it been since that day?

Rachel Jarmusz 7:48
14 years.

Bill Gasiamis 7:49
Yeah, 14 years, and you're still kind of feeling like you don't ever recover. But can we put that in context? Kind of gives people a little bit of hope. Now you haven't "recovered". But there's a big but there, tell me about what life is like though? Because I also feel the same thing.

Rachel Jarmusz had an opportunity to evolve after a stroke



Bill Gasiamis 8:13
My whole experience started in 2012 and I'm not ever really going to get back to my old self, you know, whatever that means, or whatever that was, there's me there, I'm me, and I do me things. But then I have to change, I've changed a lot of things. Simply because I just couldn't persist in trying to be what I used to be because it's just not going to happen. And, I don't mind the opportunity to evolve.

Bill Gasiamis 8:13
Right, I think that's a really beautiful way to put it. That's a really beautiful way to put it that I say that I'm not fully recovered. And some people might look at me and think, Oh, she's got a long way to go. Or some people might look at me and say, Wow, she's recovered a lot.

Rachel Jarmusz 9:08
But to me, it's not about getting somewhere necessarily, you know what I mean? It's just about accepting what is right now and kind of embracing this opportunity to be a new person, I'm different. And it's not a "bad thing", I have to live differently. I can't do things that I might have done before, but maybe those things weren't great for me.

Rachel Jarmusz 9:32
And now I'm choosing different things and you know, found yoga, and a big part of yoga is just like this idea of the power of now and being here and I may not be

what I used to be, but this person I often say that like I'm a better person post-stroke.

Rachel Jarmusz 9:57
I'm stronger, I'm more patient, I have developed a sense of empathy, a sense of real true compassion, and like, self-love is a big thing that like starts to develop out of this. You learn boundaries, you learn self-care, you learn how to say, No, you learn what you want to do what you don't want to do things kind of simplify weirdly that's tragic and depressing. But like kind of hopeful, like, I think, like, it's cool.

Bill Gasiamis 10:33
Yeah. So what's the kind of depressing part? Let's see if we can kind of dive into that a little bit. The reason I ask is, because it seems like there are mixed feelings in there, you're talking about hopeful and depressing. All in the same three words, you know? So how can you give me a little more insight into why there's so much happening in those three words, why is it so deep?

Rachel Jarmusz 11:07
Well, I think the way that I look at it at least, it's like the yin and the yang, it's the dark and the light can be both. It can be hopeful and tragic. It doesn't have to be one thing. And that confuses people, I think because people often want to have like, well, what am I going to get better?

Rachel Jarmusz 11:34
Tell me, you know, if what's going to happen, and am I going to get this result, and I'm kinda like, you don't know. And there may be things along the way that are not so great. But like, that's part of the whole process is that it can be sad and uplifting, it can be depressing and happy, it doesn't have to be one thing. And it can, to me, at least encompass all of these big emotions. And I mean, it has to because it's what I'm feeling.

Bill Gasiamis 12:12
I think it's not uncommon, what you're saying, because I relate exactly to what you're saying. So I've had, so I'm not sure if anyone's ever done a massive, fully immersive, four-day intensive course of anything. For me, the time that I go back to was about 2012, and 2013, I did some personal development courses straight after I went through the first two bleeds in my brain.

Bill Gasiamis 12:44
And then I discovered that it was the best thing I had ever done. And there's a lot of aspects of it that I hated. What I didn't have then was the nuance to understand where the hate was coming from and what the best thing was. So the best thing was that it was making me feel for the first time in a long time that I was stretching myself or learning something useful that I was going to apply that was going to make my life better.

Bill Gasiamis 13:14
The part that I hated was that it was hard and made me uncomfortable. And I didn't know where it was heading. And my head was the thing that brought to light, that discomfort that hates those types of words where it didn't allow me to fully sink into it because he wanted to resist a little bit.

Bill Gasiamis 13:38
It wanted to say, well, hang on a sec, we're not comfortable with this, we don't know, this stuff, we're not familiar with this stuff, just this sucks. It's too hard. And then the other part of my heart, which is loving it is going no, no, we need to be here.

Bill Gasiamis 13:53
You know, this is amazing, we're learning new things, we're meeting great people. So there was this you might call it yin and yang. And I don't even know if I'm describing yin and yang. But it was a separation of my intelligences one trying to continue to live the old way, and one going there's got to be a new way.

Rachel Jarmusz 14:15
Well, it's like the constant head-in-the-heart debate. It's like your head is telling you one thing your heart is telling you another and which one do you listen to? And you always go with the heart and often the head is to say, well, that's stupid. Do that or, you know, whatever, but it's a matter of like, it's the same thing with stroke recovery because it's like it sucks. It sucks.

Rachel Jarmusz 14:44
There are days that it just really sucks and is like a pain but then it's like maybe you take a day to rest you feel better than the next day and you realize that your body is cueing you how to like, move. And sometimes you do need to slow down and not do as much. And sometimes you need to put yourself out there in

situations where you might not normally do it.

Rachel Jarmusz knowing when to slow down

Rachel Jarmusz 15:16
So I think it is not always roses and sunshine, but it's what we need the most for, I think, as you said, evolution, or evolving into this different person, you know, it to me, it's better. I don't know, some people don't like the verbiage of better or worse, but it's more evolved, it's more mindful, after you have a stroke, you have to think about what you're going to do.

Rachel Jarmusz 15:52
Because you physically can't do things. So it's a matter of like, Is my body going to move today? Or am I going to maybe not do X, Y, and Z? You know, and you strip away things that end up like, not even mattering in a way you're like, why did I even need that and your life like, just cleans out and it's such a beautiful thing. It is a beautiful thing.

Intro 16:26
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. How long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, and doctors will explain things that, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 16:52
If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation. Stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you. It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke.

Intro 17:11
These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke, they'll not only help you better understand your condition, they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. Head to the

website. Now, recoverafterstroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Bill Gasiamis 17:31
Hello, and welcome to episode 246 of the Recovery after Stroke podcast. My guest today is Rachel Jarmusz, a yoga teacher who had an ischemic stroke caused by a vertebral artery dissection while on a rollercoaster ride at age 25, just a few months after her baby was born.

Bill Gasiamis 17:51
Yeah, the focus is really beautiful. And it is really good when things just fall by the wayside simply because they can no longer exist in your world. After all, they create pain and suffering and annoyance and all those sorts of things. I know, there are lots of times that I did or didn't do many things that are difficult for people to understand or for me to explain or for my family to kind of roll with. But it was, well, that thing that you're talking about, I simply cannot participate.

Bill Gasiamis 18:27
It's not that I don't want to or wouldn't have participated if I had the opportunity. But right now the way I'm feeling is I just can't be there. So I'm not going to put myself through the torture of doing something that used to be pleasurable, just so that I can continue to suffer yeah. And to hold on to something that is from my past. It's not going to be possible to integrate into my new way of doing things. I just can't. Things are different. They've changed.

Rachel Jarmusz 19:16
Yeah, absolutely. That's, that's like everything.

Bill Gasiamis 19:23
So tell me about your transition from what we'll call your old life to your new life. So you've come home a month later, you're dealing with a baby. And I imagine at 25 you are fairly newly married?

Rachel Jarmusz 19:43
I was yes.

Bill Gasiamis 19:47
Tell me about that. How did that go? Because that would have been complicated.

Rachel Jarmusz 19:51

Yeah, it was complicated, to say the least. We were newly married and lived in Southern Illinois. And after my stroke, I decided to move back home to my hometown, which is Chicago. And we got divorced because it wasn't an environment where I could heal and be this better-evolved person that I needed to be.

Rachel Jarmusz 20:23
And I knew that. And so that was one of the first chords that had to be cut. And just, you know, I mean, that was hard. I just left, you know, and kind of tried to pick up the pieces living with my parents for a while. And like that, my parents were very keen on getting me into like, the best rehab facilities.

Rachel Jarmusz 20:46
Ironically, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago is like, one of the most well-known stroke rehabilitation centers. So I started doing rehab there. And then I just continued to do rehab for years, and years, and years. And so I kind of got tired of that, and then found yoga. And then the whole story kind of changed.

Bill Gasiamis 21:19
So when you left to go back home, did you live with the family or on your own?

Rachel Jarmusz 21:24
I lived with my mother.

Bill Gasiamis 21:27
And your husband and your child?

Rachel Jarmusz 21:30
No, just my children, my husband was still.

Bill Gasiamis 21:34
Okay. So you're newly married, you're dealing with a stroke, dealing with a brand new baby, and you're dealing with now having to change your living environment because it was thought at the time that the best place to be was in this particular rehabilitation?

Rachel Jarmusz 21:52
Yes. So we're there, all three of us, my two kids and myself in my mother's house, and having a wonderful time. Doing like the little, you know, the little buses that

pick you up for rehab, they come and they get you because you can't drive for some time.

Yoga for stroke recovery



Rachel Jarmusz 22:11
And I did that for what felt like forever, you know, just weeks and weeks and weeks until I could walk without a cane. And then, as I said, I stumbled upon yoga and saw that there was this whole other world of, wait a minute, I can do that. I can, you know, like stand on my head or do a backbend or do something that like, feels good on my body and calm my mind.

Rachel Jarmusz 22:42
And like have better posture and have more energy and all these things. So that's kind of when things started to shift for me. So in terms of being more, okay with things, and finding peace in life, this is my life now. This is my life. And it's it's making me feel content right now.

Rachel Jarmusz 23:12
Like, I'm happy and I attribute a lot of that to yoga and the principles of just like, acceptance and mindfulness and being here, now, which is why I think it's such an important thing to teach stroke survivors, meditation, because like, we get out of our heads a lot. And we go to other places that are just not productive for our healing and the whole, just staying in the moment, and I feel like yoga has given me a whole new world of opportunities.

Bill Gasiamis 23:54
It didn't start that way. You didn't know anything about it. But somehow you found yourself there. And that's, I'm curious about that because I mentioned the personal development courses that I did, at the very beginning. And I had no idea that I should do a personal development course. I just had a lot of time on my hands.

Bill Gasiamis 24:13
And a friend of mine just said, Hey, there's this course running, I reckon you would appreciate it. After being at home for six months, doing nothing, I thought, Okay, I'll go wherever you tell me, I don't care what it is, could have been a cult

for as much as I knew.

Bill Gasiamis 24:27
And I just turned up and went to the course and attended and had that uncomfortable hate, love, hate experience. And then integrated that the months to follow and then started to think about okay, what else can I learn? What else do I need to know to help me in this journey?

Bill Gasiamis 24:53
Get me out of my head connect me to my heart and move me away from my old thoughts in the way that I used to give myself such a hard time over everything, and live with thought patterns that were from, probably not even me, they were probably from my ancestors and lived stressed and anxious and just outwardly expressed positivity and all these things, but internally lived completely differently.

Bill Gasiamis 25:33
Just not positive, not confident, always worried, always concerned, and always had doubts about my abilities, my lack of self-belief was just ridiculous, right? And then, I've just gone because I had nothing better to do, and I couldn't be bothered being at home anymore. And then my life was like a sliding door moment.

Bill Gasiamis 26:00
I went into that course, and four days later came out a completely different person. Now, what was it like to go into the first yoga session? Because after a stroke with a particular type of deficit that you had. That would not have been an easy physical experience.

Bill Gasiamis 26:21
And I imagine, because I'm comparing myself now, I imagine that it would have been hard to deal with mentally because I went to yoga after all my issues. And I never continued with it, because I felt like it was just way too hard. It really, made me aware of the differences between my left side and my right side now.

Bill Gasiamis 26:53
I was essentially trying to be mindful, but that kind of mindfulness was just highlighting the dramatic difference in how my left and right sides felt. And that was uncomfortable for me to be in that space then. So long-winded question.

Rachel Jarmusz 27:14
I think it's an experience that a lot of people have, after they have a stroke, either feeling like, it's too hard, they don't like attention drawn to their body, they don't want to have to think about that imbalance. And that, like, it's a bit intimidating. I mean, the yoga world has to keep it real about that.

Rachel Jarmusz 27:33
Like, it's not exactly welcoming in disabled people, although they have things like accessible yoga, that's like a different division of yoga that does, you know, like handicaps and wheelchair stuff. But I always thought that was kind of like I don't know why the yoga world doesn't integrate yoga more I wanna say easier, but more I don't know, it's not the kind of yoga that I learned. And it's not the kind of yoga that I teach. So I tell people that like, keep in mind that all yoga is different. And you have to meet a teacher that meets you where you are.

Rachel Jarmusz 28:21
And you have to find a class. It's a shame that there are no more classes that have different varieties of people who say chair yoga should be taught more, in my opinion, because people, first of all, people are hurting themselves getting up and down off the floor. And even if you can do a downward dog on the floor, you're probably hurting your shoulders, you're probably not doing it right. No offense, and you're gonna hurt yourself.

Rachel Jarmusz 28:48
And so lift onto the chair or something, and do it, you know, on a table or something, which is what I tell people like, it doesn't have to be hard. It doesn't. And that's kind of why I do what I do. Because it bugs me that there's that consensus about it. I'm like, Listen, if I can walk into a yoga class, and do yoga, anybody can seriously because it well, I'll tell you that I took my first class and was hiding in the corner.

Rachel Jarmusz 29:28
And it was a class at a hospital. So it wasn't like a studio. It was more like older people and I think maybe there were like six people in there. So it was like, really kind of empty and the teacher was so kind to me, she was like, just stay in the back. Nobody's gonna see you.

Rachel Jarmusz 29:45

You don’t have to be like and I was like, just in my glory back there like doing my own thing. There is literally like a little corner like there was like a little wall and then like a little wall and I was just back there. And it was like so had I had a different experience? I might have never done a class again.

Bill Gasiamis 30:08
Yeah, so you’re feeling like, go in the corner, hide, just participate without anyone else sort of without you feeling like you’re slowing the class down or not keeping up.

Rachel Jarmusz 30:21
Yeah. And to me, that’s the way a class should be taught anyway like the room is pretty dim, people are not looking at you, and there are no mirrors. So you’re not like, forced to look at you and stare at imbalances, you’re just there moving and breathing and doing whatever the hell you can do.

Overcoming isolation



Rachel Jarmusz 30:39
And it doesn’t matter, you can’t do it. It doesn’t matter if I mean, nothing matters other than your fluid movement and your breath and you I guess your body but I will say that after that, I wouldn’t go into a class, I took privates with like a friend that was doing it like kinda like, cheaply because that was the only way I could afford it for like, almost a year, until I went into a group class because I was like, terrified to go into the studio with peers and be looked at.

Rachel Jarmusz 31:19
I mean, because I knew that that was gonna happen. I was still wearing an AFO. When I started yoga, like, and for like, a good year into it, I was still wearing it. And you know, you go into every yoga studio, and they say, okay, take your shoes off. Put your shoes at the door. Well, I can’t walk without my shoes.

Rachel Jarmusz 31:38
So I’m hobbling in. And I’m like, whatever. At that point, I don’t even think I cared. I was just like, whatever I was so in love with yoga that like, I just wanted to do it. And so then I just started taking like two or three classes a week, for like, a good few years, and just like really doing it, and then I was like, I kind of want

to know more about to practice and about why this feels so good.

Rachel Jarmusz 32:11
And why I'm like, walking without an AFL now, and like moving my arm a little bit. So I was like, I should take the teacher training. Never really wanted to teach because who wants to see a disabled yoga teacher up in front of a room? That was my mentality at the time, at least.

Bill Gasiamis 32:30
I understand that.

Rachel Jarmusz 32:33
I'm not teaching but after finishing the teacher training I couldn't teach I just got pulled into all these different classes. And I found out that who wants to see a stroke survivor teaching yoga as everybody does? Everybody got sucked in. Yeah, and stroke survivors were finding me and asking me for tips.

Rachel Jarmusz 33:04
And then I went to like, some support groups around my neighborhood and talked about and people were interested. And so I was like, Oh, I guess I have to teach, y'all are forcing me to come out. And so then I was like, this is obviously like a bigger thing than just me doing yoga.

Rachel Jarmusz 33:23
It's something that people do want to learn and something that people like, should not ever feel like they can't do it. And like that's my mission is to just get people to see stroke survivors to see that they can potentially exceed any expectation that they might have had, where they could be, they can keep going.

Rachel Jarmusz 33:53
And that's what yoga does really as a gift. So much hope it gives you so much like benefits, like the tiniest little movement. You know, I was just working with a lady the other day, and she said subtle movements lead to bigger movements. And I was like, you know, it's true. It's true.

Rachel Jarmusz 34:15
And because we were doing such a simple movement, and I kind of could sense maybe she was a little frustrated by it because it was like, so minuscule. But I was like, please stay with it. Like, just stay with the movement. And then she goes,

Yeah, that's right. I did have a therapist who told me subtle movements lead to bigger movements.

Rachel Jarmusz 34:34
And I was like, exactly. That's exactly the idea of yoga even if you can't move your arm doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you're inhaling, lifting from your shoulders and your arm doesn't go anywhere. You're still doing it. You're still sending the message and that slightest little Federalists movement is One thing you can't ignore, is

Bill Gasiamis 35:02
Neuroplasticity is what it is. And then what that does is create pathways. And if you repeat that process, those pathways get reinforced and perhaps can lead to more neural connections. And as a result, it could lead to a more pronounced movement. And then you just build from there.

What is interesting about teaching yoga?

Bill Gasiamis 35:21
And it could take ages and it could take forever, but it is legitimate. It's what yoga used to do to take advantage of things like Neuroplasticity, but we had no proof we couldn't prove it. So the East thought it was amazing because the East has been doing yoga forever. The West thought, what a bunch of weirdos.

Bill Gasiamis 35:45
But now, the science from quote, unquote, the West, you know, has emerged to say, well, look what we found out about movement about yoga about this thing called Neuroplasticity. And now they've come together, these things have merged. And it's completely legitimate. And everyone knows the benefits of yoga.

Bill Gasiamis 36:06
What is interesting about teaching it, though, and how you got sucked into teaching, while I went to that particular four-day course, to learn about this concept of head, heart, and gut intelligence, as it's called the embracing. And then from there, the guys go to me, Well, you should do the trainer's training.

Bill Gasiamis 36:27
And I thought, Well, what do I know, four days ago, I didn't know the bump on my

head. And now you're telling me I need to do this trainer training? And again, I just said, yes. Alright, I'll do it.

Bill Gasiamis 36:42
But what I found when I did the trainer's training, and then ran some of my courses, what I found was that it deepened my understanding and the knowledge that I had about this particular methodology that I had learned.

Bill Gasiamis 36:59
So teaching often deepens your practice, it's a really important part of doing a practice, I feel the missing part of any practice is the fact that some people haven't taught it to other people yet, and they just go participate, participate in it.

Bill Gasiamis 37:21
Getting better at something I think needs to have a component where you're teaching another person and trying to explain to them what you are hoping that they're gonna get out of it. Did you find that when you became a teacher?

Rachel Jarmusz 37:41
I don't know. You're familiar with a man named Rom Das. He's ironically, a fellow stroke survivor, but also like a

Bill Gasiamis 37:54
What was his name, Tommy,

Rachel Jarmusz 37:56
RAM, dass, Rem da, SS those. So he. I don't want to get too much into the story because people can google him if they want. But he ended up having a stroke later in his life. But he was a very famous meditation teacher, and kind of

Bill Gasiamis 38:21
American kind of Google says he was an American spiritual leader, ROM, das ra M. Second word, the A S. S. And born Richard Alpert. In 1931, also known as Baba RAM, thus, an American spiritual teacher guru of modern yoga.

Rachel Jarmusz 38:44
Yes, so the only reason I bring him up is because he says he talks a lot about service teaching yoga, and giving. And he says, one of his most famous quotes is, I teach yoga to work on myself, and I work on myself to teach yoga. And because it

is like that circle of you're teaching to learn, and you're learning to teach.

Rachel Jarmusz 39:11
And you're it's that. And I think a big part of yoga is teaching it because you can't learn so much of the practice via teaching it to others and articulating the language and all of that. So I don't know why I thought that I wasn't going to teach that was silly. Wishful like, oh, I won't even but like I think intuitively I knew that.

Bill Gasiamis 39:44
Yeah, you said that you said about earlier a little bit earlier about how Yoga is a little standardized. There's a lot of the same thing and you don't get a lot of nuance in yoga. And I think the simple right isn't easy, because there are not a lot of stroke survivors teaching yoga, there are not a lot of people, perhaps that have cerebral palsy that are teaching yoga and so on.

Bill Gasiamis 40:07
That is where the gap is because people who haven't had neurological conditions a physical ailment or some kind of a problem in their lives are not at that stage where they can apply yoga in that way. And they just apply it in the way that they know. And that's the majority of the population, right?

Bill Gasiamis 40:31
And these days, the buzzword around that is inclusive, it's not inclusive enough, perhaps is the buzzword, right? But the reality is, that it can't be inclusive because that person hasn't had the level of experience to create the right space. For people like us to go there and feel included

Rachel Jarmusz 40:55
a sync point that quite honestly, I never really considered. But that's very true. And a big part of the reason why I do what I'm doing and continuing to get my next training to be like a teacher trainer is so that I can train stroke survivors to be yoga teachers because that is so true, I love that perspective on it is that that's the reason that it's not opening these doors to more stroke survivors because they just don't know.

Rachel Jarmusz 41:28
And you can get the most qualified yoga teacher who went through a million trainings and's trying her best to teach stroke survivors, but she doesn't have that

body. She doesn't know what that's like she's not gonna have the same level of empathy that someone who experienced it has.

Why you need to embrace the fact that you're a stroke survivor

Rachel Jarmusz 41:45
And now that I think about it, that's like a really big problem, because there are not people that have like Down syndrome, or cerebral palsy or anything teaching yoga on like a big platform where you're seeing it in like Yoga Journal, or like, in that, but like, That's bad. Like, that's, yeah, it's a bad reflection on the yoga community. I think,

Bill Gasiamis 42:12
and think about it, when you go there, you're doing your thing. And people know you've had a stroke? Well, it's going to encourage people with other deficits from different readings for different reasons to come along and feel comfortable and be involved.

Bill Gasiamis 42:27
Because they know that you know them, they know that you've been there, they understand they appreciate it. And I believe that the reason there's no space there is because they're waiting for you, Rachel.

Rachel Jarmusz 42:42
Maybe, I mean,

Bill Gasiamis 42:46
they've got to be remembered, on, I'll give you the perfect, not that you need more convincing, you're already working in that space. But I think what I'm trying to say is you need to embrace the fact that you're a stroke survivor. And because that's a niche within yoga, and all your classes don't have to be for stroke survivors, you need to embrace that part of it. And this is why right, because there are there are podcasts that are about stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 43:12
But the people talking about him having had a stroke, I can't listen to those podcasts. The people who are speaking about stroke, who haven't had a stroke

are usually in the field of rehabilitation, neurology in those spaces, and they're talking from that perspective, that mindset of stroke, and recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 43:31
And it's great because it brings people of a similar mindset together. And it gives them an insight that perhaps they didn't have. And it is a stat that helps teach people and helps teach people about how to particular how, for example, to support a stroke survivor with their particular skills, right?

Bill Gasiamis 43:50
And it's great, but I can't listen to it's boring. It doesn't give me the type of conversation that you and I are having. So what did I need, I needed a podcast about stroke and recovery, and to talk about all the stuff that we all go through every day, and that we've been going through for 10 years and 15 years, right?

Bill Gasiamis 44:11
And what's beautiful is that I wasn't the only one that had that idea. heaps of other stroke survivors have had that idea. And there are podcasts everywhere about stroke recovery. And they do it in their unique way because I can only do my podcast in my way and other people do it in their way. And I think and I think that the space was waiting to be filled by stroke survivors. And now we're seeing the growth in that space.

Bill Gasiamis 44:43
I started this podcast in 2017. I was still very unwell. And I wasn't releasing many episodes at all. And it's since 2015 I think you're going to be episode 250 Something like that. And what And that went from, and that went from 10 people listening a month to last month, there were 8000 downloads on my podcast. Wow. Right. It's amazing.

Bill Gasiamis 45:13
So this is what I'm saying it's taken time, it's taken between 2017. And now and the only thing that has made it work is that I'm just talking to people like you every day about stroke recovery.

Bill Gasiamis 45:30
And if I'm doing it consistently, and they're finding me now, I was yelling about it at the top of my lungs, at the beginning, but now it's the other way. Now people are finding me and like yourself, you reached out, I'm gonna show how you found

that it's not relevant, but doesn't. But it's like, the example is how things grow.

Bill Gasiamis 45:48
And this is the space that not only you, a yoga instructor who's had a stroke, can feel a similar space in this world. But then other people who I hope are listening to us, and they haven't got a yoga idea, they've got another idea for stroke, or going, should I give that a go? Now, I don't know about you.

Bill Gasiamis 46:12
But this is a question for you. But I'm going to tell you about my perspective, this has changed, and the podcast has changed my life. Again, even more in a positive way. And sometimes, it's really difficult to do it because I've got to wake up at six o'clock in the morning to fit in people from the United States and people from

Bill Gasiamis 46:36
the UK. And it's difficult for me to wake myself up to do a podcast, but it brings me a lot of satisfaction, a lot of joy, right? And then what that does is that has given me purpose in life. So I'm wondering about whether yoga has become even more than yoga for you. Because it doesn't sound like you're just a yoga teacher. Still. It sounds like it's

Rachel Jarmusz 47:04
grown in ways that you never thought of and never expected. You could say that it it started as like a thing, you know, like it was gonna be a thing over here. And I was just gonna do this thing. And now it's like, the thing is everything. And it's given me a larger sense of purpose in my life.

Rachel Jarmusz 47:29
And it's changed, you know, my household, it's changed so many different aspects of just my day-to-day life. And then meeting other stroke survivors who are curious about yoga is honest to God, the most inspiring and coolest thing that I think I have ever witnessed in my life, people are sending me pictures of them in yoga poses like they've seen on my social media, or they thought that they could do and they saw me and thought that they could try.

Rachel Jarmusz 48:02
And I'm looking at these pictures. And I'm just like, Tears are coming to my eyes. Because I'm thinking like, first of all, like, it's sad to me that people have not had this kind of support before, because like yoga and stroke survivors should have

been like this. From day one. It makes so much sense.

Rachel Jarmusz 48:22
It's almost just like, what are we doing by not teaching these very simple mindful movements and breathing techniques to someone who has had a brain injury? It's not like I don't get it. But you know, now that I'm seeing more people doing it, and they're it's like, so uplifting like you said, it gives me a reason to get out of bed.

Rachel Jarmusz 48:50
It gives me a reason to stay motivated and do my yoga, seeing other people do it. And so I feel like if that could just keep spreading and keep spreading into a person nobody would have to suffer from having a stroke because it can help. Howard Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel Jarmusz 49:19
In our emails, before we jumped on the podcast, you shared a few things that you thought might be helpful. And we've spoken about yoga a fair bit. I think people know, what yoga is, although there are different versions of it. Tell me about the intention setting. Tell me about why setting an intention anywhere in life about anything is important and then how it applies to the work that you're doing.

Rachel Jarmusz 49:50
Well, an intention, you know, I guess. The Yoga Journal tells us that doing yoga without intention is like an empty practice, you know, you're not setting the intention. And an intention is kind of like a goal. But it's not really like an intention is something that you want to embody, like right now, like a goal is something that you are setting for the future. So when we come to yoga, we are forced to just be present with what we have right now.

Rachel Jarmusz 50:26
And your intention might be for more compassion done that day, or whatever or more compassion towards someone, and then in a situation that's bothering you, or whatever you're going through at that moment that you sit and is running through your head, your intention is, is kind of everything like you're intending on what you're going to embody through your practice. And

Bill Gasiamis 50:59
it's kind of what you're working towards, it's like, I want to be happy. But you're

not. The aim is not to find and remain happy. It's to work towards happiness and do the things that get you into a happier state more often, knowing that happiness is never, you're never going to arrive there, you're always going to have ups and downs and good days and bad days, and moderately happy days and days where you're really sad.

Bill Gasiamis 51:30
But that's yeah, like an intention for life could be I want to be happy, but

Bill Gasiamis 51:35
not as a destination, I just want to do the things that bring more happiness into my life. Now, for a yoga intention, I think that's a really good thing that you mentioned because I never went into a yoga class with a good intention or any intention. And I think that that might have been something that I was missing. Because my head was telling me,

Bill Gasiamis 52:01
this is too hard. People are looking at you, you're delaying the class, and you're wasting your money.

Rachel Jarmusz 52:10
Yes, well, and intention is is to me kind of similar to a mantra, because it's something that you can use in your head, as a replacement to all of those thoughts to keep yourself kind of any you know, is there's a lot of like bad cliches about yoga, like, when you get on your yoga mat, you're gonna clear your mind, you're gonna empty your mind, that's not real, your thoughts are gonna be there.

Rachel Jarmusz 52:35
The goal is to like, notice the thoughts, choose the thoughts, replace the thoughts that you're not pleased with, and insert other thoughts there.

Rachel Jarmusz 52:45
You're, you know, you're not going to think, and so you're like, brain dead, you know, and like, buried in the ground, then you're not going to have thoughts, but our mind is going and probably gonna just go very quickly, in a situation like that, when you're nervous, and you're somewhere new and you don't know, you know, it's, that's normal.

Rachel Jarmusz 53:08

But if the teacher might have said to us, or have you had taught me, teachers just don't emphasize the like, you go into class, and then it just starts like, Yeah, but to have a conversation beforehand about like, why are you here? What is in your heart right at this moment, and to stay in that place can be a game changer for people. It can be

Bill Gasiamis 53:38
it would have been for me to think about it. Because everything that I've ever done, that I've gotten a lot of benefit from that was hard. There was an underlying intention. So the podcast is a classic example. And it's really hard to do for 2017 to now and do it in the last three years, one episode a week, it's really hard.

Bill Gasiamis 54:01
But the intention is to fill a gap that didn't exist for me, that is needed. And that potentially what this could move into is other things for me that are related to stroke recovery. And from my perspective, I think I can make a big difference. That is my intention.

Bill Gasiamis 54:21
And I, I knew it, maybe not at the beginning, but I some way in that journey uncovered it. But every time I went to yoga, I just knew I needed to be there, or it needed to be somewhere like that. And perhaps I was hoping that I was going to fall into the right version of it, or the right teacher or whomever.

Bill Gasiamis 54:48
But I didn't find myself in that situation. A couple of them were taught by young girls who, fair enough'll doing probably great work but not for me. To another, I was being told by an older guy, who again, just just to say hello to everyone was to sit on the mat, and then it was straight into breathing and, and then that was it.

Bill Gasiamis 55:13
And the breath work wasn't something that was, there wasn't a lot of conversation around this. So we didn't appreciate the benefit of the breath. It was just about Okay, going to, it was a bit of Guided Breathing. But there wasn't a deeper understanding of it, I felt like it. Perhaps the class was for somebody who had a deep knowledge of yoga when they got there. In the beginning, it wasn't for beginners.

Rachel Jarmusz 55:43

But that's how every class and studio is. So my question to the yoga community is where are people supposed to go to learn? Are they supposed to take $1,000 for Teacher Training? That's, you know, a year and a half? No, there should be more.

Breathwork and the vagal nerve are connected

Rachel Jarmusz 55:58
And then I see studios do yoga on one, you know, and so they try to do things where they will welcome the new bees and get people. But again, I'm like, Why does it have to be a separate thing?

Rachel Jarmusz 56:13
Why can we not just have classes where teachers explain a little bit of stuff, it's not hard to have a conversation at the beginning about what pranayama is, what we're going to do, what the techniques are called, why we're going to do it, talk them through as opposed to just like, what we're doing everybody quiet, you know, nobody gets up and like, I don't know yoga, it's just really wack sometimes. Like, it makes me mad, because like, it doesn't have to be like that.

Rachel Jarmusz 56:44
It doesn't have to be but

Bill Gasiamis 56:50
go ahead. Sorry, I kept you Okay.

Rachel Jarmusz 56:53
One more, I think it's becoming this like very population-specific thing, that only a certain group of people that, like you said, kind of already know what they're doing. And kind of already have a background in it, that go to these studios and keep going and weekly, you know, sometimes, two, three times a day, these studios run classes, and people are just going and going.

Rachel Jarmusz 57:21
And I'm just like, we can do better than that we can we a as a community, the yoga community, which I feel like I'm a big part of, and kind of speaking on behalf of stroke survivors in the yoga community. Like what the heck, we can do better, we can explain things better. It doesn't.

Rachel Jarmusz 57:44
It's like it's a secret. It's becoming like, it's like, you can't and that's such bullshit because this is like life knowledge. This is like it's it's for everyone and it should be shared in every situation just freely and not withheld so much. But you're so right that like you go in there, you're doing the exercises, and you're kind of wondering why, and then you're not getting an explanation.

Rachel Jarmusz 58:16
And it loses its meaning, you know, is not going to be beneficial if you're sitting there like what the heck is is what am I doing this for this is uncomfortable, my back hurts my head I you know, has to go to the grocery store after this and then go pick up the kids and then none of that's well over productive yet.

Bill Gasiamis 58:41
Yeah, it's it's just the way it is. I know exactly what you mean. It's okay because it works for a lot of people. So it's still like, I still feel like it's okay and opens a door for people to get deeper into the practice if they want to, and if they are drawn towards it.

Bill Gasiamis 59:05
The other thing you mentioned was on the Yama which is breathwork. Is that right? Tell me about the importance of that and how that needs to be integrated or why that's necessary. And then is that associated with the vagal nerve is they work together.

Rachel Jarmusz 59:25
The reason that I'm is so important that I include a whole module on that specifically is because, to me, that's like everything in stroke recovery and recovery, quite frankly from any trauma.

Rachel Jarmusz 59:44
Your vagus nerve is pretty much just holding on to everything that you have experienced every scare every fright every panic and the breath I kind of say that the breath of like, you're sending little love notes to your body, you're reminding your body that it's okay, you're safe, you're gonna care for it, it doesn't have to worry, it doesn't have to panic.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:00:14
It's, it's okay. And if you look at spasticity on a stroke survivor, it's that panic that

sets into the body and that is all the vagus nerve that is all vagal nerve issues, it's not muscular to talk about doing repetitions, you know, or doing, you know, Botox injections in the muscle, the kill the muscle, belly, none of that ever really made sense to me, because it's not. It's, it's your breath, it's prana, Yama is breath control.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:00:48
So it's techniques that control the flow of your breath. So you know, you might be thinking, Well, I'm breathing, obviously, like I know how to breathe. But it's deeper than that. It's like control techniques, it might be like breathing in one nostril and breathing in the other. And alternating or doing a forceful exhale, through your nose is doing like one of my favorites that we shot i.e. the Darth Vader breath, you like to constrict your throat.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:01:20
So it comes out like, like Darth Vader, raise that like, heavy breath. But that, to me is the essence of yoga is the breath. So I tell people like, even if they're not moving, and they're doing an intentional breath work. And when I say intentional breath work, it just means that your attention is on your breath, doesn't mean that you're doing anything particular, you're just, I'm sitting here, oh, there's my breath, noticing it, that's intentional.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:01:56
So like, the fact that you draw your attention to it, is the start of that control. So you may be like, don't know, sitting there breathing, and your mind is like quacking at you. You know, and you're taking a breath. And you're trying to stay focused on the breath. And then a thought comes in, and you're a bit distracted by the thought.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:02:26
And then you come back to the breath. And then you have a thought, and then you're distracted by the thought. And then you come back to the breath. And it's a cycle of training your brain to choose the thoughts that you're thinking, to choose. Wait a minute, I don't have to like, it's funny, because we talked about the thoughts being like cars, passing on this, you know, going by, and like I tell people don't get in the car.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:02:59

Wave, you know, by like you see it, I see you. Um, you're not getting in the car, you're not letting your attention follow that you're simply allowing What is there to be there.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:03:14
And then perhaps shifting to another focus. If you want to, say include a mantra, or include something that's like gonna bring you into a deeper practice, then you can start replacing those thoughts with new thoughts or vibrational sounds chanting whatever you want to use, and kind of get out of that, like you said, that ancestral loop of shit that isn't even yours. Like, it's not yours. It's not your thought patterns. It's

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:53
one of the best questions I think, to ask myself is, who's, are they even my responses? Is that how I would respond? Well, is that really what I think about that? Where did those thoughts come from? Where do I want to think about come from you know, I've found that a lot of the stuff that I've done that caused me I'll use the words grief and anxiety and stress came from my parents, and not that they intentionally passed that on.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:27
They did it unintentionally. And when I think about my parents and where they got that from, they got it from their parents, and so on. My parents grew up in rural Greece in 1940. My dad was born in 43. My mom was born in 45. We're talking about in the thick of the Second World War.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:50
And that makes sense that their parents would have been stressed and broken down and not able to be intentional and all that kind of stuff, they would have been in survival mode the whole time, the country was occupied by Italian forces. My Auntie's and my mom had to live

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:16
as little kids with Italian soldiers carrying guns, driving bad-looking trucks and cars, and all that kind of stuff. So it's like, you know, I get it. And then my grandparents, they grew up in 19, in the early 1900s.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:37
And there was a first world war. So it's kind of makes sense that the majority of

the things that I've received, then in the generations in the last 100 or so years, it makes sense that most likely, what they were passing down was to the next generation, a way to survive, what the last 100 years.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:04
The same kind of thing, because if it continues, if the pattern continues of destruction and war and unsafe situations, well, then that's what we need to pass down to the next generation. The thing about it is, is that I'm blessed to be living in Australia, where we haven't experienced that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:25
And it's not appropriate for me to live the life that the people before I had to live, it's not appropriate, it's not necessary when it is appropriate and necessary, that's a different shift into survival if that's what I need to do to survive. But right now, I can just pause that, and I can let it go.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:44
And I can just live the lifestyle that's necessary for the circumstances and the environment that I am being surrounded by. So that's what's appropriate is leaving to your environment. And then when you shift environments, is having the presence of mind to go, I am no longer in that environment, I can change the way I go about things.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:13
Sure, perhaps I will be a little more vigilant. And I'll pay attention to signs about the past environment, that difficult one or that dangerous one, so that I don't find myself in the same situation, and I'm not prepared for it, perhaps I'll be a little more vigilant.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:30
But I need to pay attention to actually what's going on in our lives need to live, the version of lifestyle that's appropriate to the space that I'm in. That is what I learned after doing that intentional internal work, checking in with me, paying attention to my thoughts, paying attention to my breath, and being guided by people who,

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:56
who had already done that kind of work? And this is the challenge with going to a yoga session when you're a 38-year-old stroke survivor. And the person that's

teaching me is a stunning 23-year-old, who doesn't know shit from clay, about life. And it's not her fault, because she's amazing anyway, and she's doing an amazing thing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:22
And she's probably found yoga, and it probably feels fulfilling, and has created some fulfillment in her life and allowed her to grow and the rest of it, but it's just not appropriate. What she's teaching is not appropriate to me, because I am at a different phase and stage in my life. And that's what you're saying about yoga, tends to tend to be

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:49
there's not a lot of people like us delivering yoga, and therefore

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:59
a lot of people who have stuff that they need to deal with can't relate to that stunning 25-year-old that is at the front of the class, it's doing three, one after the other three sessions in a row, and then she's doing it five days a week, and she has more energy than we can ever have an audio thinking is I feel completely totally out of my league inadequate or the rest of it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:24
And it's that's the reason why partly, and I love that they're doing it and I want him to continue doing it. Because there's a lot of people who,

Bill Gasiamis 1:09:34
who they are supporting and helping and they are filling the space for those people and it's great. So there are no hard feelings or misunderstandings, but it's you it's our version of people that we want to find that are going to guide us for the moment that we're in then

Rachel Jarmusz 1:09:56
and to be completely honest it's not repeated tentative of yoga, that's not yoga have somebody who is not? Well, I guess, I mean, you can't be age discriminatory about people not teaching, you know, under a certain age, but yoga is.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:25
I know what you know what I actually, I think you can be in a loving, compassionate way, not that we don't want them to ever teach. It's that you need

to teach at a level that's appropriate to your understanding of your skills and your experience in life. I think it's, for example, a car mechanic who has to do an apprenticeship.

Bill Gasiamis 1:10:50
You cannot just become the top car mechanic. At 25. You haven't seen enough cars, you can't see the patterns. Don't know what when people say, you know, it's that makes its make that weird noise against click like, like, like, you haven't heard enough of those stories to know exactly what the weird noise is that you're talking about. So I don't think

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:16
that it's discriminatory to say at 25 because maybe not everyone's as dumb as I was at 25. But I was dumb at 25. I don't think it's discriminatory to say at age 25, that the level of yoga that you should be teaching should be somewhere around this space.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:36
You shouldn't be taking a class just for the sake of filling a class for the space provider who needs their space filled. I think they're doing the space providers who are just putting anyone in there are doing the practice a disservice. But then at the same time, Rachel, it all potentially leads to something more amazing for somebody anyway down the track. So

Rachel Jarmusz 1:12:02
you say that all yoga is good yoga in the world. So we can't say that this is not this should not be so I mean, it's I go yoga and like brewery yoga, and like, all these kinds of Yogi's that they have, and part of me wants to be like, Oh, my gosh, what is the yoga community doing? That's like, you can't go with your glass and drink a beer and then say, you know, you're Yeah, whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:32
But it's an idea to be a yoga.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:12:34
It is. I mean, it's a thing. Oh, my gosh, is it

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:39
that should be legal.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:12:43
I mean, I'm a big believer that all any yoga in the world is good yoga. So we just need but there also is the standard and it's more of an issue of the teacher training.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:12:58
And I sometimes hate to bring this up because I sound like such a hater. But there, there needs to be more spacing, time spacing in between people getting certifications and not being able to go and get a weekend. Training that now you're just able to work and train, there needs to be continuing education credits and things that people are doing to keep themselves going and then time, space.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:13:28
So that like you said, you can acquire a listening ear for Oh, my back hurts when I do this, then, you know, you know how to respond to that person, as opposed to like, the 20-year-old is looking at me when I walk into a class like, Well, I hope you know how to modify for yourself because I you know, I had a teacher told me that one time because she was like, terrified of having me in her class. And I was like, Don't worry, I'm a yoga teacher.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:13:54
And she was like, Thank God this is what we're getting in studios. Like, what if I was not a yoga teacher and I was just a stroke survivor coming in and said, Hey, I had a stroke she would have been like,

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:09
and, and teaching from that space of fear is not the right way to teach a yoga class anyway. And we're not dissing people, we're having a philosophical conversation about yoga is what we're doing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:20
We're just trying to get to the bottom of things that perhaps we can never get to the bottom of, but we're at least trying to have some conversation about it, right? I know that you're planning or you're running a course or you're building a course. Tell me about that course that you're building and you're looking to recruit stroke survivors, is that right?

Rachel Jarmusz 1:14:42
So because this is so new, the idea is, is that I need to get more people willing to

learn yoga because I plan to go on and to do bigger training with this and to take it to bigger venues and talk to bigger yoga communities. And if I don't have or I feel like if I don't have a broad enough base of like comparing, you know, working with different stroke survivors, I'm not going to be a good resource like.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:15:17
So my goal right now is to try to find people who either are doing yoga on their own or are willing to learn a four, six-week course of yoga and give feedback to benefit and help the whole program being written. Because like I said, there's not a whole lot of research that has been done on this.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:15:41
The small study that was conducted was in like 2012. And it was like 12 people. And it was a, it was a post-stroke, yoga, balanced study. So they studied yoga, in people 369 months after their stroke, and saw and wanted to test how it would improve their balance.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:16:10
The results were astounding, and in every case, it improved the person's balance, regardless of what other things they were doing. Like they were doing other therapies, it improved. And then at the end of the study, they say more research needs to be conducted, except nobody's doing it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:32
Okay. So what you're doing? So what you're doing is you're building an eight-module course. And what you're, what you're hoping to do is get people to join so that you can support them through this course. And I'll tell you I'll speak about the modules in a second.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:47
And then from there, you're going to get some feedback about what you might do, I imagine you might do a before-yoga questionnaire, and then after-yoga questionnaire, and kind of get a bit of an understanding of what they noticed what change what benefits they felt.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:05
And then you want to be able to report on that, and then recruit more people and kind of keep learning about how to support stroke survivors in this way. Yeah. So yeah, the course has eight modules. It will consist of what is yoga, its history, and

its tradition. We spoke about the mantra and intention setting a little earlier. It's about pranayama, which is breath work and the vagal nerve, we spoke about that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:32
It's about Asana, which is physical postures, which consists of three phases, or flows, wheelchair, or chair, standing, and floor. Floor exercises, and then we've got meditation, slash Modra, sound healing, and singing bowls. Self-care and self-massage, Thai massage, and dry brushing, and then finally, caregiver, yoga slash partner yoga.

How do you recruit stroke survivors to the program?

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:06
So it sounds comprehensive because you're talking about all the things that make for an Oh, my God, what's the word like a very holistic to use another buzzword, holistic, Rick, approach to recovery from something? In this case, specifically stroke, right? Yes, these candidates that you want to encourage the comm board? Where do they have to be? How do you recruit them? How do they access the program?

Rachel Jarmusz 1:18:49
They can find me online. So it's all like Zoom base now, given COVID and everything like it's just it's been, I guess, better to do it on Zoom. But yeah, online sessions can be scheduled with me on any of my social media or the website, that's just my yogaworld.com. People can just inquire about it.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:19:13
And like I said, I've been getting lots of responses, you know, at first, I kind of thought it would be mostly like older people that were new to yoga that didn't know what it was or how it would help them. And was just curious, but now I see that like, there are a lot of stroke survivors that already have an interest in yoga and might have had an interest before their stroke.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:19:38
And don't know how or maybe don't feel confident enough to get back into the world and I'm hearing such horrible stories from people they call yoga studios.

They don’t get called back. They get looked at funny. They get told that they can’t practice here. You know, they don’t.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:19:56
They can’t do certain things, you know, and I’m just like, what the heck, what the actual heck, because that should not be happening, it should not be happening at all. And so I invite people to come over to this area and like test something new, obviously, like, I want them to understand that it’s, it’s, it’s never been done before.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:20:20
So you’re going to try it and you’re going to do a series of poses or a series of like mu drugs, those are like, finger positioning. So you could do finger counting or a finger, whatever, holding, but if you do that, then you give me feedback that then I can take to my superiors and tell people, Hey, this is what it’s doing for them.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:20:49
And I’m bound to think that there are some really like, interested yoga therapists that would want to know how this is affecting the stroke community and would be very interested in hearing about, say, 50 stroke survivors that did yoga for six weeks, you know, and to see their results and, and to educate these teachers about how to treat us in yoga studios.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:21:18
Because, you know, it was funny, because one of the first ladies that I’ve worked with on Instagram, I was telling her that, like, what she was telling me that she was so anxious about doing the session that we had scheduled. And I said something like, well, that’s normal.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:21:34
You know, yoga is very intimidating. It’s an intimidating world. And she stopped me and said, I don’t know if I would agree with that. I think that the yoga community is intimidated by us. And not the like that we should be intimidated by them. And it struck a chord with me, because it was something that I had never considered, but I was like, I think you’re right, I think they don’t know what to do with our population.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:22:11
And so they do nothing. And we feel like shit, we don’t have a place here. But in

reality, it's, it's their loss. And they're losing this experience. But I hope to kind of bridge that gap a little bit and bring people more together. So there doesn't have to be this huge divide between like yourself and say, just a regular or like a, like a, like a 20-year-old guy that's going into a class. You know, fit that might be very drawn to that teacher, because you know, he's whatever.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:22:50
And that, that's fine. That's great. I wish that that environment, well, there's a place for that. But there needs to be also, like I said, a bridge that's built between the brain-injured community and yoga studios, yoga therapists are like a buzzword that yoga therapy is like, you know, going to be like the doctors of the future and like all that stuff, like, Yes, but how about they like spending time with people because then this like?

Rachel Jarmusz 1:23:31
Like, we talked, I think maybe like, at the beginning of this Neuroplasticity was so new. And people at first kind of thought that yoga was just this weird Eastern thing. This like, Oh, I'm gonna, like, sit and like, make myself into a pretzel. And it's you it's just not. It's not that. It's not that like. And Neuroplasticity changed all of that for us. Because like you said, now people can say, wait a minute, that's science.

Yoga as a prescriptive therapy for whatever you need – Rachel Jarmusz

Rachel Jarmusz 1:24:12
That's not goofy stuff. That's science. And so what America and probably other parts of the world are doing now.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:24:24
And kind of like, rapidly, I think they're trying to study yoga. They're trying to study it, quantify it, qualify it, you know, make it into like a, okay, so if you have high blood pressure, and you're going to a yoga class, or a yoga therapist, or your doctor saying five years from now, write you a prescription, to go to see your yoga therapist to get yoga as a prescriptive therapy for whatever you're going through.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:24:55

They will have like almost a direct inventory of things to look through that they've studied to treat you. And that's what that's what they're doing now. And Harvard did a study on yoga, trying to find poses, trying to say that this pose was going to do this for you.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:25:21
And they like hooked people up to all kinds of monitors that, okay, if you're in Warrior One, it's working, you know, this, this and this, and they were gonna put it in a book and put it in a file. But what they found was that every person that they did, it was

Bill Gasiamis 1:25:36
different. Yeah.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:25:39
No, they couldn't chart it. And so I mean, I think that's the

Bill Gasiamis 1:25:46
point. That's the point of it is everyone's experience going there, and their version of healing and recovery and aha moments, and whatever. That's the point of it, the point of it is, is not to have it in a moment. Yeah, do this one. And get, do that and get that that's no point. Because then going to yoga is wrong, you don't go to yoga to get what the other guy got, you go to yoga to get what you're gonna get. That's the point of it, it's supposed to be

Rachel Jarmusz 1:26:23
like stroke, yoga, like, is so easy, because it's simply looking at the person for who they are, adapting a pose for them, and talking to them in a language that they can understand for their needs. And it to me, is not like rocket science.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:26:49
It's like, like what we should have been doing to begin with anyway. And so now it's like, well, yeah, every, you can't look at a yoga picture and be like, I want to do that pose, I want to get into that pose, I'm gonna work towards that pose, you don't have that body, you don't have that body, and you should not be

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:10
trying to that pose,

Rachel Jarmusz 1:27:12
right, trying to get into that pose, you need to come at it. And that's why I teach in such a different way that I think sometimes it puts people off a bit because a lot of times we're not doing much of anything.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:27:26
And so people often feel very, like, antsy, like, they, you know, they want to move, they want to talk to me, they want to get something going, and I'm just like, No, we're just gonna sit, you know, we might place a hand on the rib and like, take a breath, in or out or move one direction, but it's such subtle movements that like, you couldn't possibly leave a session and say, like, I couldn't do that. You know what I mean?

Rachel Jarmusz 1:27:51
Like, because you're doing literally what you can do. Well, it sounds like the kind of yoga that humanity needs right now. It's just like, gentle. Let's just move with our breath and feel any tense areas, and tight areas, try to relax, and try to strengthen what might need to be strengthened, but it's in such a nonimposing direct, cueing way.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:28:22
It's just like letting you find your way. They're letting you find a way into the breath pattern and finding really what I call like comfort in the pose and being able to be there. And if somebody I mean, it's, it's just why it breaks my heart so much, because when we go back to the sutras, and we look at the Sutras, the sutras talk about Asana, as being steady and comfortable.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:28:49
And that's all they say about it. There are 196 sutras that we're given of yoga, and there are two that reference Asana and one of them is that it's steady and comfortable. So if you go into a class, and you're feeling like you can't do it, I would say that maybe you're not doing yoga, you're doing some other workout thing. That is not yoga. Because if you're not studying comfortably, you're not in an Asana. You're not, you're not you're doing something else, but the teachers.

Bill Gasiamis 1:29:29
Yeah. And how can you be in that's

Rachel Jarmusz 1:29:31

probably going to hurt you later. And that's not yoga. That's not like I don't mean to trash talk or say that this is not valuable, because it could potentially lead someone into the realm of finding it.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:29:49
So I have to acknowledge that but when you look at the tradition of yoga, like really the tradition from like the sutras and the Vedic texts that we have about this just human knowledge, this knowledge of life because that's what yoga kind of is, is like the science of life.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:30:12
And it's like saying that you don't know how to live, you know, by saying that you don't know how to do yoga, it's basically like, like, it's not possible, you're living. So you're doing it. So it is possible to do it, you're just not, you just haven't found the right avenue to do it. And that sucks to me because too many people walk away from the practice like that's not for me,

Bill Gasiamis 1:30:43
Rachel, you're, you're, I think you're gonna do all right. Because I think a lot of people understand where you're coming from. And this thing is going to this thing that's going to help you get over lunch is your passion, bring people in, it's going to encourage people to come in.

Bill Gasiamis 1:31:04
And this is there's, there's a lack, there's a space that you need to feel, I believe that you're already starting to feel that space, but just looking at it from a way that's a lot deeper. So it's not just about doing and having spaces for people to come. It's all it's also about reporting on the feedback that people give about how they experience it so that you can then create a better environment and different kinds of lessons. And

Rachel Jarmusz 1:31:38
that's what it is. Yes, because that learning piece has got to be there for teachers to teach stroke survivors. Yeah, there has to be like, Okay, I understand that if some because every stroke is slightly different, I like to try to emphasize that strokes kind of carry a common theme. So there's kind of pockets in the body that are more affected than others and they're very, I'm finding that there's a lot of themes within them within strokes, even strokes that are very different.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:32:15
There's themes, there are, there are common shoulder issues, common certain joints, seem to be affected more in certain areas. And that fascinates the crap out of me like I just started an anatomy, yoga training course today and I'm hoping to like beef up some of my anatomies because I'm so intrigued by this stroke body and like, why it does what it does, and learning about the nerves and learning about the breath.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:32:50
We studied the diaphragm today for like two hours, just like the function of the breath and how it lifts and how the vagus nerve, you know, receives all those messages and could potentially relax limbs or bring back movement to limbs just with the flow of the breath. Yeah, just sending the breath there. I mean, how incredible is that? It is

Bill Gasiamis 1:33:13
incredible. And it's yeah, it's hard to get your head around that because it's not a head thing. You can't think your way through that is going to be difficult. It's something you have to experience and you have to do. It's something that is not a head-based thing. It's a bodily experience.

Bill Gasiamis 1:33:33
And it's a very, it's a very, it's particularly complicated for some people to get into that space where they deeply understand that it's not something to work out in your head. It's something to do and experience and then and then you have an internal reference for it, not just what somebody told you. about it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:33:57
Your Instagram seems to be doing quite right. We've got here we've got 17,000 or 18,000, nearly followers. Have you reached out to them to recruit some of the people that you're looking for? And how are you going in their recruitment process? How many people have you got? Well, I

Rachel Jarmusz 1:34:21
don't think it's going that well. I don't I don't think that people always received me quite well. And I kind of just don't know even how I do it. I kind of tried to read the room, so to speak, and see who may be interested in it and who may seem like they're interested.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:34:44
And then I might reach out and say hey, do you want to try a session and then I might get no I already did yoga is not for me or I don't have time or know that it would be helpful for me and so I'm getting a lot of like pushback I guess, which is to be expected, I guess. But then I get a lot of like, I want to learn, I want to learn, I want to try. I just had a lady reach out and say that she wanted, she had aphasia.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:35:18
And she wanted to learn chanting, which was incredible, because I haven't even like, started to promote that a lot. Like I do my chanting, but I haven't really like, put it out there. But she saw it and thought that it might be good for her. And so she reached out and I was like,

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:40
Yeah, so

Bill Gasiamis 1:35:42
the reason I asked is that we'll put the word out right now to people who are listening right now, to reach out to you, they can go to my yoga will.com, I'll have the links in the bio. And they can go to on Instagram, my yoga will as well and they can follow you there again, they'll get the links from the bio, your they'll get your links from the show notes of this episode.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:07
And perhaps what they can do is just reach out to you via messenger, or the contact form on your website. And I might even do a post on my Instagram and just say that Rachel is looking for people who have had a stroke to participate in a

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:29
program of yoga. Yeah. And for learning. How's that?

Rachel Jarmusz 1:36:37
Learning? Yes, yes, that would be very helpful, I think.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:41
All right. That's what we're gonna do. Rachel, thank you so much for reaching out, and being on the podcasts are appreciate it.

Rachel Jarmusz 1:36:51

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:36:52
Thanks for joining us on today's episode. To learn more about my guests, including links to their social media and other pages, and to download a full transcript of the entire interview. Please go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes. If you would like to take the course Five Foods to Avoid After Stroke, go to recoveryafterstroke.com/courses and get on board now.

Bill Gasiamis 1:37:16
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Bill Gasiamis 1:37:43
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Bill Gasiamis 1:38:10
Thanks again for being here and listening. I appreciate you and see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:38:15
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