

Young Stroke Survivor - Izzy Hirst

Izzy Hirst was at the Manchester Arena in England the day a terrorist detonated a bomb at the completion of the Ariana Grande concert. This began a series of health events that would lead to Izzy Hirst experiencing a stroke aged just 17.

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www.instagram.com/beyond_a_brokenbrain/

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Transcription:

Izzy 0:00

Really, I was just not happy for a long time. And when you're not happy, what you should do is change something. But I was doing the complete opposite. I was like resisting any change that wanted to happen.

Izzy 0:11

I didn't move forward with my new self, I was looking back on my old self and just comparing and like, you know, I want to be doing that. And I would have been doing this right now I would be going to uni right now.

Izzy 0:21

And just I always kind of comparing, and then I think what I've kind of learned without realizing I was learning it was. If you didn't like the situation that you were in, it doesn't matter what's happened. The three things that you can do I

really like this saying.

Izzy 0:39

Three things that you can do, you can either leave it, change it or accept it. Obviously, after you've had a stroke, you can't change it, it's happened. You can't leave it because you live in it. There's only one thing that you can do if you want to move forward and that's to accept it.

Intro 0:58

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

Bill 1:12

Hello and welcome to recovery after stroke, a podcast full of answers, advice and practical tools for stroke survivors to help you take back your life after a stroke and build a stronger future.

Bill 1:23

I'm your host three times stroke survivor Bill Gasiamis. After my own life was turned upside down and I went from being an active father to being stuck in hospital I knew if I wanted to get back to the life I loved before my recovery was up to me.

Bill 1:38

After years of researching and discovering I learned how to heal my brain and rebuild a healthier and happier life than I ever dreamed possible. And now I have made it my mission to empower other stroke survivors like you to recover faster, achieve your goals and take back the freedom you deserve.

Bill 1:54

If you enjoy this episode and want more resources, accessible training, and hands-on support, check out my recovery after stroke membership community created especially for stroke survivors.

Bill 2:05

This is your clear pathway to transform your symptoms, reduce your anxiety and navigate your journey to recovery with confidence, head to recoveryafterstroke.com to find out more after this podcast.

Introduction

Bill 2:18

But for now let's dive right into today's episode. This is Episode 148. And my guest today is Izzy Hirst who was at the Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester arena on the 22nd of May 2017 when a terrorist detonated a bomb as fans were exiting the building at the end of the concert.

Bill 2:37

This event started a cascade of events that would end with Izzy in hospital recovering from a stroke at 17. Izzy Hirst, welcome to the podcast.

Izzy 2:47

Hi, thank you for having me.

Bill 2:49

My pleasure. Thank you for being here. You are living with an acquired brain injury. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you how that came about?

Acquired Brain Injury

Izzy 3:02

Okay, so there's kind of a bit of a backstory to it. I acquired the brain injury in December 2017. But the story kind of starts in May that year. And so my family and I and my best friend, we were at the Manchester arena, I'm not sure if you're aware when the attack happened.

Izzy 3:21

And that we weren't physically harmed, we were really lucky in that aspect. But it caused quite a lot of sort of mental problems in terms of like the stress that it caused, and things like that.

Izzy 3:35

And that May time is around when exams would typically be. And so because I couldn't sit the exams. And because of the stress that that event caused, it was arranged that I would sit them when I went back into September.

Izzy 3:47

And so that happened and that was all, you know, it was all fine. I was dealing

with that. I thought, that's fine. I'll go back and do those in September, you know, I'll be all sorted because my plan was to go to medical school.

Izzy 3:58

So those exams were quite a big deal to me. And sort of over the summer with the stress of that event. I started to just get just really minor like abdominal symptoms like stomach pain, I wasn't eating a lot of just pair after eating and things like that.

Izzy 4:15

And I just didn't think so much about I thought it was all linked to Manchester and it was just a stress about sort of physically manifesting. And then in the September when the exams rolled around, obviously the stress just sort of went from here to here.

Izzy 4:29

Because I had these exams that I was putting a lot of pressure on myself for revising until like 3am. And yeah, the symptoms just sort of match that and it went from just sort of stomach pain and not eating so I was going to the toilet I think about maybe 15, 20 times a day.

Izzy 4:47

I was passing blood, and what happened sort of across of time from September to December was the symptoms just got worse. And I also developed neurological symptoms.

Izzy 5:00

So it started with a really awful headache on the left side, and just couldn't cope with scenery. I was just in a dark room for about two weeks before the actual stroke. And I couldn't deal with any noise I couldn't eat I was throwing up.

Izzy 5:15

And so at this point I was I was getting really dehydrated because of whatever was going on with my stomach. And I wasn't eating, couldn't drink, couldn't keep fluids down or anything so I was, you know, getting really dehydrated.

Izzy 5:28

And in that sort of three month period as well, we went to doctors about four times, we went to a&e four times, and my parents paid for me to be seen

privately. That was actually the night before my stroke, because it just couldn't get any answers or help from anyone.

Izzy 5:43

And so the night before my stroke, the doctor that we saw, he said, I think that this is colitis. And it's sort of there's something going on with dehydration that's causing the neurological thing.

Izzy 5:55

But I can't admit you here because that was in a hospital private hospital that wasn't in my hometown. So they wanted me to come back home and be seen here. And to travel back the next morning.

Izzy 6:08

And quite early on, because I couldn't sleep anywhere. So we thought we might as well get home and see if I can get admitted to the hospital. And I collapsed in like as I came in through the front door and it wasn't a stroke or anything.

Izzy 6:21

This was I think just the traveling with that, like pain and fatigue. And I just collapsed because I sort of had enough and my mom, she said she'd had enough of waiting and she rang an ambulance. And it's a really good job that she did. Because maybe within an hour I was at the hospital and I was having my first seizure. And what turned out to be a stroke.

Bill 6:42

Gosh, so the event in Manchester you're talking about is the terrorist attack at the Ariana Grande concert. That's the one right?

Izzy 6:52

Yeah.

Bill 6:53

So where were you in regards to the vicinity of that particular blast? How far away were you? Did you hear it?

Izzy 7:02

Yeah, so we were lucky. Again, like I said, we weren't physically harmed. But the blast sort of happened in the kind of the reception like the foyer area, we were

still in the stadium at the time, the concert, literally just it was like seconds after the concert finished that it went off.

Izzy 7:19

But we were across the other side of the stadium. And we had it go off. And then just heard the screams, the chaos stack, see people sort of mourning and piling back into the stadium. And that was when your heart just used to go to like survival mode. And it was just like run, and I was 17.

Bill 7:38

Yeah, that's so young to have to deal with something so traumatic and unexpected, and without real reason, with no real reason other than for craziness. And then you've gone through quite a difficult period of time after that as well. It looked like we're things at all settling down? Did you have issues with the way that you were coping with what happened after the blast? Did you get support for that? What was that like?

Izzy 8:12

It's been quite a long journey with that, to be honest, because that happened. And it was sort of a cross period of time. Oh, well, I've just had an EMDR I'm not sure if you're familiar with what that is.

Izzy 8:26

These eye movement, rapid desensitization. And you sort of talk through it, what you do for me, because it was on zoom, I couldn't do the eye movement started tapping, like this instead, it allows you to talk through it without getting sort of re-traumatized.

Izzy 8:41

So I've sort of dealt with that. Now I've put that to one side, because I'm feeling a lot better about it. But for like, up until my stroke I was just not sleeping because I'd have flashbacks and nightmares.

Izzy 8:55

I would be constantly hearing the bomb going off in my head. And things like music events, I did go to what I would not enjoy them. I'd just be looking around thinking someone's gonna do something, someone's gonna attack me.

Izzy 9:06

And before I went to bed on a night, it sounds crazy. But I check my cupboards and under my bed, I thought there was a bomb in there. I'd wake up and see the attackers face. And yeah, it was really awful. And then it was maybe in the September, I started counseling for it.

Izzy 9:23

So I felt sort of ready to talk about it and you know, deal with all those things that were going on. But unfortunately, partway through that counseling, I became ill and I couldn't go anymore. And then the person that I was seeing, she moved down to London, and I'm in the north, so I just couldn't continue with that.

Bill 9:40

That's been a tumultuous time now. Is it coincidental to you? Do you feel it might be coincidental at the time when you were doing the counseling and perhaps reliving some of those experiences that you also got this other symptom in the gut? Do you feel like there's a coincidence there or what's your instincts telling you about that?

Izzy 10:05

You know, I never really thought about how it could be linked to that, obviously, it kind of started off with that, but really minor. And I guess it was the exams, which was stressed, but then that would have been really stressful as well. So probably it was just a combination of things, really, I definitely put the, it's all sort of colitis, I put that down to stress 100%.

Bill 10:26

Your levels of stress would have been more dramatic than regular stress in that if you were just studying for your exams, that's a certain level of stress. But if you're dealing with this other incident, and then that on top of it, it's pretty understandable that somebody of your age 17 hasn't got a lot of resources to work out what's going on in their mind in their body and take big action.

Cerebral Venous Sinus Thrombosis

Bill 10:50

Not only a 17-year-old hasn't got those resources, most adults don't have those resources. And it's understandable that you would find yourself in this situation. So that led to dehydration which led to a cerebral venous sinus thrombosis and a

hemorrhage. And that's a lot of words. Tell me about what that is?

Izzy 11:13

Yes, so what happened is sort of the wrong time of dehydration it led to see, when I thought of a blood clot in the brain, I was thought of just one small thing, taking a blood vessel. But when I've seen my scans, it was kind of spread all around. And that's I think that's what a venous sinus thrombosis is. And how that led to the hemorrhage, we think, is that it can cause sort of like a build pressure in the blood vessels become leaky. And so yeah, it was it was the colitis that ultimately led to the stroke.

Bill 11:48

So how did you present what were the symptoms? How was it obvious that you were having this neurological event? What was going on?

Izzy 12:00

It wasn't that obvious at first, obviously, when I was not in hospital, I just had the headache. And I think because of my age, doctors said oh it's sinus problems. It's this it's that just wasn't really taken seriously.

Izzy 12:13

And then it was when I actually went into hospital I was taken by ambulance. And at this point, I was just I only had the pain, I had absolutely no other symptoms. But I did start to get pins and needles in my right arm didn't think anything of it. Because I was holding my mom's hand in the ambulance, I thought it was just from holding my hand up.

Izzy 12:31

And then I was taken for an X ray. And I was getting onto the extra bed that my right side just went completely heavy. And I was trying to pick my leg up with my hand didn't move and it just felt like a like a bag of bricks. I was just like, I can't move my leg.

Izzy 12:47

And I started screaming out and I was the only person in the room I started screaming out, I can't move my leg. It's just as like a movie. When I play it back in my head. I just started to like, tip off the bed, feel everything hit the floor, I could see the lady sort of running back towards me.

Izzy 13:03

And then my head hits the floor and everything just goes black. And when I woke up well what an extra member is being in a room with my parents. And at this point, I couldn't move my right side. But I had no idea because I was just like lying in bed. No idea what's just happened.

Izzy 13:19

I was quite happy at this point, you know, I was just like delusional. And I couldn't move my right side. And my mom said I was kind of shuffling around on the bed. She had no clue why they had no clue, I was like paralyzed on the right side. I had no clue. And it wasn't I guess until I maybe tried to have a drink of water or something that we actually realized what was going on.

Bill 13:40

Oh, what a crazy time for everybody, especially you what's it like when you wake up and you realize what's going on and what had happened to you? When was the first time you knew that what had happened to you was quite serious. And now there's, you know, there's a recovery that you're going to have to start and go on or what was that like? What's that all about?

Izzy 14:04

It's really weird about that first day, I know that I think my auntie and my sister came to see me. And I couldn't move this side. But I started to get movement in my fingers and toes.

Izzy 14:15

And I just was kind of like accepting it. Like I wasn't questioning why can I not move. I was just like. But look how good this is that I can move these. And then the next day I woke up and I was completely paralyzed again.

Izzy 14:28

And that was when sort of the longer recovery started. But I don't think there was a single point that I thought at that point anywhere that I was I called this is worrying. I can't move. I just sort of did what they told me to do and went with it.

Izzy 14:43

And I just didn't really question it. Which is weird looking back because I was definitely frightened. But I think I was more frightened about the fact I had something going on with my head and I could go at any second than I was about

the paralysis.

Intro 14:56

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?

Intro 15:13

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

Intro 15:36

It's called the 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, and they'll help you take a more active role in your recovery. head to the website now, recoveryafterstroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Bill 15:59

Not overthinking it by the sound of things. You were just going with it.

Izzy 16:02

Yeah. Which is weird, because I should have been very more worried than I was definitely that side for me came more when I came out of hospital and looked back and realized and realized how different my future was going to be. Because I think when I was in hospital, I couldn't quite comprehend it. I thought I'll stay here. I'll do what they tell me to do. I'll get out and then I'll be back to normal, that's what I thought.

Bill 16:27

But how long has it been since you were "back to normal?"

Izzy 16:32

Well, I mean, I came out of hospital. And I could walk with it. And I was using a wheelchair. And for longer distances. But back to normal, I think I realized

doesn't, it doesn't happen.

Bill 16:46

Yeah, there isn't really a normal after stroke is it? It's just dealing with whatever you've been left with, and then constantly trying to overcome and get better and better so that you are not impacted so much by the condition that you're left with.

Bill 17:02

But there isn't going back to what it was like before that it just doesn't seem to happen for anybody that I've met, it improves and symptoms get less. And sometimes, for some people, they ease-off, and they're not so debilitating.

Bill 17:18

But most people that I've spoken to about stroke, still say to me that, you know, after 10 15 20 30 years, they still consider themselves a stroke survivor, and they're still recovering from it or trying to overcome an aspect of it.

Bill 17:31

And a lot of people go back to living full and normal lives. But your life was put on hold literally, because of this episode. How did you go at your exams? Did you manage to get through your exams before the stroke or not?

Izzy 17:48

And I think yeah, I did I sat them. Obviously I was really ill when I did sit them and cannot remember how I did at all? Probably not very well. And then what happened when I came out of hospital? Well, one of the first days I was in hospital, I said to my sister, can you get me my books and things because and start revising I've got exams coming up.

Izzy 18:10

And then it was when I came out of hospital and I went to a local brain recovery charity. And they said to me, no, you're not doing any exams or any hard cognitive work for at least six months. And so that was when I realized I was gonna have to take that year off college and go back the next year.

Izzy 18:29

And so that was what I did. And I did sit them in the end, I sat them in 2019. So it was a year after I would have sat them. And I had to change my plan as well. I wanted to do medicine. But I ended up doing biomedicine, because I just know

that I wouldn't have been able to cope with that the stress of doing medicine, after going through all of that.

Bill 18:49

Next level amount of study and all the issues that are associated with the pressure of doing well in those exams, because it's such a difficult industry to get into. And fair enough. So you did biomedicine and how did you go? Did you end up achieving the marks that you needed and get through?

Izzy 19:08

Yeah, did I ended up doing better than I thought to be honest. Because what happened was in that that 2018 was really difficult. I sort of felt like I didn't have a purpose for a long time I was in that early stage of recovery where everything's really confusing. And then in the September it was like our family, I've got college like I've got something that I can do.

Izzy 19:28

And I just put my absolute all into it. And because of the brain injury, I can struggle a lot lot more with my memory, I used to be quite naturally just struggle to get the grades, whereas now I have to really work hard for them. And so I just basically locked myself in a room for a year with like flashcards and stuff like that, and I came out with and three A's and a B.

Izzy 19:49

Which was enough to get into the well more than enough to get into the biomedicine and I was just so pleased with it. Because I think a lot of people really doubted that I would get to where I need to speak and get those grades after what happened.

Young Stroke Survivor

Bill 20:02

Fair enough that they had those doubts, I imagined that they just doubts from concern for you. And they didn't want you to to overdo it and make yourself further unwell. Did you struggle with fatigue with issues like that concentrating? And then did you see those as you got better and better at studying and brought yourself into that did, did they ease off or were you constantly going through that same struggle for the entire time that you were studying?

Izzy 20:31

And I think for me, the fatigue was definitely not as worse when I was in hospital, and then coming out like that first six months, which is why I'm really glad now that they told me not to do anything for six months.

Izzy 20:43

Because I feel like it gave my brain a lot of chance to heal. And because when I first came out of hospital, I would have say, like a walk for an appointment or just like a 10 minute appointment, and go in there waking up getting dressed, having a shower, go in there in the car, having the appointment and be asleep in the car on the way home.

Izzy 21:01

And and I would sleep most of the day, I would have so many naps. And it became normal after a while just to sort of schedule in these naps not to do too much in a day. And then, like over the past three, three and a half years, I've just sort of built up my sort of scene where my tolerance is.

Izzy 21:21

And then when I found it, I just stick there, because I think I used to try and fight it a lot. Because obviously I'm young, my friends are going out and I want to be doing all those things. And I can't do those things, just not to the amount that they also do them because it just end badly basically.

Bill 21:36

I love that what you said about you've discovered your tolerance, and you go there and then you don't go beyond that, that's a really smart thing to do. Because there's no point going beyond, I used to find myself when I'd go beyond my tolerance, the next day would be terrible, it would be a ride-off, which meant that I kind of had fun. And then I would regret it the next day, and maybe the day after that.

Bill 21:56

And then it wasn't worth going through the pushing through the tolerance and then dealing with the aftermath. So at the beginning I very rarely did I go out beyond say 10 or 11 o'clock. And I just couldn't I was falling asleep on the couch, I could feel wherever we were, for example, even if we were at dinner, I could feel my left side really starting to ache and hurt.

Bill 22:18

And it would be really difficult to walk. So I would wind up my wife as soon as we could to get home so that I could rest. And that meant that I had to say to people look, I'm going home early, and they just had to deal with it. Not that they were giving me a hard time for leaving early.

Bill 22:34

But you could tell they wanted us to be there. And we couldn't be there. And we just couldn't explain it in any other way other than I'm really tired. And I'm going to go home and rest. So that's what we did as well. And to be honest, it's not what I would expect from a younger person like you now, I sound like an old man.

Bill 22:55

But most of the younger teenage people. And if I remember back, you know, in my time, there wouldn't have been almost anything, stop me from doing the things that I had to do go out with my friends catch up and do all that type of thing. And one of the things I think I would not have done was stopped drinking alcohol. Did you find yourself drinking alcohol? Or did you stop? What was that experience like?

Izzy 23:21

And so I wasn't allowed to drink alcohol for two years. And I just turned 18 about a month after my stroke. And that means we're allowed to talk out to nightclubs and stuff here and drink. And I didn't drink I stuck to that I didn't think I drank until maybe my was it I think I drank on the results day when I got my exam results.

Izzy 23:41

And then I started drinking when I went to uni, which was about two years after. And that was just because I was just terrified of something happening again. I didn't want to put anything going on up here at risk. And so yeah, so I did stick to it. Minus about maybe two months.

Drinking Alcohol After Stroke

Bill 23:59

And then how did you feel afterwards? Did alcohol cause any issues? any concerns about that you might be triggering something off in your head because I know

that when I drink now, even nearly nine years yeah, it makes me feel like I'm having another stroke like the left side goes numb again.

Bill 24:17

And it's no fun. I can't stand properly. I can't walk properly. So there's no point in really doing it and if I do, I'll make sure that it's at dinner with a meal and it's maybe one drink over many hours. What's it like for you when you drink?

Izzy 24:34

It really depends on the environment but at first it definitely did cause a lot of problems. so it was when I started going to uni obviously typical uni student drinking and just trying to keep up with everyone because I've been waiting for this for so long, like an extra year to go to uni I wanted it to be the experience that I had in my head.

Izzy 24:55

And so I was going out and drinking that you know keeping up With all these new people that I've met, and but then there was a couple of times where I'd get home and, and I'll have no recollection, it wasn't that I was drunk, because I didn't need to drink a lot. I don't know about you, but I always feel a bit drunk anyway after my stroke, everything's always a bit thingy anyway.

Izzy 25:17

And so I didn't necessarily drink a lot, but it would cause what we thought were actually more seizures because I would just kind of wake up somewhere and be like, how, you know, sort of like as if I'm passed out or something, and have like a headache, which, fair enough people say it could have been hangover, but I felt you know, you have that like feeling, or something has happened here.

Izzy 25:39

And so we spoke to the neurologist about it. And he said, the things that are probably triggering your seizures is lack of sleep, the alcohol, and sort of together especially, they're going to be really bad for you, like different people have different triggers. And that was what they were for me.

Izzy 25:54

So now I just really watch it. I think, obviously, nightclubs have not been open here. But when they do I would just be careful with the amount I drink and make sure I'm going out with people that know me and kind of watch out for signs of

anything happening.

Bill 26:08

Yeah, good move. I always also feel kind of drunk all the time. And that's, that impacts my balance, and it impacts all sorts of things. And then, as a result of that, drinking makes it next level, and I'm a cheap date. You know, I'm just a one drink wonder. What was the hardest thing for you to go through after the stroke?

Bill 26:31

Because I imagine at your age, not only are you putting your life on hold, but there's a lot of other things going on? In your mind? Did you do the whole? Oh, my God, this could be it. Have you contemplated that? Or is that something that's not in your head? What has been the hardest thing for you?

Izzy 26:50

What do you mean by this could be it? What do you mean by that? Sorry.

Bill 26:53

As in that this could seriously impact your life. And you could pass away? Did you have that conversation with yourself?

Izzy 27:01

I didn't realize how serious it was definitely in the very, very start. Just because I think I didn't have that, like awareness. I wasn't like kind of I was conscious, but not really with it. But it was maybe about a week instead of being in hospital. When I googled and chances of surviving a brain hemorrhage or something, I saw the 50/50.

Izzy 27:23

And at this point, even though was set up in bed and talking and laughing, and it was still very likely neurosurgeons were on standby was still very, like she can go any second kind of thing. And I didn't think it hit me until I saw it there on my screen. And I was like that's scary.

Izzy 27:41

And, and then that was when the thing with my head and sort of our to get scared to even for someone to even touch my head. Because I thought that someone touching my head would set something off. And I got really obsessed with that. But I think the hardest thing, probably just stem from that is more, I feel like

you've got your physical, your cognitive and then your mental recovery.

Izzy 28:02

And I think for me, it was definitely the mental side of it, which sort of stems from that I had a lot of anxiety around my health, a lot of anxiety in general, because of Manchester and the stroke, I just always thought something bad was going to happen.

Izzy 28:15

And then with body image as well. And I struggled quite a lot with that, which I don't know if that's something you had. I was wondering about this, because I feel like it's not directly people speak about a lot. And if it's just my age, and you know, the fact that I'm a young girl, I don't know.

Bill 28:29

Tell me about that body image thing, what kind of issues around that did you have? And how do you think it was related to what happened to your brain?

Drug Side Effects

Izzy 28:38

So after my stroke, I was on obviously, I'd lost a lot of weight with the colitis. And then I was on steroids, I was on weight gain and drinks, obviously in bed paralyzed can't really get off into a class or anything. So I gained a lot of weight, not necessarily loads of weight, but just sort of you get the hamster cheeks with the steroids.

Izzy 29:03

And I did get some negative comments from people that weren't really great in my recovery, and they're not in my life anymore. I didn't realize you don't really see yourself changing. And now I look back and I was like Oh, is that what I look like? Like I don't recognize my face anymore.

Izzy 29:21

You know, seeing pictures of yourself and friends and you're like, Is that me? sort of thing. And then I just got this, I've just got this image in my head all the time of sort of my post-stroke self. And it's like, it was kind of like for a long time no matter how much I watch my food or my exercise or anything. I would just always see that person in my head and it was like I could never do enough to sort of get

away from it. And so I was really hard on myself for quite a long time but I'm doing a lot better with that now.

Bill 29:52

Yeah, good on you look it is an issue for all sorts of people and I'm not sure if you have any ongoing physical this abilities that is obvious that you've had a stroke I don't. But when I was, my stroke happened when I was 37. So I had three bleeds in the brain and then brain surgery, and for the first bleed they put me on dexamethasone, the steroid to decrease inflammation in the brain.

Bill 30:15

And that did exactly to me what it did to you. And let me tell you, I wasn't happy about it, because I felt like I had lost control of my body. And it wasn't that that was my main issue in life. My main issue in life was that my head was bleeding. But I figured that if I've got to be on this medication for longer than, you know, a few months or whatever, I'm going to be seriously overweight.

Izzy 30:37

I was on it dexamethasone I was on as well.

Bill 30:40

Yeah, right dexamethasone, and it's a really good drug. It does a lot of things, right. But what it does also is it put on eight kilograms, or 17 pound in literally three weeks, and none of my clothes fit. And it made me have hallucinations, it made me feel like my skin was crawling, I couldn't sleep. It made me eat hours a day, seven days a week, I could not stop eating.

Bill 31:05

And it was a very difficult day, one day when I went to buy new clothes, new t shirts, and everything. And none of my clothes fit literally in three weeks, I had to go buy new clothes. It was such a devastating experience. But what it did for the first time is it made me realize that there's other people around us who are struggling with weight issues and body image issues.

Bill 31:28

And 99.9% of them won't be happy about that. And there might be so many reasons why they are at that weight. Whether it's because of bad eating habits or whatever, I think we're all the same when we put on weight that we don't want to have. It's not something that we're happy with.

Bill 31:47

And somebody who is overweight, for say, let's say nutritional issues, might even feel that they're overweight, is that whole situation is out of their control. And I felt just like anybody else who had ever spoken to who was overweight and feeling bad about themselves, I felt exactly the same way.

Bill 32:04

So it inspired me though, to find out how I can decrease inflammation in my body without drugs, not that I was going to stop taking them if the doctors told me that I must. But I did everything I could to support reducing inflammation in my own body.

Bill 32:20

And as a result of that I went to I went on a really strict diet regime and got rid of all the inflammatory foods out of my diet and went back to basics, you know, steak and three vege, and a whole bunch of sellers and some fruit and all that kind of stuff, no dairy, no caffeine, no alcohol, no sugar.

Bill 32:39

And that really helped me to feel like I had some control back in my life, it wasn't an easy thing to do. And I didn't do it all. In a short amount of time I took one what I consider inflammatory foods out of my diet. Slowly, every few months or so every time I ramped up. And I was able to feel comfortable to try and take the next one out.

Bill 33:02

But the main one that I took out that a lot of stroke survivors talk about is gluten and bread. Because that one increases the fatigue after you eat it. So people eat it, they get a real spurt of energy, and then the body releases insulin. And then it decreases that energy very dramatically. And then the brain thinks, oh my gosh, we're running out of energy, and it starts to go into a shutdown mode and you get fatigued then you've got to sleep it off.

Bill 33:31

That was the cycle that I was on with dexamethasone. And that's when I was eating all day, every day, my mom would make me a bowl of pasta. My wife would be making me pasta everybody would be making pasta, and I'd be eating maybe 4000 calories a day where before I was eating less than 2000 a day. So absolutely

I understand how you experienced body image issues.

Bill 33:55

And yes, it's partly tied to your age at the time, of course, right. But like I said to you every person that I've spoken to has had a stroke, who has a physical disability, has now had that issue and many stroke survivors who I've interviewed on the podcast will say you know, I wonder you know, what's my partner gonna think of me now that I look like this or what other people gonna say.

Bill 34:18

And it's a terrible place to have to find yourself. But what I feel like is, if other people are judging you for that it says more about them than it says about you. It means that they can't grasp the concept of not being well and they're lucky that I haven't got to that point yet. So you learned some lessons really early in life and I wish you didn't have to learn them like that, but it sounds like you had no choice did you?

Izzy 34:49

No and it's weird to say because I'm not. I'm not glad that the stroke happened. But because I do always wonder what I would have been like, if it hadn't happened and what life would have been like. But I am really grateful for all the things that I've learned.

Better After The Stroke - Izzy Hirst

Izzy 35:07

Because I do think I'm a better person for it, not for the stroke, because for a long time that put me in just really bad place mentally and feeling sorry for myself stuck in the same place, not moving forward. But then when I finally kind of accepted it, and I did start to learn and grow, that was when I really did i do think I've become a better person for it. Yeah, definitely.

Bill 35:33

I said the same thing. And I've got to that point where Lauren years out. And before that, I say, you know, the strikes the best thing that ever happened to me, and people, some kind of reconcile that. And I understand when people can't understand how somebody could say that, but it is my live with physical disability that you can't see every day.

Bill 35:53

My left side is weak and numb, and it bothers me and my balance is an issue and my fatigue catches up with me sometimes, it's the best thing that ever happened to me, I was a complete moron before the stroke. And I'm not talking about my personality. I'm not talking about how I, how I treated people and how I behaved. I mostly was a good guy, but I was stupid.

Bill 36:14

I had no idea what life was about, even at 37. And, I had to go on this. study this crash course to study to work out what the hell am I doing? What's the point of life? What am I here for? What what am I trying to achieve? And I'm here to answer all the questions, but I'm well on the way to understanding that, like, it's not really about me, this whole life thing.

Bill 36:41

It's about other people. It's about making a difference. It's about sharing experiences. It's about teaching other people what it is that we know that's important, that's going to help them if they are so interested to find out. And, and it's also about being the best version of yourself that you can be and constantly strive for that constantly strive to be better than I was yesterday.

Bill 37:06

And that was not me, I wasn't that guy at 37. I had no idea who I was. And I've learned a lot. So that's why I do the podcast now. And it's helped me find my purpose, which is a real thing that people struggle with after stroke. It's like, what's the point of life? What is my purpose? And it didn't come to me day one, when when I woke up, you know, it took me three or four years to struggle through that.

Bill 37:32

And it didn't even come to me after I started the podcast, it came to me Well, after that when I realized the podcast is making a difference in helping people. It's kind of like, Oh, my gosh, this might have something to do with my purpose, why I'm on this planet, and how the podcast is making a difference. So that's kind of what I got out of it.

Bill 37:55

Now. You spoke about that too. A little earlier, you felt like at the beginning of the

recovery, there was no purpose. Have you shifted? Do you have a purpose? Are you kind of finding it? And it's okay, if you don't, but it'd be lovely to hear what a young person's purpose in life might be?

Izzy 38:15

Yeah, I mean, I think I've found maybe not the purpose. But I found reasons, you know, purposes since then. I think when I first came out, because I've made that physical and cognitive, not necessarily the greatest forms of recovery, but definitely physically Yeah, I'm the same as you, I look fine.

Izzy 38:36

But I'm not necessarily you've got things going on that people don't see. But because I didn't, I wasn't working, wasn't at college wasn't driving, I just felt, you know, and you feel really alone when you don't have a purpose because you need one, that's what we all need one.

Izzy 38:52

But now kind of similar to you. I do a lot of work with the local brain recovery charity, I have my Instagram page, I'm doing my university course I'm really loving, just connecting with other survivors. And I've started volunteering as well at the hospital on the rehab ward.

Izzy 39:10

And literally only done one shift so far, but I really enjoyed that. And, I think obviously, it's great because in the future, that's what I want to go into is working in a hospital. but I think, obviously, I wanted to be a doctor before. I really know why I wanted to be a doctor. I didn't have reasons why it was what I wanted to do.

Izzy 39:30

Whereas now I'm like, No, I've been there. I've been on the other side. And I'm not going to be a doctor anymore. But I can certainly work in hospital and make I think make a difference and help people and connect with people because I feel like that's what you want when you're in there.

Izzy 39:46

Because all the time when you go to appointments and things it's like people are speaking to you. And it's as if this isn't a really big day in your life and this appointment is not something massive that you've been waiting for for months. You It's just another day at their job.

Izzy 40:01

Whereas I'd love to be able to sort of connect with people in the future, and make them feel like you're being like listened to. And I understand the symptoms that you're going through. And I understand that it's impacting your life. Do you know what I mean? Like everything I'm doing now is to help me eventually get to that point.

Bill 40:20

Yeah, it's weird to say this, but there's nothing better than another doctor who's had a stroke. Because they're the only people who get it. And there's few of them. And I understand that, and I wish there was none, to be honest. But when you go into a hospital, and you deal with somebody who's been on the other side, and understands.

Bill 40:39

That makes just a massive difference, the way that they go about explaining things, the way that they go about understanding what you're struggling with. So it's really amazing to see that, you know, one of the people who I looked at for some information and trying to get a better understanding of what was going on in the medical fraternity that I've had, of people who are helping stroke survivors was a gentleman who I interviewed on the podcast, who was a psychologist, who had a stroke.

Bill 41:14

So what that resulted in is that he's several years like me, I think he's maybe eight or nine years beyond the stroke, and he's learnt a lot. And he wrote a book that was designed to give an insight into what it's like being a stroke survivor, so that now, other counselors, other psychologists are reading this book, and applying that learning into their counseling sessions.

Bill 41:42

So that there's this different level of understanding now where there wasn't before so that was a really good thing. And then the other person was Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, who was one of the first videos I ever saw, which was, she was a neuroscientist, a researcher, she was researching the brain because her brother had schizophrenia, when they were kids, and she was just trying to understand then I suppose help her brother and her family.

Bill 42:09

And then she had a stroke. And she had a conversation about what it was like as a clinician, or as a neuroscientist, to experience her own stroke. And she spoke about this weird situation where she was observing the stroke happening as a clinician, while it was happening to her as well.

Bill 42:29

It was the craziest thing. And I got a lot out of connecting to people like that and learning from Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor through her book, and also through my guest on the podcast, and I'll get his name in a moment, who shared this amazing version of stroke from the eyes of a psychologist, which when I went to my psychologist, after the stroke, I couldn't get to that point where I was able to explain exactly what was going on.

Bill 43:01

And I knew that she knew she was amazing, but she just didn't know that what I was saying to that extent, right, it didn't matter much, but it mattered. And the person that psychologists name was David Roland, and he wrote a book, recently, his second book, *The Power Of Suffering*.

Bill 43:18

And he also wrote another book, his first book was called *How I Rescued My Brain*. And his second book was called *the power of suffering*. So when I met David on Instagram, I was, and then I chased him up, and then I followed him. And then I asked him to be on the podcast, I was so amazed that somebody had been a psychologist, and now they've had a stroke, and they've put that experience to work to make a difference to stroke survivors.

Bill 43:48

So I get what you're saying, like, it makes a big difference, you're going to be an amazing person in a hospital, especially if you work anyway, in some kind of a neurological environment or in a ward like that, or in a stroke ward. I think that's one of the beautiful things of having people with experience in that space. And of course, I'd rather you never had that experience. But since you've had it, you might as well make the most of it.

Izzy 44:14

Yeah. No, you never think about people, they're professionals. You can see

doctors a bit invincible, or at least I do, you don't think really about the things that they might have experienced. And actually they could have, had a stroke. I don't think I've ever met any of my health care professionals who have gone through something like that, but it would have been obviously not nice for them to have gone through that but nice for someone in the room to have kind of understood a bit deeper.

Bill 44:42

Nobody ever shared with me that they went through something similar or that they hurt their toe or anything like that. You never hear about them. So they do put on this brave face of it's not about them. They just make it about you in some way. Because they're trying to get you better and get you out of hospital.

Bill 45:00

But I think that'll bring the thing that doctors are missing. And it'll bring that human touch, you know, that little bit of additional layer of support without going too far, they don't really need to do too much to say, I've been in your shoes, or I know somebody who's been in your shoes, and I think that'll make it better.

The Recovery After A Stroke

Bill 45:19

But yeah, that's okay. I'm alright with them doing what they do, they did a really good job with me, they fixed me up, they got me home. And then there's a point where the recoveries then the responsibility for that has to be on us. So you seem like somebody who's really taking responsibility for how you're going to recover? Is that how you've always been? Or is this just something that you've been really motivated about?

Izzy 45:45

And I've always been quite an independent person since before the stroke. And, and then in terms of taking responsibility for my recovery, I think I kind of ignored it for the first six months, because I was still kind of a bit in denial. And I was trying to keep up with everyone.

Izzy 46:05

And kind of just, I was just really not, I was just not happy for a long time. And when you're not happy, what you should do is, is change something. But I was

doing the complete opposite. I was like resisting any change that wanted to happen any of that.

Izzy 46:21

I was like instead of moving forward with my new self, I was looking back on my old self and just comparing and liking I want to be doing that. And I would have been doing this right now we're going to uni right now.

Izzy 46:32

And just always kind of comparing, and then I think what I've kind of learned without realizing I was learning it was if you didn't like the situation that you were in, it doesn't matter what's happened, the three things that you can do I really like this saying. The three things that you can do, you can either leave it, change it or accept it.

Izzy 46:55

Obviously, after you've had a stroke, you can't change it, it's happened, you can't leave it because you live in it, there's only one thing that you can do if you want to move forward. And that's to accept it. And it was when I started to accept it, especially when I went back to college because I had a new purpose, I felt a lot better for that.

Izzy 47:14

And then especially in the past six months only, and when I started doing the therapy and stuff, and I really started to accept it that sometimes we're not going to get all the answers. And these things just happen. And if I can't change our car, leave it. I'm in it. So I might as well stick with it and do the best I can.

Izzy 47:31

And it was when that kind of clicked that I started to really take responsibility and be like, these are the deficits I have, I'm going to have them but I can at least maximize my own potential and do what I can with them. Do you know what I mean?

Bill 47:47

Yeah, I completely get it. Because I think I accepted it like right at the beginning. When I woke up from surgery, and I couldn't walk. I didn't know if I could walk again, I didn't know if I was going to be able to walk in, I had no idea what that was going to end up looking like.

Bill 48:05

But I just accepted everything I just didn't like it. I wasn't happy about it. I wasn't keen on being there and trying to learn how to walk again. But I just accepted it. And I felt like that is my mind to a point it decreased some of the stress. And therefore it allowed me to put my energy into other things like recovery, and like actually walking as best as I could.

Bill 48:29

I just didn't do the whole I didn't feel the I didn't do the Why me at all. I never ever did the Why me I just got on with the job. And I suppose I've done the Why me from time to time in the past on other things, but I've never done it with this. And one of my coaches anyway, maybe it's because up until 37, I had been going to counseling since about the age of 25.

Bill 48:53

And I've been going to coaching and all sorts of things. There's definitely a lot of things I wasn't happy about. And that's that thing I was talking about earlier. Like I wasn't completely satisfied with my life. But I wasn't smart enough to understand what to do different. I didn't do the thing that you said which was change something and do something different.

Bill 49:11

I did the same thing whinged about it forever, hated it forever, but I didn't really achieve anything. And one of my coaches actually says, and I'm sure this is you know, some super guru that says this somewhere. She said, you know, what you resist persists. And I resisted everything up until that point.

Bill 49:30

And it persisted. All the things I resisted change and change was telling me man, you've got to change something, you have to do something different. If you don't do something different. You're going to suffer and struggle with this and it's going to annoy you for the rest of your life. But no matter how much he told me, I didn't want to hear it right?

Bill 49:48

And from a lot of the people that I coach at the moment, you know some of the people that our coaches struggle with acceptance and one of my one of the strengths of ours I'm catching at the moment said this, I won't reveal his name.

And I won't reveal any of the other issues.

Bill 50:04

But the challenge that he has is with his leg similar to my leg, but his leg feels numb in just one position in just one part of his leg. Okay, so it's not his entire leg. And it feels strange when he runs. So I totally understand what that's like. And in one of his comments, you know, he said that he refuses to have it feel like of that for the rest of his life.

Bill 50:31

And he hasn't come to terms with the fact that it's not up to him as to whether it feels like that for the rest of his life. He just may feel like that for the rest of his life. And he's struggling to believe that somebody out there can't fix it. And I'm like, no they can't do everything yet. Like, doctors cannot fix everything.

Bill 50:51

However, they did save your life. That's a pretty big deal. You would think that that's a blessing. And I'm not saying that this person doesn't sometimes go to that place where he's blessed. But he's definitely putting a lot more time into the feeling in his foot. He was somebody who was up and about much sooner than most people I've ever heard.

Bill 51:14

And, sometimes he just struggles to go through that place. And I feel like the more he stays there, and it's his journey, I'm just there to guide him and support him. It's his journey. But the longer he stays there, the more he's going to struggle, the more he's going to waste energy on this part of his recovery. And the less he is going to be able to focus on things that are more important, because I'm sure there are things that are more important than his foot.

Izzy 51:43

Yeah. What you said about the things that, like the blessings, and then I guess the things that we don't like, and we don't want to accept, the kind of is a skill, and I guess, maybe early on in recovery, you've got a lot on this side. And not a lot on this side. It's kind of like this. And as you go through, you need to be grateful for more. And these things you realize you can't change and it one day tips. And that's just the point that you kind of want every survivor to get to.

Bill 52:15

If you could get all the stroke, survivors to get to that point where they tip over to the point of more gratitude than anger, more gratitude than resentment, more gratitude than comparing, you know that certainly does help. And there's a time for anger. Absolutely. There's a time for comparing, there's a time for all those things, I think you have to go through every part of the recovery.

Bill 52:38

It's just how long do you want to stay there, it's the way that I saw it, I didn't really want to stay in those unproductive places for too long, because I at 37 realize that life can be very short, which meant that I might be spending the rest of my life doing all that junk, and not living my life.

Bill 52:56

And then also, what kind of an example Am I setting for my kids who hopefully won't go through anything serious or dramatic for a long time? But if they do, and the only example that they've got to go on is somebody who's angry and mad and resentful all the time, while then how is that going to support them in having an alternate view?

Bill 53:20

So yeah, it's a really interesting conversation. It's really interesting to have this conversation with somebody who was 17 at the time of the stroke, and is now 21. And you're talking with somebody with a lot more wisdom than most other 17 and 21 year olds, of course, you know, you know what I mean?

Bill 53:38

They haven't been where you've been, and they don't have that kind of wisdom. And that's kind of a good thing. But there's also something lovely. When I hear you talk with such I'm not sure what the word is, it's wisdom, it's definitely wisdom. You know.

Izzy 53:57

I don't know if I'll say I'm wise for a 21 year old, but that's really nice. Thank you. I've learned some things at least I'm still learning.

Bill 54:07

Yeah, we all are, but you are wise. You're wise in that aspect of life not saying that you're, you know, the epitome. But you're on your way.

Izzy 54:18

Yeah. Not quite yet.

Bill 54:21

But you're on your way. So how's the rest of the family coping with all of this? Do you have siblings mum and dad like What's all that like?

Recovery Of Izzy Hirst With The Help Of Family

Izzy 54:33

Yes, so when I was in hospital, so my kind of close family immediate family was my mom dad, my sister and my auntie came to the hospital a lot. And she's always one of the first people kind of on hand if something happens, but it kind of every day at hospital my mom would stay from morning till night and my dad no my dad would stay morning till night my mom would be there for me all through the night.

Izzy 54:58

So they really didn't see each other for it was about a month I was in hospital and they were just kind of pass each other. But having them there, I just feel like that made such a difference to my recovery. And I wish it was something that everyone could have obviously because I was 17, I was allowed someone with me.

Izzy 55:13

And what it meant was that when I got to a point in my physio where I could kind of walk independently, maybe not the best walk back and do it. And I've gotten used to, you know, if I had a bit of rubbish on my desk at hospital, someone else would pick it up for me.

Izzy 55:27

Whereas my dad would be like, I'd be like, can you put this in the bed? And he's like, no, you can do it, you can get off and do it. And he would make me do these little things. And he'd walk me up the corridor and back and things like that. And we would play games as well.

Izzy 55:42

So I'll get my hand movement play like what's the game, where you've got is it connects for and things like that. And all of that, I just think I didn't realize it helped at the time, it just seemed like fun. But it did. And I wish that something

that every survivor could have.

Izzy 55:58

Because it does make a difference. Having people with you 24/7, and then being able to help you move versus being lied in your bed waiting for one hour of physio. Do you know what I mean? But yeah, my family and my sister as well, obviously, she kind of kept everything together while my parents were coming back and forth. And she came to see me and yeah, everyone was really great. I've got a really good support network.

Bill 56:23

Yeah, lovely. What you said was interesting, I often found myself waiting for that one hour of rehab. And I was expected to just do nothing for the rest of that time. And I found that quite strange. And I didn't, I was on YouTube, YouTubing, you know, you know, searching how neuroplasticity works and I was doing all that kind of stuff, but they were expecting you just to be there, watch the TV that's in your room and not doing too much more than that.

Bill 56:51

And I found that quite bizarre, but I'm sure they've got other things to do. And that's okay. Like, again, I just took responsibility on using that time productively, so I could learn about how to help myself get out of there quicker. And, that was a good approach now as a young girl, who was 17 and now couldn't move half of her body. That would have been difficult going to the toilet, showering all that kind of stuff. How did that impact you? And your I'm not sure your emotional state or your mental state?

Izzy 57:25

Yes, and obviously, as well, I needed the toilet a lot because I still have the gastro stuff going on. So what would happen is I just had a call button. And every time I needed the toilet I would press it. But there's a real urgency when you've got to stay close if you need to go, you just need to go.

Izzy 57:44

And I would get really stressed out because I'd be pressing this call button. And obviously you've got other jobs to do. But I'll be pressing it and I'd get really angry. And they would come. And then I'd obviously be all smiles when they were in the room and I would have two people sort of lift me and put me I couldn't walk

to the bathroom and back. So that would just lift me onto there.

Izzy 58:08

And then to be washed. I think one time I just I got really upset and I was just like, I don't feel clean. I just started crying Whilst this someone was in the room. And then these two health care professionals, I don't know what who they were just came in, sort of took my gown off wash me didn't say anything to me, dressed me.

Izzy 58:31

And I was like 17. And I was like what just happened? Like what just happened a week ago, I could walk and I was just a normal person. And now someone else is washing and dressing me. Yeah, it was really strange. I imagine you really went through quite similar.

Bill 58:49

So going to the toilet. I remember, straight out of surgery. I was laying waiting to go to rehab. So there was about three or four day delay before I went to a rehab facility. And I was waiting. And they asked you have you been after surgery have you moved your bowels yet?

Bill 59:07

And I said no. And I think it was day two or something like that. And what they do is they give you a laxative and they give you laxative day 1 and it hasn't happened. Nothing's happened, they give you laxative day 2, nothing's happened.

Bill 59:19

And then you've got this buildup of stuff and you've got a build up of laxative. And then it happened. And I was sitting in the chair realizing in my bed realizing I've got to get to the toilet right now. And I did exactly what you did. I press the button, nobody was coming.

Bill 59:33

And I couldn't use my left side. But the wheelchair was next to my bed. And I dragged myself off my bed. I dragged myself into the wheelchair, which was dangerous, but whatever. And I started pushing myself towards the toilet and just when I got to the toilet door, the nurses caught me or came in caught me and said to me, what are you doing?

Bill 59:55

You know, I and I said to him, listen, I had to go you ain't here. What was I gonna do? There was two options either get myself to the toilet or you're cleaning my bum for me.

Izzy 1:00:07

Oh my goodness that must've been really difficult?

Bill 1:00:07

It was tough, right? It was tough. And they started kind of laughing. And also they said, they appreciated the fact that I thought of them, which had nothing to do with them. You know, of course, I didn't want that to be in that situation at all. But, we're arguing now and we're at the toilet door.

Bill 1:00:12

And I said to him, I just got to get to the toilet. Can you please help me up there? That helped me up onto the commode. Now, when I got there, I noticed they weren't leaving. And I said to him, What are you guys doing? And they said, well we have to wait here because it's too dangerous for you to be at the toilet on your own, you might fall.

Bill 1:00:41

And I said you must, you have to get out you need to leave. Because I'm not doing this with you here. There's no chance and I'm busting and you've just got to get out and they wouldn't leave. So eventually, I said to him I promise, I will not move. I will not try and get up. I won't do any of that stuff. When I'm done. I will call you in.

Bill 1:00:59

But not while I'm not Now. No you can be here now. So they eventually left and I said just wait behind the door to please wait behind the door. they close the door. They're way behind the door. All right. And as I said, I promised I did what I promised. And then I called them in. But then I was kind of trying to work out like what do you talk to somebody about when you're on the toilet doing your thing and they're in there watching you?

Izzy 1:01:22

Yeah, well, I had similar experiences, but I had just a curtain so I just had to put the curtain up. And but it was really funny because most of the time during the

day, it would be my dad. And it would just be really funny to be honest. So we just jerk about it. Yeah, luckily, I didn't have any like strangers watching me on the toilet.

Bill 1:01:46

And, of course, that never occurred to me until that moment that that was a possibility that that had to happen. Like that. And then it's like, no, you've just caught me unprepared. And I can't go through this right now. I haven't worked it out in my head. how it's supposed to go.

Bill 1:02:02

All I know is it can't happen the way you're saying. So it was quite stressful. And then I've talked, I've spoken to a lot of other stroke survivors who have been through exactly what we've been through and the left side, or the deficit on one side of their body was more dramatic.

Bill 1:02:18

And they had to deal with a lot more than that. You know, one of the ladies I spoke to Clodah Dunlop, she was locked in, and she wasn't able to move anything other than her eyes. And there's a number of people I've interviewed like that.

Bill 1:02:31

And Clodah was telling me that as a 30-year-old, you know, female, she really worried about her safety and her well being when she's in a hospital and she can't move and all these other people around her and she doesn't know any of them.

Bill 1:02:43

And all she can do is blink her eyes and she can't speak.

Izzy 1:02:47

That must be so scary.

Bill 1:02:48

So scary. And it's, you know, super frustrating and traumatic, and I can understand, you know how that could leave an impression on people. So I take my hat off to everybody who's been through that situation, and worse, and come out the other side now to talk about it.

Future Plans Of Izzy Hirst

Bill 1:03:08

And to overcome and to move on. And I think you're doing a really good job of that. What is the future? Looking like for you now? So I know you're at uni, what year uni Are you in? And how soon do you hope to graduate? And what do you hope to try and get yourself a job in what field?

Izzy 1:03:27

Yeah, well, I just finished my second year. And, I got FS. So that was good. And so I'm going into my third year in September. And then I'll also be applying for physicians associate and postgraduate.

Izzy 1:03:44

And that'll be two years. So I've got another three years to go hopefully if all goes to plan. And then yeah, I'll be working in hospitals and physician's associates quite a new role here. I don't know if it's something where you are, but essentially you work underneath the doctors to help diagnose and treat.

Izzy 1:04:01

And hopefully they'll get the powers to prescribe soon as well and do minor treatments and surgeries. So yeah, basically essentially following the route that I wanted to do still, but in a different way and under a different sort of role.

Bill 1:04:16

Okay, so kind of like a role where you're reporting to a doctor and supporting them with their work.

Izzy 1:04:22

Yeah, yeah.

Bill 1:04:23

That's beautiful. So you get to get really intimately involved with the patient and support them, but perhaps a bit a little bit more connected to them, than be at that level with a doctor is where they're a little bit more disconnected. Does that sound right?

Izzy 1:04:39

Yeah, yeah, possibly might give more opportunity for that because you are

working under them. So you're the one that's kind of going to the patient taking history doing the examination, things like that. You're the one with the patient contact and then going back to them and check in, you know, does this sound right? And you've definitely got that patient contacts there, which is what I really want.

Bill 1:05:04

Your Instagram is beyond_a_brokenbrain. And I saw a couple of your posts. And that's why I contacted you I saw your post where you were talking about the stages that you went through from the age of 17, to the age of 21. Now and how you've changed and evolved and moved on.

Bill 1:05:25

And that really was I think, an inspiring post, it's really good to see. And that's kind of the message that I'm trying to raise, it's that message of we went through a really bad time, things were tough. We didn't like it, it was a lot of things we had to learn and overcome.

Bill 1:05:41

And one of the challenges that some stroke survivors face early on is they hear me speak, who's nine in so many years down the track, and they jump to the conclusion that oh, my God, like he's a stroke survivor, and he's perfect. I need to be like him, and I need to be like him really quickly.

Bill 1:05:57

And I really want to create an understanding of a path that people have to follow. It's gonna take some time for some people, it's gonna take longer than it will for others. What inspired you to put together that little bit of history for yourself?

Izzy 1:06:17

I think, because I would have quite liked to have seen that when I was in hospital. I remember, there's a boy in my town, actually, he had a stroke, and hearing that he'd had a stroke and seeing what he was doing after. And that was like I'm not the only one someone else has been through this and look where he is now like there is hurt kind of thing, I think hurt, is really important now in recovery.

Izzy 1:06:41

And, yeah, but also, at the same time, like you said, you have to be quite careful with it. Because then people can be like, people will message me and say, oh,

when did this? When did your arm start to move? When did your leg start to move. And it's definitely it's not the same for everyone, the way that things have happened for me, like everyone is different, every stroke is different. So you do have to kind of have a balance of these are the good part of my recovery, but also this these bad parts.

Bill 1:07:09

I think your instincts have guided you. Well, with regards to the way you go about things and what you've just described, did it serve as a bit of a reminder to you as well as to how far you've come? Did you look back on that? And go? Well, actually, I've come quite a long way.

Izzy 1:07:24

Yeah, definitely. I do like to look back, I have quite a few videos from when I was in hospital. And if I ever am feeling sort of doubting myself a bit or anything like that, I will look back, and I will remind myself, like no, actually, you're doing really well you know what I mean?

Bill 1:07:40

Most of what you're going to experience from now on is just general life. So the stroke survivors tend to have this thing. And I'm generalizing. So if you're a stroke survivor, and you're watching or listening, and this is not about you, that's perfectly fine. But they did they tend to have this thing that you know, what they're going through is unfamiliar, perhaps it's got to do with the stroke.

Bill 1:08:04

But it's, most of the time, it's really not what I feel like is most people who are struggling with life, emotional problems, mental issues, all those issues tend to be there before the stroke. And the stroke kind of makes it a little bit more heightened, or it makes it a little bit more obvious because stroke has its own complications.

Bill 1:08:27

So I think my message to you is that what you're going to experience from now one is life, just general life, you have your ups, you have your downs, you have your good days, bad days. But if you can have the attitude that you have, which is to look back, and then try and ask yourself, what's good about this? Or what can I learn from this? Or how can I grow from this that's going to really support you.

Bill 1:08:50

And if you're in a tough time, and you're feeling low, ask for help. And at the same time, when you're in a tough time, and you're feeling low, just know that it most likely will pass allow yourself to experience all the range of emotions, because they're really important. All the emotions are telling you something, they are giving you information.

Bill 1:09:11

And you have to pay attention to that information and do something about that. When you're feeling unwell. That's information that's feedback, something is not going right. And you need to pay attention to something and you need to take some action on something. Does that resonate? Does that ring a bell?

Izzy 1:09:29

Yeah, I think because especially with the colitis that's ongoing. And I can tell if I'm letting myself get stressed out or upset about something, that would be a reminder. So in a weird way, I am grateful to have it because it's like my biological thing. That's like take a step back with what's going on. But sometimes rather than noticing it up here first, like I'm feeling this way, I'll get problems with my stomach. And that will make me think, oh, is there anything going on at the moment that I need to watch.

Bill 1:09:59

On that note. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really, really appreciate it. And thank you for sharing your story.

Izzy 1:10:07

Thank you for having me. It's been lovely and I think it's great what you're doing as well. I think it'll help a lot of people and that sort of scale that we talked about. I think you'll help a lot of people get to that point. Yeah, I hope so.

Bill 1:10:20

Thanks so much for joining me on today's recovery after stroke podcast. Do you ever wish there was just one place to go for resources, advice and support in your stroke recovery? Whether you've been navigating your journey for weeks, months or years, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to get the answers you need.

Bill 1:10:37

This road is both physically and mentally challenging from reclaiming your

independence to getting back to work to rebuilding your confidence and more. Your symptoms don't follow a rulebook, and as soon as you leave the hospital you no longer have medical professionals on tap.

Bill 1:10:52

I know for me It felt as if I was teaching myself a new language from scratch with no native speaker inside. If this sounds like you, I'm here to tell you that you are not alone. And there is a better way to navigate your recovery and rebuild a fulfilling life that you love.

Bill 1:11:07

I've created an inclusive, supportive and accessible community called recovery after stroke. This all in one support and resource program is designed to help you take your health into your own hands. This is your guide walk you through every step in your journey from reducing fatigue to strengthening your brain health to overcoming anxiety and more. To find out more and to join the community just head to recoveryafterstroke.com see you in the next episode.

Intro 1:11:35

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Intro 1:11:52

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Intro 1:12:15

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Intro 1:12:30

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Intro 1:12:43

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Intro 1:13:00

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