

Ep #140: Your Age Doesn't Matter - 2 Stories of Recovery - Sue & Carolyn



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Susi Hately

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Welcome and welcome back. I'm delighted that you're here because I've got two of my clients here today, and both of them are over 60. Carolyn, who I'll introduce in a moment is 63 going on 64. And Sue is 74. And the reason I have them here is because I want people to know that tissue can change over 60.

We are bombarded with messages that we become more decrepit as we get older. And I'm not going to negate the fact that biology is biology, and there is a reality where we're not 20 anymore. However, a lot of people think that they have to survive the older decades. And the reason I have these two here is just to tell some stories, and that's it.

I'm not trying to convince you, well maybe covertly I am trying to convince you. I want to show evidence of what's possible, evidence of what's possible around your own tissue healing. Even my dad when he was 79, he went to yoga with me and Stu for the first time and he said his legs felt 25 years younger and he had to go back. And he kept going regularly, like right up to like three months before he passed away.

So I want people to know that change can happen and that suffering does not have to happen. So with that, I want to introduce you to Carolyn and Sue. I've got Carolyn Isbell who is 63. And we were having a bit of a joke because my kids like to say they're five and a half and Carolyn was saying she is 63 and 11/12. Almost 64. And Sue is 74.

So how I'm going to start with this is Carolyn, what brought you to utilizing yoga to reduce or eradicate pain? Let's work with that piece because you've been in yoga for a long time. So how about utilizing it for the purposes of reducing or eradicating pain?

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Carolyn: Well, I started to feel pain in a new way that I've never felt before and I honestly thought it was a problem in my hip. So I pursued traditional medicine and tried pretty much everything that I could think of or find available in the amount of time that I could withstand the pain. Because for some of it, it was really interrupting my sleep, it was interrupting what kinds of things I was able to do.

So I did as much as I could in traditional medicine and I also did some things acupuncture. And I think, for me, I think that there were layers of issues. I felt like whenever I went somewhere, not to bash traditional medicine either, because I think everything has helped a little bit. But I feel like it took me as far as I could and I just needed to do something different.

And I had worked with Susi before, done her training, and knew that I had a lot of things that I could improve on through the work that she does. And so I thought, well, I really need sleep, I would really like to get out of this pain. Some of the things that I did actually gave me more pain than I started with. And it was really at a very, very high level and very difficult for me to even figure out what to do next.

So that's what brought me to Susi. And she started helping me, you started helping me right away. And it wasn't all physical either, so that was one magical element that I thought was different than what I had been pursuing.

And it's hard to explain what an impact that had for me. Like I don't know if I have the right words, but it was pretty amazing how, yes, tissue is changing. Yes, I am moving differently. But there is also a different attitude that I've had, that I've grown into through the work with you.

Susi: And what's that new attitude?

Carolyn: Hope, an attitude of hope instead of resignation to this is the way it's going to be. I think I still remember the moment when I said something like, I don't know if I can get better. And you said you can. And just hearing those words opened up a whole path of healing for me, physically and

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mentally. And it kind of opened my mind, maybe my mind was closed to it too for whatever reason. That was a very big step to cross that.

Susi: So why did you believe me?

Carolyn: Well, I learned a lot from you before. I trusted you. It felt like that was what I needed to hear. Obviously, I trust your reputation because I've worked with you before and I trust your knowledge. But I think for me, I felt a sense of support from you right away. We were able to communicate that you cared about my healing. And so I could give my trust to you to help me through it, if that makes sense.

Susi: Yep, that makes total sense. How about you, Sue?

Sue: Well, I had had an ankle injury from like doing high impact, gosh, a long time ago. And so I'm like, okay, I'm going to start yoga, I think I can do that, it will be low impact because I had ankle surgery. And then I started getting injured doing yoga. So then I just found Susi on the computer. It was so amazing, buying all of your books, and like, oh, there's a different way to do this. And feeling in my body, oh. And paying attention. And that really made such a huge difference.

I agree, western medicine is so helpful. I've had a shoulder impingement issue and they looked at it and like, well, when you can't sleep, then we'll do surgery. But I just did all of the movements that Susi tells us to do just being present and not pushing. And all of that's just made a ton of difference.

And now the doctor really says, well, what I see in the X ray and what I see in front of me, you know, my strength, they they're still measuring it. I'll do physical therapy, do everything that we do as yoga therapists. And it's like magical. Just I think there's just an extra component of really being here and trusting innately what our body is telling us. I think that has just made a huge difference.

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Susi: And what's interesting with you, Sue, we've been doing some classes together, you and I. And not in the too far distant past you fell on your knee and it ended up being a diagnosis, I think it was patella femoral.

Sue: Yeah.

Susi: Which impacted your ability to play pickleball. What then happened from there?

And the reason, I'm doing this totally on purpose. So even though I said at the beginning I'm covertly maybe convincing people, but I want people to know, a lot of people who are listening who are older play pickleball. And a lot of them are playing in it with injury. And you're a great example of someone who hurt themselves, not on the court, but you hurt yourself. And then you're now back on the court and you don't have pain.

Sue: Right. Oh yeah.

Susi: And you're 74. I'm just wanting to remind people, and she's 74.

Sue: Yeah.

Susi: So what happened? Like walk people through because sometimes people are like, "Wait a second, that's not possible. You can't be getting out of pain at that age and getting back in shape." And right now if you could see Sue's face she's like, "What?"

So say about that, what was that trajectory for you have being hurt and then going to PT, integrating the yoga and working through that process, and then getting back on the court?

Sue: Yes. Well, I think just we have to keep moving. And I love moving and I'm not going to accept anything that is going to tell me that I can't. In my body I 100% believe that I can heal. Everything that that we all, that we do together just says keep listening to the body. So I just stayed really positive. And I was actually happy I didn't break anything. I thought, wow, I

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was proud of myself for falling and, you know, I bragged about it to my doctor and she's like, "Okay, yeah, okay."

But, yeah, it's just a mindset of just taking little steps and going, "Oh yeah, I can do that. That feels good, okay." And not pushing ahead. Just having trust in our bodies that they can heal and that they do. And not taking a diagnosis as a life sentence. It's like, okay, let's just see what happens. And you just keep getting more and more positive feedback. And that just makes all the difference, I think.

Susi: So you started off with the mindset of you just got to keep moving. But what's interesting about your I just got to keep moving is you're not keeping moving at all costs.

Sue: Right.

Susi: And not that I'm being judgmental when I say the next thing I'm going to say, of like sometimes people can stand around before a golf game taking Advil. I mean, I understand why they're doing that and if that's what they need, that's what they need. You're saying there's actually a way you could golf with less pain, right?

Sue: Yes.

Susi: Or even no pain. And your process through it was, okay, how can I tune into my body? How can I listen to this? I don't have to rush. And in fact, the less that you rush, the better that you do.

Sue: Yes. Oh yes, absolutely. Because I have had back spasms in the past that were not fun at all. And Western medicine only took me so far. But just listening to my body, not pushing it, it's been years since I've had any issues, knock on wood, with that.

So just tuning into the messages that our bodies send us and then going, okay. And breathing, totally breathing. And I think it was in 2017, the last intensive that I did with you, just getting connected to my pelvic floor. For

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some reason that helps everything. I don't know if you feel the same way, Carolyn. But if I can actually go there, because often when I go there, oh yeah, it's tight. Okay, let's just down regulate here. Just come back into my body, why am I tensing up there?

And pain goes away by paying attention to that. It really drops down so, so much. And I think that's just something we have to work on with ourselves. Do you think? That's what I think. Because I was like, well how do you feel your pelvic floor? But the more you work with that, the more you're able to. And that is really, really eye opening for me.

Susi: Right, and also between the connection between your pelvic floor and your diaphragm and just the way things are moving and your ability to tune into yourself. Was this something you've always been good at? Or is it something that you've had to learn over time?

Sue: I think I've been a big pusher always and ignoring. So yes, this has been a big leap for me.

Susi: Was it because of pain and you got only so far with certain treatment processes?

Sue: Yeah.

Susi: What had you make that shift, do you think?

Sue: Nothing else worked as well as this. And just the whole feeling of being connected and feeling grounded and in control more of my container and just being at ease here, it snowballs. It just feels better and better. And then that's more powerful.

Susi: So would you say that when you were pushing and ignoring, there was a certain kind of power there that you had to push through something? Like you had the physical might to push through something.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

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Susi: But now it's almost re-channeled?

Sue: Yes.

Susi: Because you're tuning in that much better and you're able to use that which you hear that much better?

Sue: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Susi: So the piece of this that I think can be helpful is for some people thinking like slowing down is really hard to do. And slowing down, it might be hard to do, but the result of it can actually be really, really effective because it's not like you're giving up anything. And both Carolyn and Sue are nodding their heads right now.

It's like you're not giving up anything, although initially it feels like you are. It's just that you're re-channeling the way you're doing something.

Sue: Yes.

Susi: Yeah.

Carolyn: Yeah, if I could just add the kind of work that we've been doing together has built a deeper strength and stability in me. And other activities that I do have become so much easier as a result, not forced or anything.

I think I gave Susi the example of water skiing, which I only get to do a couple times a year. And I wasn't sure I could water ski. And I found myself having so much ease and skiing so much farther and better or stronger and more confidently without doing any training for water skiing. It was just a lightness that was a lot more fun.

Sue: That's awesome.

Susi: So in your words then, Carolyn, what would you say is what led to your being able to be in more ease? Like if you were to explain it to

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somebody, how would you say it? You didn't train for being, and you were slaloming, and you were using one ski. What do you think contributed to having more ease?

Carolyn: I wasn't trying to ski with ease, it was just happening. So I was just trying to let the movements happen. And, granted, I was probably trying to avoid tensing up because I was worried about being too tense and all of that. But honestly, it just happened. I wasn't trying to ski with ease, it just happened.

For me, that's a big deal because I'm a person who, I can relate to what you're saying, Sue. You know, I tend to try hard, I tend to push things. And I don't think I was aware that I was doing that. The experience of having something happen like that was pretty profound for me. And I'm still working on all of that, trying to be more at ease. But there's practice to do to be able to get there. I feel like stability gave me a sense of ease.

Sue: Yes.

Carolyn: Stability I've never had before, ever. And I've had a pretty active life, I would say.

Sue: Well, and I think, Susi, your less is more was really powerful for me.

Carolyn: Yeah.

Sue: Because all of the better balance programs that we've done, that helps my students that are in their 50s. You take things for granted and the simple things aren't that easy to do. And so that just makes all the difference in the world. And it's yay, yeah, we can just kind of do less, but end up being at maybe a better, for sure a better place.

Susi: Yeah, because a lot of what I mean by doing less is not necessarily taking less off the plate, but rather to do less so that you can move with greater efficiency.

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Sue: Yes, less effort.

Susi: Yeah, and so when we're looking at it from like a physics or a biomechanics point of view, can we not borrow from another part of the body in order to try and make this body we have stronger, which innately makes our whole system weaker, right? Because if we clench with our jaw to do something that our legs or our hips are meant to be doing, then we're taking away from both areas, right? We're not actually improving the hips any better. And the jaw is now adding tension into it, right?

Or a classic one that's probably got more neighborhood relationship is the QL, the quadratus lumborum. And the quadratus lumborum firing up when it should be more of a hip movement or hip stability. And so a lot of issues can arise for people because their QL is attempting to do the job of a hip joint, and that's not its job at all. And that's the beauty of compensatory patterning. But over time, it can be really difficult.

So when we're looking to go less, it's like let's really refine the movement biomechanically so we actually get the muscles and tissue doing what's meant to be happening. Which is why tissue can change at any age. Because if we're just helping the body do what it's meant to be doing, then it does what it's meant to be doing.

Sue: Yes.

Susi: Yeah. And then from there, you can build, right? Because then you're getting, as you guys both mentioned, you're getting more stability, you're getting more control, more coordination. You're tuning in better to what's working and not working. And then you can take that information and then build upon it. And then all of a sudden you're on the water water skiing.

Carolyn: It's very enlightening to learn what you're doing to try to do something simple, and all the things that are moving that are in the way. And when you can release that and just do the movement, it's a completely different experience and so much easier.

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Susi: Which is where some people can get really, I was going to say in trouble, but it's not really in trouble. It's where they can get pooped or bound up or doubtful because they're given exercises to do and they're told to do sets of 30, or sets of 10, or even sets of eight. But they're not necessarily doing the movement well.

So they knock out the movements as almost a to-do item, or as the rehab sheet for example, from any number of professionals or what they get from Google or whichever. And they go and do the exercises, but they aren't necessarily doing them well, right?

Sue: Yes.

Susi: And they're overcompensating, or over bracing, or over, over or under, right? And so then they're not actually getting the benefit from the movement that they could be getting or the practice that they could be getting. Really, really good.

So when you think about friends of yours, or colleagues or those sort of that you are in a circle with of sorts. Maybe not directly inner circle, but like layers away, but sort of in your cohort of people you know, you'll hear people complain about age. You'll hear people complaining about like pain and strain that just is part of this process.

So my question to you is, I mean, I'm just cresting 50 here, so I don't have any lived experience over 60. I have the experience from my dad who told me what makes 80 different than 70 is that it's a little harder to keep up with life at 80. 70, it's a little, the entropy is stronger at 80 than it is at 70. So I get that.

But what would you tell folks? Because both of you are now at a place where you have significantly reduced or no pain. And there's so much more that you can do, you can tune in so much better. You're kind of bucking the trend of what it is to be over 60 and over 70.

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What would you say to people who are listening or who are professionals, with people who are listening? Like they're health professionals who work with people in their 60s and 70s, what would you say to them about what's possible?

Sue: Yeah, well find that carrot, that something that you have a passion for, that you really want to do. And then just enjoy it at your pace and see what happens. You know, that you don't know until you try. Just getting off the couch and moving feels so much better.

Susi: I'm wondering, do you hear messages more and more from, whether it's healthcare providers or other people, about what it is to be in your 60s or 70s? Like is that something that you have to sort of like push against or ignore? Does that happen for you guys?

Carolyn: I hear it sometimes. I hear that people are hearing from health care providers that this is just, you know, everybody has something and this is your thing. And I would like to say to them, maybe if you could open yourself up to some different ways of doing things, maybe that isn't necessarily true.

And reaching out beyond what the obvious choice is, with maybe what all they know and maybe just looking a little deeper into some possibilities because I think that pain can be reduced. I do, I really do believe pain can be reduced. Eliminated is a harder thing to say because that's a big statement. But my pain has gone down so much. And if it comes back I can get back to a very, like no pain. I can get to no pain.

But I feel like there are tools to maximize your health and we just have to find them. And for me, it was finding them through the work with Susi, with you, Susi. But you have to be open-minded, I think. And you have to be open to hope.

Sue: Yes. Yeah, it seems like there are many people that just flat out, accept this is what it's like to be this number. And we're all so different and

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there's so many possibilities. But if you accept that going into it, well of course that's what you're going to experience. If you can just stay open and keep breathing and just listen to what your body is telling you, I think it's just going to be so magical.

Carolyn: I think that's so important, Sue, the listening part. Because I think we can go through our early years of life maybe listening less without any ramifications.

Sue: Right. Oh yeah.

Carolyn: There's a certain art to this, I think, of listening. And in my mind, I'm younger.

Sue: Absolutely.

Carolyn: Yeah, in my mind I'm in my 40s. So there's a reality part balancing with the possibility part.

Sue: Yes.

Carolyn: And the art of listening can help you find the sweet spot.

Sue: Yeah, the truth there.

Carolyn: The true, yeah. Which is pretty hopeful.

Sue: Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Susi: So what would be your three, maybe three, if you have more you can add more or less, but your three key factors for listening? If you were going to give something, like someone's listening to this and saying, okay, I want to try this. Or yeah, I get what they're saying, I'm getting inspired.

So like, what would be three things that you would recommend? Like how would you guide someone to listening? I'm also thinking of health

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professionals who are listening to this, of like what they can share with their clientele.

Carolyn: Yeah, it's hard. I mean, I think for a long time as a yoga teacher I used to always say, listen to your body. But I think that there is a practice in that it's not an automatic thing. I think it is hard to do, so practice.

Sue: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And being aware of the breath, all the breathing practices that we do. And then the more that we do that, the more we can do it when we're on the pickleball court, do it when your shoulder starts to bother you. Oh, okay, oh yeah, the top of my shoulder is hiking up and up. Just, okay, I'm going to be aware.

Yeah, it's just a practice, don't you think? And then the more we do it, it gets reinforced and then you feel better and you want to do it more and get injured way less, maybe not at all, or rebound more easily.

Carolyn: And I think tuning into, to borrow from my meditation teachers, to be able to sense without evaluation but just without judgment, without evaluation, without stories, tuning into sensations. What is it feeling like in the moment to move your feet in a circle or move your head from side to side? What does it feel like without the stories, without the evaluations or judgments? Just what is that sense? Tuning into what is that? Can you even put it into words in your own mind? That was a big step for me.

Susi: And if you're listening and wondering, I mean, my whole podcast series is really, at its core, about listening. But if you go to podcast episode 115, which is a yoga nidra inspired practice which helps you kind of connect in, episode 114 is rebuilding trust with your body. And then 127 is about knees and climbing and descending stairs more easily. So if you check out those episodes, those are three that might be curious for you to explore this idea of what they're talking about around a practice.

I think the other piece that I wanted to make mention of is because I asked them specifically, because I know what I've taught them and I wanted to

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hear from them what they would say. And it's become so unconsciously competent for you, really in a way, right? And you explained it well.

The piece that I would add is notice, like if you're on the pickleball court and what happens to your breath, right? Like when you're utilizing the breath, as Sue mentioned, like just notice when it changes. And you don't have to be like magnifying glass on it all of the time, but just every so often, as you start to take that time to practice when you're in your quieter moments. And then you'll start to tune in more and more and more and more.

Sue: Yes, in more complex situations. Yeah.

Susi: Yeah, you'll just notice it. I had a client the other day who said, like he had been tuning in and then he noticed some worry arising about his child. And then the tension came back. And he's like, "Oh, curious." And then said, okay, hold on, let's settle down body. And then the worry settled down and then he was able to actually look at the scenario a little differently.

Sue: Yeah.

Susi: Right? So it's interesting when you start to tune in more and more to your physical body, and the reactions and responses.

Sue: Yes.

Susi: And both of you are saying, which I agree with, it's like it takes practice. It's not like a one and done type of thing. It's like anything, any sort of habitual change, it's got to take some time.

Sue: Yes.

Susi: Yeah, and then you just get better and better and better and better at it.

Sue: Yeah, more natural.

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Susi: Yeah, nice. Well, coming from someone who's a self-described pusher, yes Sue, I totally understand that. I did not know that about you, it's been so long. It's lovely. All right. Any final things you'd like to share before we close off?

Carolyn: I look forward to feeling better all the time.

Sue: Yes, that possibility is so helpful. Yeah.

Carolyn: Yeah, thank you.

Susi: Thank you guys, thanks so much for coming on.

Sue: Thank you.

Carolyn: Thank you so much.

Sue: Bye.

Carolyn: Bye.

That was so much fun chatting with Carolyn Isbell and Sue Larson, where Carolyn is over 60 and Sue is over 70. And the reason I wanted to share this with you is because I wanted to provide evidence of what is actually possible. And some of what they have to offer you, if this has resonated with you in terms of, yes, things can shift, and if you want to take it a step further than join me in Your Age Doesn't Matter.

I have two programs right now that we're doing a flash sale on. Better Balance 2.0 as well as Optimizing Knee and Hip Rehabilitation Post Surgery. These are integrative practices based off of the latest evidence.

And supporting you and being able to improve your mobility, your strength, your stability with this yoga foundation in mind, based in biomechanics, based in kinesiology, really tuning into your own self. Again, that website is learn.functionalsynergy.com/strong, love to see you there.

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If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.