Dr Lemmon & Pat Wetzel Cancer Survivor Interview-Finding the Inspiring Stories of Hope All Around Us Transcript

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Introduction and Pat Wetzelu2019s cancer story

Hello, I'm Dr. David Lemon, and I'm excited to be on this episode of the Natural Cancer Support Channel. And I have Pat Wetzel here as my guest, and she's a cancer survivor and author of Bump in the Road, 15 Stories of Courage, Hope, and Resilience.

And so we'll just dive right into her story. Pat, welcome to the show. Hi, thanks for having me. It's great to have you. Start from the beginning with your cancer journey and what happened and how was that diagnosis like?

What was your reaction and what did you do? I got incredibly sick at a meeting down at Half Moon Bay and I came back. I was living in the Tahoe area and I just was not getting well for several weeks.

So I went to see an ENT doc who said, you have lymphoma. And I said, what is it? I do not give you some antibiotics. I'm sure it'll go away. Well, he favored me, but he was right.

I had a biopsy done and it came back with a slow growing lymphoma, but the biopsy was not very accurate as I would find out. I hooked up with a local oncologist and I wanted to avoid the heavy chemo at any cost.

And I looked at doing a round of monoclonal antibodies. First, instead, monoclonal antibodies are often part of the therapy for lymphoma. So at any rate, I did a round of monoclonal antibodies, or Tuxen actually.

And I know it's worked very well for a number of people who've gotten remissions out of it, but it did not work for me. And I had serious side effects, inability to breathe, for starters, head to toe hives.

The hives were horrendous. And the oncologist suggested that I go on steroids. Since this might be part of a long-term maintenance drug, I thought this is not a cool idea.

So instead, I sought out a Chinese acupuncturist. And about a month of expensive and extensive acupuncture, and all my symptoms went away. So since that failed, I was also looking at some clinical trials.

There was one at Stanford that was potentially interesting, and my oncologist very happily opened the door for me, which I appreciated. And it's a good thing actually I did that because I was rejected from the trial because the original biopsy was incorrect.

They had misdiagnosed my cancer, and the correct diagnosis came back with nodal marginal zone lymphoma, which is incredibly rare. So here I am, having been through one round that didn't work, getting rejected from a clinical trial, having the rug pulled out from underneath me in terms of an incorrect diagnosis, I decided I'll go for a round of chemo, and I did.

Fast forward two years, cancer's back, I go through another round of chemo. So over six years time, I went through three rounds of treatment actually.

And at the end of that six years, it looked like my cancer was back again. My hair was falling out from stress from a business situation. I was vomiting blood.

I was very stressed. And I went to see my oncologist who was sure that without ever asking any me anything about what was going on in my life, he was sure that we could run a dozen expensive, invasive, horrific tests and find something wrong.

And I remember just leaving that appointment, walking down this gray hall.

Misdiagnosis, treatment attempts, and acupuncture relief

You have to walk by the billing department to get out because you have to pay before you can leave. And I just walked down this hall and it was gray after they redecorated it.

The elevator was slow. It was gray. I went down to the ground floor. And I just thought, if the past is any indication of the future, I have 18 to 24 months before the cancer overruns my body again.

I had had tumors wrapped around my aorta, my entire body lit up on a PET scan. So I thought, if that is the case, I am not going to spend it tethered to the medical world.

I am not going to live in a chemo chair with poison dripping into my arm. So after some thought, I went home, I put my house up for sale, I put everything in storage, and I hit the road.

And I went traveling for several years. Obviously, I'm fine. So the question of whether or not the cancer was back at that point in time remains up in the air.

But I have taken the approach now of I'm going to live and enjoy my life. If I get serious symptoms, I'll look into it. But frankly, I've lived a really good life.

I don't think I want to go back into that helipathic medical world. It's traumatic on so many levels. And I think I've had enough of it. So they did chemo, it was clear, and then came back and clear and came back.

And we kind of know that radiation and chemotherapy are carcinogens, so that makes sense, right? The battles I had to fight along the way were unbelievable.

You know, it's take care of your, take charge of your health because nobody else will. But actually a good side, the good side of that is There was a really good study done by Dean Ornish at University of San Francisco.

At any rate, he did a study on men with prostate cancer, and he took this group of men, he debodied them into two groups. One group went to cancer boot camp, one group did not.

The group that went to cancer boot camp had to change their diets, eat wholesome diets, get exercise, go into some sort of stress management program, and they had to connect with each other, which was challenging for a group of men.

The people who went through the cancer boot camp came out with much healthier numbers. Their average PSAs dropped. They had no recurrences in that group, whereas the control group did not do very well.

And that study, while it is specific to prostate cancer, I think holds a lot of wisdom for all of us because he looks at nutrition, he looks at stress management, he looks at the spiritual aspects of this.

I think all these components really are part of the cancer journey and influence it as well. Yeah, it's too bad that the oncologists aren't trained in those other pathways of healing.

Like I kind of liken it to the spokes of a bicycle wheel. And if you have those seven pathways, you create that holistic treatment plan. You can roll forward smoothly on the bicycle wheel with those seven spokes.

But if you only rely on the three of chemo, radiation and surgery, then you have a triangle and you can't really roll on the triangle wheel very well.

So kind of the analogy I use a lot with patients where you need those other holistic pathways to round out the treatment plan and to get through it. I think that's very true.

And I think that our medical system, our allopathic medical system, is incapable of delivering that. And what we need is some sort of integration between NDs and people in these more holistic specialties and traditional medicine.

And I think You know, your treatment plan is an individual choice. I don't think anybody should push one plan or another. I think that's something that you have to decide as a patient.

But I think that you need so much support that is not there in the current system. It's just astonishing. And the thing that really drives me crazy is we just repeat the senseless wheel again and again.

You go into the oncology office, it's gray, it has a smell that is not associated with life. People look so downtrodden and awful. Some of them are on oxygen.

It's just a horrific environment. And there's nothing done, nothing. There's no attention to alleviate the obvious suffering on multiple levels of people are experiencing.

And it just happens again and again and again with each patient that walks into the office.

Choosing lifestyle changes and holistic support

Yeah, it's a rough journey. So with the acupuncture, you said that one month of acupuncture kind of reduced all of your symptoms. Do you know if it influenced the lymphoma itself or did you get a sense of whether it was helping to reverse the lymphoma as well?

Well, it didn't because I had to go in because the lymphoma had not abated at all, but it did manage all my side effects and it kept me off long-term steroids.

And did you do Chinese herbs as well or was it just the acupuncture? Well, I'm trying to remember now this was 2009. I have done Chinese herbs in the past.

I'm not, and I may have done some herbs in association with an acupuncture. I'm not really sure. And when you were kind of at the end of the conventional medicine journey and you hit the road.

What kind of things did you incorporate in your travels as far as holistic health goals? Getting out of Dodge was good for my mind. But really before that, I changed a lot of aspects of my life.

I think going through cancer, one of the primary things you face is a lack of control. And what do you control? Well, you control what you eat. You can control what you do.

You control what you think. You can control the people you hang with. So I really started to focus on those areas I did control. I tried going vegan for a while, which I felt great, but I was miserable.

So I migrated towards essentially a real food, low-glycemic diet, which is good for anything. I started a serious meditation practice. I became pretty relentless about cutting any negative energy out of my life and I exercised and even when I was going through that second round of chemo where I was just so tired, well first round too, I was so tired I just couldn't put one foot in front of the other.

I somehow got to the gym with a trainer and it used to be a trainer could beat me up for 40 minutes or an hour and it wouldn't even phase me. I could barely get through 20 minutes.

But I think that was a really important piece of my recovery in that I didn't lose a lot of muscle mass. I retained a lot of strength. And I think exercise in general gives you more energy, as contrary as it sounds, going through treatment.

Exactly. Yeah, there's so much research on exercise and cancer, and it's not emphasized enough in our country

anyway. So we definitely need to work on emphasizing exercise as one of the big treatments for cancer.

Well, and I think you need exercise in your life in general. And I'd been playing a lot of sports, so I was in good shape going into everything. But maintaining that through chemo was very, very difficult.

Yeah. It really takes it out of you, doesn't it? Yeah. I couldn't walk to the mailbox. I had such bad chemo brain that I broke down sobbing in Costco one day because I couldn't enter a four-digit PIN.

And you're talking to somebody who has a degree in finance from Wharton Business School who can do logs in her head practically, or used to be able to.

I mean, I should be able to enter a four-digit PIN. Did that all come back slowly but surely? No. My brain is in a very different place. I'm a walking testament to neuroplasticity.

Starting, first of all, the chemo really screwed my brain up in terms of just a lot of confusion. I wasn't able to do linear things like I used to do.

That ability was just about gone. But simultaneously I'd been starting, I started a very serious meditation practice. I used TM twice a day. And that really started to rewire my right brain.

So by the end of all this, I became much more right-brained than left-brained, which was how my brain coped and adapted. And I actually think I'm better off for that.

But I miss the ability to do some of that more detailed linear stuff. I simply do not have it anymore. So you used to be a lot better with calculations and math and verbal tasks and Well, not verbal as much with spreadsheets.

I had complex spreadsheets for huge sums of money and things like that, that I could dance through. And now the thought of doing it, I don't think so.

Interesting. So over the last decade or so, what have you been doing? What have you done with your travels and what else have you learned about health?

Well, I think actually that period with cancer formed the foundation for good health practices. And I've just continued them. I am probably more aware of both my physical and psychological health than I was in the past.

And I think paying attention to your mental wellbeing is incredibly important.

Chemo brain, meditation, and long-term recovery

And it's something I do pay attention to. And in meditating twice a day, I think that has been probably the single game-changing element in terms of my health.

That's awesome. Would you say that cancer is the best thing that ever happened to you like some patients have? No, I don't think I wouldn't wish this on anyone, but I think you have an opportunity in terms of how you respond.

You can do the woe is me organ recital endlessly for years and you'll lose every friend you ever had unless they're doing the same thing. And I hope not.

Or you can decide it's, you know, what can I learn is one of my mantras. And I learned a lot going through that. I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about health.

So I see cancer as a pivot, a portal really, into a more conscious and meaningful life. And I think that's an enormous opportunity for anybody going through a game-changing set of events like this.

So every bump in the road comes with its opportunities. And it's up to you to decide if you take them on or not.

Exactly. So tell us about your book project and how that evolved and what went into it.

Well, it evolved out of a bump in the road. I had a film project. When I hit the road traveling, I started a blog called Cancer Road Trip. And that evolved into the idea to do a film project where every quarter we would give seven people impacted by cancer an amazing bucket list trip to an iconic location.

The first trip was Tanzania, where we'd have Kilimanjaro and the metaphor of a mountain, Safari and the metaphor of survival, Zanzibar and the spice of life.

I had almost a million dollars lined up for this, not cash in hand, but sponsors lined up when COVID hit and travel shut down. So I thought, what am I going to do?

Everything fell apart. I lost all my money, all my time that I put into this project. And I decided to do a podcast, partly to keep my social media audience in place.

And I thought, what's more appropriate than calling it bumping the road? But I was actually curious to know, how do other people navigate life's bumps?

I've been slammed by some real things. Obviously, I've moved through them. But how do people manage this? There's no roadmap for life. No one tells us how to manage these things.

So I dove in and I started the podcast. I didn't know if I could get any guests. I didn't know how to do a podcast, but I started it. I'm going into my fourth year now and just published the book this September.

The first book is a compilation of stories and the future books will include things like Bump in the Road Strong Women, Bump in the Road Business, et cetera.

The book has some cancer stories in it, but it is not about cancer stories. It's really just about remarkable people, really remarkable people. The wisdom that came out of my podcast was so profound, it just had to be shared.

And these stories, I think, really highlight what people can do when they're really in a tough situation. And I think we can all learn from that because, you know, our emotions are all the same.

Our experiences will be different. But say you experience isolation, going through cancer, isolation as a result of some other event, divorce or something like that.

When you hear a story about somebody else's isolation, it rings true to you because it's emotional. So I think regardless of what the specific bump is, we have a lot to learn from each other because we're all on this emotional journey to try to figure things out.

Exactly. Did you have any books that influenced you in your healing journey or did you kind of just absorb and be self-taught by nature? Oh, look at the reference section of my book.

It's pages. But I think the most influential book was David Servant Shriver's Anti-Cancer, A New Way of Life. It was originally published in 2008 and I think republished around 2012. I think it remains one of the seminal books in terms of cancer, lifestyle, and our environment.

David Servant Shriver was a young, hot academic at the University of Pittsburgh doing brain scan experiments. And one of his people didn't show up one night.

So he went through the scanner and found out he had a brain tumor. He went through a hellish year of treatment.

From cancer journey to the Bump in the Road podcast and book

His marriage fell apart. He couldn't work. And at the end of the year, he asked his oncologist, well, what should I

do? And his oncologist said, well, go back to your life.

So he went back to a high stress life with lousy food, little exercise, and the brain tumor came back. So he went on a global quest to see what creates anti-cancer health.

And the thing I love about his book not only is it a personal story, but I think more importantly, it's a story about the elements of health and it's very well documented.

So if you want to look at it from a scientific perspective, there's an enormous amount of information there in addition to the anecdotal aspect. Yeah, I really love how it's a really good balance of his emotional life and his relationship with his new wife and his medical knowledge as a doctor and then the research that he did on the holistic therapy.

So it's a really great balanced book. Yeah, and I think that for me, I got into a lot more Buddhist reading and things like that. The thing I like about a lot of the Buddhist wisdom is that it falls on an individual and I'm of no religion.

spiritual bit of no religion. But one of the things I like about the Buddhist philosophy actually is that it looks to the individual for change or behavior.

And I like that idea of you can influence your perspective. Is there one of the stories from bumping the road that inspires you the most you'd like to share with the audience?

But they're all good. One of my favorites is Eric Weinmayer. Eric went blind at 16. So you can imagine the anger, the rage, the isolation, the confusion, everything he went through.

Eric went on to climb Mount Everest, the Seven Summits, and to kayak down the Colorado River rapid. Eric tells a story. And it's one of my favorite stories.

He talks about, he divides the world into three groups. And the groups are fluid. We can all move. We move between them. We've all been in each of these groups.

The first group are quitters. They're self-evident. The next group are campers. And they are the people who do not want change. They want to avoid change at all risks.

Now, in fairness to them, they may be so beaten up by life that they don't want to put their head outside the foxhole anymore. And then very few people are climbers.

Now climbers can be campers because being a climber all the time would be too exhausting. But I love that analogy. And what really fascinates me is why do some people decide to be campers?

And what does it take to initiate a camper to become a climber? And that's what I look for in my podcast. Is he one of the only blind people to climb Mount Everest that you know of?

After he climbed it, I think one or two other people did. I believe somebody else has, but Eric was the first. And you found all these people for your podcast just in doing your own research?

Started off just doing my own research. Yeah. Reached out to anybody I knew with a good story, but now people find me. So it's taken time. It hasn't happened overnight, but it does evolve.

Any plans to reinitiate that travel experience with the cancer patients in Kilimanjaro? Yes and no. The answer is probably no because it's complex. There's a lot of liability involved in it.

And depending on the people, you can get into a lot of personality issues that from a film perspective, you can edit that and make it a wonderful story.

From an experiential perspective, it may be a little bit more than I want to take on. But I think the real motivation

behind it was to give the cancer community excitement every quarter or every four months maybe.

a new trip. Wow, where are they going to go? I wish I could go.

Lessons from inspiring guest stories

I'll apply." The idea really was to inspire hope, happiness, joy, tell these stories in an inspirational way. I'm so glad that you've been able to be resilient in the face of your bump in the road and you found so many other inspiring stories of people risen to their challenges and their bumps in the road.

What other words of advice do you have for people that are listening that are in the middle of hitting that bump violently sometimes? Keep moving. One other story very quickly.

Sarah Dransfield found out she had osteosarcoma when she was about 16, had her leg amputated. And as you know, with leg amputation, there are multiple fittings, your muscles shrink.

There are just a lot of issues with getting fitted with a prosthetic and being 16 years old, losing a year of your life. I mean, this is not an easy thing to go through, but she ended up modeling for Vogue, Italy.

met the Queen in England and has gone on to have a really amazing life that might not have evolved if it had not been for that cancer experience. So I throw that out because you don't know what's ahead.

And if you can see opportunity rather than obstacles, I think you can create a really good life based on a difficult experience that hopefully has given you a lot of wisdom.

So I guess my advice would be learn about health, learn about mental health, incorporate it into your life, and keep putting one foot in front of the other because sometimes, some days, it is about survival and not much more.

But you can get to the other side. And I think that you really need to integrate a much more comprehensive approach to health than allopathic medicine.

And it's hard and it's expensive. You have to go out and find these medical professionals outside the traditional system that can help you But I think that's also for better or for worse, it is part of the journey.

I think it's an essential part. Thank you so much, Pat, for being such an inspiration to so many and for helping find these inspiring stories in your book Bump in the Road and in your other projects.

Any parting words for us today?

Advice, hope, and closing resources

Stay healthy. Keep up the good work. There's always hope. Never, ever give up. Thank you so much. It's been beautiful to spend these few minutes with you and look forward to speaking again.

Thanks David. Bye bye. There are a few links down in the description below to join a free private natural cancer support group on Facebook. You can join this group or invite any of your friends, especially cancer survivors.

We need their input and emotional support in this group. For you or anyone that you love, click the link for threecancerinsights.com to watch the short free presentation to understand how to transform your health, the right way to treat cancer, and ways to reduce cancer treatment side effects.

I created the Cancer Detox course to support you and your loved ones through the cancer journey. I take you on a guided tour through the seven pathways of healing, talk about the causes of cancer, the ways to reverse it, and how to integrate natural remedies into your conventional treatment plan if you so choose.

And if you'd like to read, my book Natural Home and Herbal Healing is available on Amazon and Audible, and it takes you on a room-by-room guided tour of all the powerful healing remedies that can be found throughout your own home and property.

So check out the links in the description below and I'll see you in the next video.