Speaker 1:

The Cancer Assist Show, hosted by Dr. Bill Evans and brought to you by the Cancer Assistance Program. Help when you really need it.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, welcome to the Cancer Assistance Program podcast. I'm Dr. Bill Evans from the department of oncology at McMaster University. If you're a first time listener, welcome. I think you'll really find today's podcast extremely informative, especially if you've recently received a diagnosis of cancer or you're a caregiver, or a friend of someone who has recently been diagnosed with cancer. If you've listened to the podcast before, well, welcome back. But today is going to be special because I'm talking with a wonderful young lady who's had to face cancer, not once, but several times and go through multiple surgeries, radiotherapy, treatments and chemotherapy. So without giving away any more of her story, I'd like to welcome Vanessa to the podcast. Good morning, Vanessa.

Vanessa Leigh:

Good morning, Dr. Evans. Thank you so much for having me today.

Dr. Bill Evans:

As I said in the intro, you've had a lot of experience with cancer and I think you've just recently passed 30. So you've experienced a lot in the short number of years that you've lived and your cancer experience really begins when you were quite young, you were in high school. So why don't we start with your story there?

Vanessa Leigh:

Sure. Sounds good. So when I was 15 years old, I was sitting on my couch. I remember it was like December, 2002. And I don't know why, but for some reason I just was feeling around my neck and I felt this like P like bump. I thought it was strange. I remember letting my parents know. So they decided to take me to the doctor and after some biopsy results, after some testing, it was in fact Hodgkin's lymphoma. And it's interesting because I don't remember having very many symptoms. And in fact, when I had some testing done, I found out that it was stage four. So that meant I needed chemotherapy. I think I had about five different treatments and I needed some radiation as well. So yeah. Like I said, I was 15 years old at the time. And without a lot of symptoms, it was quite shocking. And I think obviously shocking for my parents as well.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Yeah. The fact that you didn't have any symptoms, you're just feeling perfectly normal and you feel a little lump in your neck and you get a diagnosis like cancer. That must've been really, really a shock as you say to accommodate. And how did it affect you? You were in school at the time and...

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. So I was in grade 10 and it was quite shocking. But I was at an age where I was still really young and naive and I didn't know much about cancer. Cancer wasn't what it is today. But the worst part of everything being 15 years old was losing my hair, which might sound silly to some people. But I think as a teenager, it's an important thing for us to identify with, right? So that was quite tough, of course, going through chemotherapy. It made me really sick and it lasted for about six months and thankfully the treatment worked and I was cured. So I'm really fortunate for that.

Dr. Bill Evans:

But it must have been hard to interact with your friends or for your friends to interact with you. And because at a young age, you don't really know much about cancer and here's someone who's lost their hair, looks different, is feeling sick and can't participate in usual school activities, I assume. So it must've been very, very awkward for you.

Vanessa Leigh:

It was really awkward. And I know looking back, I was known as the girl that had cancer, which was really tough, but at the same time, I didn't talk about it. I was at an age where I was embarrassed. I almost felt like it was my fault that I got sick. So I told a few people, and of course some of my good friends were there for me during this difficult time. But then when I returned to school after treatment was finished, I didn't talk about it. I just wanted to move forward with my life and forget about it.

Dr. Bill Evans:

So you basically just put it all behind you and-

Vanessa Leigh:

I did.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... carried on and you were well from the point of view, the Hodgkin's disease. And as you say, you're cured from it, but some of the treatment was influential in what happened next in your courses of health, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly. So I went on. Thankfully I went to university, I became a teacher. I got married. Thankfully I didn't really think too much about cancer, but I was in fact monitored by an aftercare clinic at McMaster Hospital. And once I turned 25 years old, I started some screening for breast cancer. So I had some mammograms. I had some breast MRIs yearly. And the reason for that was because I had mantle radiation to my chest at such a young age. So it was quite possible that I could develop breast cancer later in life. So that's why they began monitoring that. And also...

Dr. Bill Evans:

If you just, before we move past that, just to explain mantle radiation-

Vanessa Leigh:

Yes.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... because people may not understand that. It really covers the lymph nodes up when your collarbones and lymph nodes that are behind the breast bone. And so that's your mantle and that includes some of your breast tissue, that radiation, which is important to your story, isn't it?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. Thank you. So they were following me. Things seem to be okay. I think I had a few years of the testing and everything was okay but then right before my 30th birthday, when I went in, something appeared to show up on the MRI and it didn't show up on the mammogram. They actually did a few ultrasounds and nothing showed up on that as well. So I had a few people tell me they didn't think it was cancer, but thankfully I had a doctor fight for me and she made sure that I got a biopsy done. And after we got the results, we found out that it was in fact breast cancer.

Dr. Bill Evans:

And it's interesting that it didn't show up in a typical way that breast cancers show on a mammogram as a lump and are usually confirmed in an MRI. So yours was different and.

Vanessa Leigh:

It was.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... and it turned out to be in lobular breast cancer, which is as a subtype is less frequent, but also has characteristics of spreading through the breast differently. It's not lump like, and it may also be in both breasts. So that's relevant to your story as well, isn't it?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. It is. So after I had the biopsy, I remember meeting with a surgical oncologist. And because of my past history, she recommended a double mastectomy and I was prepared for that. So after that surgery, they were, sorry. She thought it was quite early since it appeared to be very small on the MRI. So she was pretty hopeful that if I just had the double mastectomy and possibly medication, I would be okay and I could move on with that.

Vanessa Leigh:

But after I received the pathology report, I found out in fact it was 12 centimeters large, the tumor. So it was quite shocking. So from that point, I found out that I needed to do chemotherapy for the second time, which was really upsetting and as well as radiation.

Dr. Bill Evans:

More hair loss.

Vanessa Leigh:

So, exactly. That was the first thing I thought of. It was tough. So even she seemed very shocked with the results. So yeah, like I said, I had chemotherapy, I had to go through radiation again. I had to take some hormone medication receptor medication. I had countless surgeries. They had to remove more lymph nodes because my lymph nodes were cancerous. So it was quite the journey the second time around.

Dr. Bill Evans:

You make it sound rather accepting of the bilateral mastectomy. I don't think it was quite that easy, was it?

Vanessa Leigh:

I know. You're right. I know. But I don't know. It was just, I felt like it was the right decision to do it. Well, of course it was devastating, don't get me wrong. I wasn't even 30 years old yet. And I was just married for one year. It was devastating. But at the time I knew, you know what? That's what I have to do. And I want to be around for a long time so...

Dr. Bill Evans:

I think the day of that surgery, if you recall it, as you described it on your website, we went to the hospital early and then had to wait a long time. And then when you finally got wheeled down to the operating room, you had an emotional reaction to it. Thank heavens for anesthetics, it put you to sleep.

Vanessa Leigh:

Oh, yeah. Thank goodness. You're right.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well. It's got to be a tough thing to cope with both emotionally and physically. And how about, how did your family and your husband react to this news and this need for this treatment?

Vanessa Leigh:

Well, I think my family, they were really devastated. I think, especially my parents and my sister, because they saw me go through cancer at 15. They were there with me throughout all of that, right? So to see their daughter go through it again, it was absolutely devastating. My husband, of course he was upset, but he was really strong and very supportive. And like I mentioned, we'd only been married for one year and it's crazy to think that's what we had to endure and go through. And thankfully, he's been my rock and I'm really grateful for him, very supportive.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, you're very, very blessed to have a strong supportive husband. And in my career, as an oncologist, I've seen sometimes families pull apart because of a diagnosis of cancer. And sometimes the husbands aren't as supportive as I certainly not anywhere near as supportive as your husband is being. So I shout out to him for how he's been caring for you through all of this.

Vanessa Leigh:

Thank you.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Now you described when you first had cancer, you were shy. Didn't want to talk about it. And you had your second cancer. You gone the complete opposite. You've set up a website and a blog and you're out there telling your story and particularly telling it in an interesting way and maybe a surprising way, titling it, dear cancer not many people would want to call their cancer affectionately, dear. So tell me how you got there in your thinking.

Vanessa Leigh:

Sure. So, like I mentioned, I was really private for years. Like after the first diagnosis up until my second diagnosis, even throughout my chemotherapy treatment, throughout radiation, I did tell a few people, some friends, some family, of course, but I still kept it in and I was really struggling with it. It was too much. I was always worried because I had found out some friends had heard and it was almost stressful. I was worrying about who knows I'm sick, who doesn't know I'm sick when I should be looking at the bigger picture here, right? So I should mention that I been seeing a therapist. So when I finished all of my treatment, I was lost and I knew I needed to reach out to somebody. I needed to talk to somebody. I'd just been through so much, especially having cancer twice.

Vanessa Leigh:

So I reached out to a therapist and she helped me do a lot of self reflecting. And within that self-reflection, I decided, you know what, I'm sick of holding everything in. I'm sick of just being so private. I really want to share my story. And I feel like my story is really unique, especially having had cancer twice before the age of 30. So I just had that realization and thinking back as well. Like when I was first diagnosed, I turned immediately to social media and I was looking for people who had cancer, like me, young women, maybe who are just married or what not, no children yet. I was looking for these people just because I felt so alone. And thankfully I found quite a few. So I've received a lot of help from these individuals. And I thought, you know what? I want to give back. I want to do something to help other women. And I also began to realize it was just getting my feelings out on paper out, like writing things down and reflecting. It really helped myself heal as well.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, those are very important messages because I think you're not alone in struggling with the emotions of cancer. And I think amongst them, there's fear. There's concern for the future. There's sometimes guilt that you've got an illness, then somehow you did something. And what did I do to deserve this? I think you even said that in your website. You asked yourself, what did I do to deserve getting two bouts of cancer and almost things go through people's minds and having an outlet and interacting with other people who've had a similar experience can be very, very supportive in healing. And I think you've found that, I mean, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. Exactly. It's been very supportive. And another reason I just want to mention too, is I share my story too, to bring awareness to those who do not have cancer. So a lot of hurtful things have been said to me during my cancer diagnosis, and I've written a blog post about this, and I'm just trying to bring that awareness towards other people to be kind, to be careful with the things that you say to somebody who may be battling cancer. I know I've had people tell me Oh, aren't you too young to have cancer. You don't look sick. My great aunt just died or, Oh I think there is a cure for cancer and big pharma is covering up. And those things they're quite hurtful, right? And so I'm just trying to bring that awareness to hopefully help other people going through it, just because we don't want to hear those things. We just want you there. And if you don't know what to say, that's okay. We just need you to listen.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, that's an another very, very important message because you do find... even the people are trying to be well-meaning and helpful, can say the wrong things and things that are actually hurtful or upsetting. I think you described them as crazy ideas that people and you should eat or drink something that's going to cure you, or-

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... there's all sorts of weirdness out there. I think your advice was you should listen to the specialists who know about cancer.

Vanessa Leigh:

100%.

Dr. Bill Evans:

And shut out all the other noise maybe coming at you. But it really is important for people providing help and support individuals who has cancer not to burden them with these different thoughts. But so what would be the direct message to those people? How should they speak and be supportive? What is it that you would have preferred to have heard than the crazy ideas?

Vanessa Leigh:

Well, you know what? My advice would just to be mindful, listen, I think that's the best thing anyone can do. Someone could say, "I'm not sure what to say, but just know that I'm here for you. I will listen to you whenever you need me." Things like that, rather than giving direct advice, especially if we're not asking for it, right? So just trying to be a friend, helping out with different things. Maybe if anybody with cancer has kids offering maybe to pick their kids up from school or offering to drive someone to an appointment, rather than like you said, giving advice about drinking something to help cure it.

Dr. Bill Evans:

So offering to be helpful and asking if there's things that they could do to be helpful to you, rather than telling you things that they think should be helpful, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right.

Dr. Bill Evans:

So that's important. And you've had some life lessons out of that yourself, haven't you? About-

Vanessa Leigh:

I have.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... how to think about living. I think that's really important to hear as well.

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. So don't get me wrong. It hasn't been easy. I've come to a place where I'm quite positive, but I did. It was tough. I had to do a lot of reflecting. I had to reach out to a therapist to get some help with different coping strategies and whatnot, but reflecting on everything that I've been through, I think one of the most important things that I've learned is that in an instant, your whole life can change. And to not things for granted, telling your family how much you love them, how much they mean to you, it's so important. And I think it's important to take moments every day to be grateful. So because you never know. Your life can change in a moment. Something that I like to do actually is do a little reflection when I'm in bed at night.

Vanessa Leigh:

And I think about my day and I think about three things that I'm grateful for and for that day, right? And that's something that I didn't do before Cancer. So definitely being grateful. And I think something else as well is don't sweat the small stuff. So I know after my Hodgkin's disease, I went back to a place where I would get really stressed. Work would stress me out. I know planning a wedding was quite stressful or just the daily stresses that we have, right? But I've realized going through Cancer again, it's not worth stressing myself out. Life's too short and you never know what can happen and it's not worth wasting energy on these things, right? The unimportant things. I'm not saying that you don't stress anymore, right? Of course, I still have moments where I'm stressing, but I stop and reflect and think, you know what? Is it worth it like in my... Should I be acting this way?

Dr. Bill Evans:

And he mentioned that it's, maybe didn't quite phrase it this way, but giving yourself permission to be angry and upset is okay too, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right.

Dr. Bill Evans:

These emotions are quite understandable and normal and don't beat yourself up. And on the other side of it, don't put on a happy face all the time. And there's a recent article in [shad lane 00:19:45] about toxic positivity. So trying to be super positive all the time when you don't feel it inside. You need to be, I didn't want to be lashing out and making everybody around you upset, but you also don't want to be falsely positive when you're feeling low. It's all right to be sad. It's all right to be upset and angry that this has happened to you, but-

Vanessa Leigh:

You're right.

Dr. Bill Evans:

... you do have to work it through and just be real with those around you.

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly. I think looking for those outlets is really important for me. Like I turned to exercise. If I felt really upset or angry, I would exercise. If I was able to write and blogging, it's a great outlet putting things on paper, right? So it's okay to be angry. It's okay to be sad. You're going to feel all of these different emotions. It's important to feel them, but hopefully move forward.

Dr. Bill Evans:

I like your thought about jotting down or mentally reflecting on three things you're grateful for each day. And it's something that's been brought to my attention recently too. And I think it is a way of refocusing your life and being appreciative much puts you in a better frame of mind. So what's been the reaction to your blog? You were pleased that you had people to reach out to who had similar experiences were helpful to you. What's been happening in terms of your own efforts to connect with people with similar experiences.

Vanessa Leigh:

It's been great, actually. I've had a lot of women reach out, ask me different questions, share their experiences and have asked for me to share theirs. I thought I'd share an interesting story. So it was back in the summer and I get my moles checked to have quite a few moles all over my body. And it was time for my yearly checkup. And I went in to see the dermatologist and he noticed that something was quite dark. So I had it removed. And unfortunately it was melanoma, but thankfully it was detected quite early. So it was skin removal and that was it. So I shared that story on my social media, just the importance of being at your own advocate, because my dermatologist is great, but he recommended that I come in every two years, but I pushed and said, you know what? With my history, and I have a lot of moles, I would really love to come see you yearly.

Vanessa Leigh:

And of course he said, "Sure, no problem." So having been my own advocate, he was able to find that mole quite early, thankfully, right? So I shared that story on social media. And there was a woman who reached out to me also a breast cancer survivor. And she just said, "You know what? Thank you so much for sharing that. When you mentioned your story about getting your moles checked, I went to my dermatologist, got my moles checked, and I actually had something that was pre-cancerous. So I just wanted to thank you for sharing that, because if it wasn't for you, I don't know when would I have gone." So that's just an example of you know what? This is why I share what I share. And it made me feel really good. Of course it's unfortunate, but I'm so glad just spreading that awareness, right?

Dr. Bill Evans:

That's a wonderful story because you've very definitely helped that other individual. How about emotional support to others? Do you get into relationships of some people, supporting each other because of the shared experiences as well?

Vanessa Leigh:

You know what? I've made some of the best friends the last few years. So I've reached out to some support groups and just and I found other women my age, who I can identify with. And I definitely, just having that emotional support has been amazing. And like I said, yeah, we're friends. We're really good friends, and it's just so nice to know that person is there. You can text them when you have a question or you can text them when you're not feeling like yourself or you're feeling down just and you know they understand. They've been through it, they get it. So I'm so grateful for these many friendships that I've made throughout this whole journey.

Dr. Bill Evans:

So we're going to take a quick break and we'll continue with our conversation with Vanessa after a message from The Cancer Assistance Program.

Speaker 1:

Register today for The Cancer Assist Programs (Virtual) CARE Walk on Saturday, May 29th. Start or join a team, set a fundraising goal and begin collecting pledges in support of free services for cancer patients and families in our community. Whether you choose to walk, hike, bike, or roll five kilometers, we hope you'll help us come together virtually in honor of a friend or loved one affected by cancer. Your support will provide help when it's needed most. Who are you walking for? Visit cancerassist.ca to register.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Welcome back. I'm in conversation with Vanessa about her experience with cancer. And one of the things that Vanessa has done most recently, maybe it's not the most recent, but back in March of 2020, you did a piece about The Two Big Cs COVID-19 and Cancer. What We Can All Learn During This Unsettling Time. So what inspired you to write this piece, Vanessa and what do you see as the parallels between cancer and COVID-19?

Vanessa Leigh:

So I think I was just inspired because just talking to different people, seeing on social media, a lot of people complaining about COVID of course, right? It's been a tough time for all of us. But during probably the beginning of COVID, a lot of people were struggling with it. And I thought to myself, you know what? I'm not really struggling. Why is that? So then I stopped and I realized, you know what? There are a lot of similarities between COVID and Cancer. And I think having gone through cancer, I was quite familiar with everything that was going on, right? So for example, like being stuck at home. That felt very familiar to me. So just there are a lot of similarities between the two.

Dr. Bill Evans:

That you've learned through your cancer experience, how to deal with it. So you had some messages to pass along about how you should cope with the COVID experience, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly. So if I could maybe touch on the similarities of between the two first, if that's okay. So I would say, during COVID, there's a fear of the unknown, right? We don't know how long we will have to isolate for, we don't know when lockdown will be over or when we might receive the vaccine, things like that. And I think relating that to a cancer diagnosis, I didn't know if my treatment would work. I didn't know, just different things, right? There's so much information that it's thrown at you and whatnot, but as a cancer patient and you just don't really know what to expect, right? Everybody's situation is different. I think another thing between COVID and Cancer is that being stuck at home.

Vanessa Leigh:

So when I was going through chemotherapy and different treatments and surgeries, I didn't want to get sick. I didn't want to catch a cold or a bug because if I did catch something, that would mean that my treatment would have to stop. So I did a lot of self isolating just to be safe and to be away from the germs. And I know a lot of us, we have to self isolate because that's what we are being asked to do.

Vanessa Leigh:

So again, another similarity, I think when I was going through cancer, a lot of my plans were put on hold. I had no say about what I could do, right? For example, like traveling, planning, having a family, things like that. That was out of my control. And I think right now, especially with COVID a lot is out of everyone's control. So just so many similarities between the two. And but I think the difference between COVID and Cancer is that cancer can be very isolating. At least with COVID, we're all in this together. We are all going through this so we can reach out to one another.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Certainly one of the things you touched on at the beginning, there was just that the fearfulness that people have and the fear of cancer, but many people are very fearful of contracting COVID-19 because particularly if you're older, more vulnerable, you have comorbidities that maybe place you at greater risk and even having Cancer and COVID, bad combination because of your immune system, there's even a term been coined for it, coronaphobia, where people are actually worried about every sniffle, every ache, every change in bowel habits. It could be coronavirus, and they're going to see multiple doctors and on the web checking different symptoms against diseases, and it's causing a lot of people a great deal of upset. And then on the other hand, there's that feeling of being isolated and lonely and bored, and it's very difficult for people to deal with it. So some of the things that you found useful during your cancer experience are also messages for people enduring the COVID pandemic, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Right. Exactly. I really appreciate, I tried to look at the positive during COVID and I still do, right? Of course it's tough. Of course it's unfortunate that we are all going through this, but I'm trying to really appreciate the extra time at home that I have to continue to work on selfcare. So things that I'm doing, I'm exercising more. I find myself not being as stressed. I have more time to sleep and take care of myself and focus on my nutrition. So I'm really grateful for that. And I'm also reminded too, things could be much worse. We're all safe at home, right? I know a few women who have cancer right now and going, "I just can't imagine having surgery and being alone, not having any support or going to the chemo suite and being alone," it's tough. So it's a good reminder for everyone that we're safe at home and we will get through this.

Dr. Bill Evans:

So really there's been an important learning through your cancer experience that you're applying very directly to the times without struggling through right now, and important learnings to anyone who's listening that, as you said, life's too short to worry about the smaller problems that we all tend to think about and to appreciate your family and friends, as you've described during, we were talking about cancer and do that during COVID as well, taking time to look after yourself.

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly.

Dr. Bill Evans:

The meditative side, the exercise, taking care of your diet so that you're eating well. I think you said in your blog that the health really is wealth, and there's a truth to that for sure. Tell us a little bit about the self-reflection side. You commented, you can't always watch television and Netflix and somewhat and the quiet times, what do you do during that time and how do you benefit from that?

Vanessa Leigh:

So I would say that self-reflection happens when I just take time to be alone with myself, right? And I just think about things that I've been through, I think about some lessons maybe I've learned after feeling angry, after going through different stages of grief and whatnot. I think, you know, what? What can I learn from this? I think between my first cancer diagnosis and my second cancer diagnosis, I had a lot of anger in me. I was just, I didn't know why I had been diagnosed at the age of 15, why me? Right? But I didn't really deal with that. I just tucked it under the rug and tried to move forward, but definitely that didn't help. Right.

Vanessa Leigh:

It's important to cut a deal with things. And I think the whole reflection piece helps you to grow and to move forward. But like I've said, so reflection for me is putting things down on paper. So before I blogged, I would just grab my laptop and I started typing, just getting my feelings out on paper. Another way to reflect too, is just, I would lean to my husband and just tell him how I'm feeling and just getting it out, right? Having a good cry, if I need to. Letting out my anger, it's just feeling everything and trying to find a silver lining in all of this.

Dr. Bill Evans:

And you said on your websites, you choose to look for the light rather than face the darkness. That's part of what you're saying there, right?

Vanessa Leigh:

Exactly. I definitely there's a lot that has come out of this journey and I'm so grateful for it. I even mentioned in my blog as well. Like if somebody could take it away from me, this cancer and everything I've been through, I wouldn't. Because I think who I am today, I've become a better version of myself, let's say, right? I think I've grown so much. And I'm grateful for who I am. Cancer is definitely not all of me, but it's a part of me. And I appreciate who I've grown into becoming, and yeah.

Dr. Bill Evans:

That's so powerful. What you've just said, that you're even grateful for the experience of cancer. Because it's helped you to grow into a better self, a better person. I think that's really remarkable to hear. And how will people find you on the internet, if there's others who listen to this and they may listening to it in some distant place in the world that we want to connect with you. So how would they do that?

Vanessa Leigh:

Yeah. So you can find me on my blog, which is dearcancer.ca. I also share through my Instagram account, which is @dearcancer.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, you might be inundated with people who want to connect with someone who can look at cancer in a positive way after living through the experiences of it twice and with all the side effects. And so on that you've had to experience. Now The Cancer Assistance Program does offer a lot of supports, one of which is actually this podcast. And for people listening, if they haven't listened previously, we did one with a social worker from the Juravinski Cancer Center [inaudible 00:36:31] on the emotions of cancer. We've talked about nutritional support during cancer with Janet Bolton. We've talked about some of the supportive care services that exist in Hamilton, for those who are local, that are listening. When we talked about the role of occupational therapy with Sarah Shalani, and it was a really engaging conversation. And so all of those are supports that are out there.

Dr. Bill Evans:

And I think with the messages messages you've given today, Vanessa, it really provides a nice group of podcasts that could help support people who are confronting a diagnosis of cancer either personally or individuals are trying to support someone who has a diagnosis of cancer because it affects everyone around you. It isn't just about the individual has the illness. So I really want to thank you for sharing so openly and honestly and courageously being so forthright about it all too, and putting it out there. It's quite a transformation from when you were 15 years old, but you've done a lot of growing in that 15 year gap. Are there any last messages you would like to leave with our listeners?

Vanessa Leigh:

Yeah, for sure. I just want to say thank you to you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure chatting with you for the last little bit. For anybody that's listening, if you've been recently diagnosed with cancer, or if you were diagnosed a little while ago, I just want you to know that you're not alone. Cancer can be very isolating. And my advice to you is to find other people that might be going through something similar. I think it's so important to connect and make different connections. You might be able to find people through a support group. You might be able to find people like I did through social media, maybe through Instagram, there are so many people out there that share their stories through different Facebook Groups, but again just know you're not alone and there are others out there just like you. And I think it will be very helpful if you are able to connect with these people.

Dr. Bill Evans:

Well, I think that's a very positive note to end on and an encouraging one for those confronting cancer. And again, Vanessa, I want to thank you for being so open and honest about your feelings and experience and being supportive to others who are confronting cancer. So thank you so so much. And thank you for listening to the Cancer Assistance Programs, podcast. Stay listening. And we have other really interesting topics coming up in the coming months. I'm Dr. Bill Evans. Thank you. And talk to you soon. Bye.

Speaker 1:

This has been the Cancer Assist Show brought to you by the Cancer Assistance Program.