



## How We Overcame Cancer As Newlyweds

Recorded on: July 31, 2014

### **Jessica Izquierdo**

Lymphoma Patient and Patient Advocate

### **Esteban Izquierdo**

Patient Advocate

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### **Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Hi. I'm Patient Power producer Tamara Lobban-Jones, and sitting with me is Jessica and Esteban Izquierdo, and they are joining me to discuss a life-changing diagnosis that even today is adding meaning to their lives. Thank you both for joining me.

### **Jessica Izquierdo:**

It's our pleasure.

### **Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

So, Jessica, we'll start with you. You sit here with the biggest smile on your face, but the road to happiness has kind of been riddled with life-changing events, including a diagnosis that caught you both by surprise, a diagnosis of lymphoma, and this was just three weeks before your wedding, the discomfort that you were having that kind of led to your suspicion that something else was going on.

### **Jessica Izquierdo:**

When I started with my battle, I was feeling a little bit of a chest pain. At that time, I thought it was anxiety because I had a stressful job, and also I was getting ready for my wedding. My wedding was taking place in Ecuador, and at that time I was living in Miami, so I thought it was

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only stress. I thought maybe by quitting my job I could get myself back together and feel better. I went to my boss. And when I told him that I wanted to quit, he was extremely nice, and he recommended me not to quit, to experience my wedding and just to relax a little bit.

After a bad day, the pain didn't go away, so I woke up my husband and asked him if he would take me to the ER thinking that maybe in the ER they can give me stronger pills, so I can enjoy that time off that I had asked from work.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

So you went to the ER, they ran a bunch of tests. And the doctor came in and told both of you, "Sit down. There's something else going on here. You've got cancer." What was your reaction in hearing those words?

**Jessica Izquierdo:**

My reaction to that was I looked at my watch and it was 8 a.m., and I asked him if I could go out and have some chocolate chip pancakes. The minute that I told him that, the doctor himself was quite confused, so he just told me to go out, and he will wait for me to come back, and we'll discuss my future treatment and my future plans.

**Esteban Izquierdo:**

That that moment I will remember forever, because I thought I would go in denial maybe, but I never was. I think most of the family when they heard the news were a little in denial, trying to make sure like she has to run more tests.

But I thought like from that point I would start like searching for what we can do. That's when we were lucky to have a little bit of research and have a friend that got us a big contact in MD Anderson, which was this amazing doctor that we're lucky to have. Jessica wrote him, and we received a response within hours, where he called her and, well, Jessica's first reaction was she wanted to get well like in at that point. So the doctor told us if we can be in MD Anderson, I think this was a Saturday, and he wanted us to go on a Monday, and that's where it all started really fast.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

Now, Esteban, when you think of the word "caregiver" we often think about, our grandparents or maybe an older relative taking care of, someone else. We don't necessarily think of 20-something, and you essentially were in that role pretty quickly. You were going to every appointment, every

treatment session. How were you able to take care of your soon-to-be wife and also manage your own emotions during this process?

**Esteban Izquierdo:**

Well, I would try to look for therapy also like psychological therapy that will help me also cope with the whole treatment we were going to have.

I think what was very important is that that point it's okay because I think it's between being angry and then just like don't know what's going on in the world. And why, it's a big thing, the question why. It's like I think it's one of the first things that comes to your mind when you have to go through this.

But what I think it helped me cope and helped me think as a caregiver it's that no matter what goes on between the treatment or after or before, we have us and we have now. Because at first when we think about cancer we think about sometimes death, and when you have some answers on the table that the doctor provides you it becomes a problem that can be solved. So that's when you get a little I think relieved, and—and you start to fight it.

And me as a caregiver, I think that's the main thing. Don't think about statistics or all the negative things that can go through a cancer treatment and that can happen through a cancer, but think about what you can do in that day. You have to take one day at a time, which is something that we learned, and I know everyone that goes through something as big as cancer or anything else knows about the one day at a time.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

We should mention that you both are newlyweds, congratulations. This happening essentially at the dawn of your lives, you sought treatment, your family rallied around you, you became closer. And now many consider you, Jessica, a hero. You're a cancer survivor speaking to large audiences of people and giving them hope.

What's next for Jessica, and probably the better question is what have you learned from this entire experience?

**Jessica Izquierdo:**

The moment you have cancer you're confused, you're angry, but as time goes by you get answers and you get treatment. You learn how hope and faith can be tangible. Also the power of love is stronger than of death, so you fight, fight, fight. You can win this.

And there is also life after cancer and life within cancer. And I think once you're a cancer survivor every day is precious, and you appreciate everything and everyone more than you ever thought, so

at the end it is a good. Of course I wouldn't have wished it upon myself, but at the end it was a good, eye-opening experience that I had in my life to just do what I feel that I need to do today that's going to make me happy today and live my life like that. One day at a time, when I was in treatment and after treatment and do everything that makes me happy today, and that's very valuable.

**Tamara Lobban-Jones:**

I'm Patient Power producer Tamara Lobban-Jones. For Patient Power, thank you so much for joining us. Remember, knowledge can be the best medicine of all.

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