

Alicia Patten

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

Hi I'm Alicia Patten.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

And I'm Lizette Figueroa-Rivera.

Alicia Patten

We're the hosts of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's patient podcast, "The Bloodline with LLS."

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera

A few years ago, we met some young adults who were completing their treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL).

Alicia Patten

And they were gracious enough to join us today. Let's see how they're doing.

Jeremy

Survivor

The first time I had symptoms was the month that I turned 21.

Betty

Survivor

You really didn't see young adults or older adults portrayed to have this cancer. So kind of like when they told me what I had I was like, "Wait a minute, doesn't that just happen to kids?"

Javier

Survivor

Yeah, I was 14, 15. I was in middle school when this happened.

Stephen

Survivor

Actually, I was working. I was in the middle of my career.

Abby-Gail Solomons, MSW, AAS

*Courtelis Center for Psychosocial Oncology
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A young adult's needs are different because they're in a new phase of their life. They're now transitioning to their own insurance, moving from their parents' health insurance, thinking about having their own family, a career, going to school, having to figure out how does this treatment or diagnosis now fit into my life and my work life and my family life. So, it's very new for them and it's a lot to navigate.

Jeremy

My mom came up from South Florida to where I was going to school, and she was with me every step of the way. It got a little overwhelming for someone who had gone off to college to be— to live on their own.

Betty

My parent's kind of live with me now, we share a house because I need the help. Although the cancer is gone I now have other health issues that I need help with and I'm highly blessed that I have my parents. You kind of when you're little and you're young, you're like, "Ugh, your parents." But I appreciate them 100 times more now.

Abby-Gail Solomons, MSW, AAS

For young adults who have been just newly diagnosed and are currently in a relationship it's a huge concern. How will my spouse or my partner handle this, and are they expected to support me and stay with me through this journey? How do we now navigate through this as a couple, right?

Stephen

My wife and I met in May, and then I got diagnosed in October of that year. So, for us it was very strange to be going through that intense timeframe and having just getting to know each other.

Jeremy

Did you ever have a discussion about it? Like, "hey, I know it's early, you sure you want to stick around?" Or was it just assumed at that point?

Stephen

She's the one actually that told me that she wanted to. I told her, I was like, "Hey, I understand that it's super early and I wouldn't blame you if you make other choices." She said, "No, I want to be here." And she was there every single day that I was in the hospital, she was there with me. That's why she's my wife now.

Betty

I was married. The strain of the cancer treatment, financial issues and burdens that we went through ended our marriage. I'm sorry. We went through a lot, and unfortunately it drifted us apart. Our relationship didn't survive cancer like I did. We were at the highest point in our life and then we were brought all the way down. We had a new baby that I couldn't hold, I couldn't take care of, because I was sick. A brand-new house that we ended up losing because financially we couldn't afford it anymore because I wasn't working anymore because of the cancer. So, I think the hardest thing for me, because I was battling, so I had that survivor mentality, that fighter mentality, and he just felt like he was losing everything. Cancer was taking everything. And he'll say it to this day, "Cancer stole my family from me." And a lot of people don't talk about this because who wants to talk about the sad parts about it? Everybody wants to see you made it, you're alive, you're a fighter.

Jeremy

I was really stuck on finishing school. I think it was my distraction. But I did have a lot of friends and a big support system at the school who came and visited me. And I developed a sense of humor that I didn't have before, which is weird.

Javier

I wasn't dating anybody at the time, definitely wasn't married or engaged. I knew my current wife at the time, we were friends. Fast forward 16 years, now we're married with two kids. When I was dating someone, when I was going through treatment I definitely didn't mention it. I didn't like talking about it. I didn't want anybody to know that I had that. And I felt—I just wanted everybody to treat me the same.

Abby

But even after you've gone through the diagnosis and treatment and are now in survivorship and you are embarking on a new relationship, how do I tell that person what I've gone through? Will they understand? Will they be supportive? How will that affect our relationship or the possibility of us moving forward?

Betty

It's hard to start new relationships after cancer, because you have to give them the heads up of everything, explain. And some people are okay with it and some people just aren't okay with it. Because you view life differently and you have a different outlook and you kind of like are certain of what you want and what you don't want. So, dating after cancer can be a bit frustrating. Cancer is gone but it's still part of us, it's still who we are. We will always still have to do our scans. We will always have that anxiety. We will always have the what if it comes back in the back of our minds. I wasn't looking when I met my partner. And he didn't get scared, he didn't back away. He may not understand it 100% but he didn't run away either. It's hard. It's hard emotionally sometimes because I wish that he understood. And you can't understand unless you're there.

Javier

You guys really had some real speed bumps with you guys. Because you're going through it in the middle of a relationship, you just started one, so it's definitely— I mean, for me it was a battle and I don't think anybody would ever understand what I went through, and I'm sure it's the same for you guys. Javier You do look at life differently. You do make different decisions and you do—everything is different. You see life in a completely different way afterwards.