



## How to turn your child's cancer journey into an adventure

Laura Lane's interview with Annie Pool

Episode #14, Hope, Strength and Courage Podcast – Full Transcript

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Thank you for tuning into the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. Love and support for parents whose kids are fighting for their lives! A weekly podcast created to support parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer, where you will find resources collected to help you face each day with Hope, Strength and Courage. From interviews with the top experts in their fields: doctors, psychologists, chaplains and inspiring frontline workers in paediatric oncology as they share their best advice, as well as day to day advice collected from other cancer moms and leaders in personal growth and development. From individuals who understand how hard it can be, I hope you will feel better prepared to cope with the day-to-day challenges of caring for your child. HI, I am Laura Lane, and I am your host. My own daughter Celeste was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 12. In 2015 I wrote about our experiences in the book "Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child's cancer with Hope Strength and Courage". Since that time, I have dedicated thousands of hours to share with other parents and caregivers the resources, tools, tips, skills and strategies I learned that helped our family to stay happier, healthier and more hopeful. My goal is to share with you my interviews with experts to support you as you care for a child with cancer.

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Today's Episode features my interview with international best-selling author and cancer survivor Annie Pool as we discuss how to turn your child's cancer journey into an adventure. It's such a fun interview with great ideas you can implement with your kids right away. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

I am pleased to introduce you to Annie Pool. Annie is the international bestselling author of "Passport to Life, how I overcame incurable cancer through the power of travel". In 2013, Annie was diagnosed with incurable cancer and she turned an insurmountable obstacle into an opportunity. Drawing on her life changing travels abroad, Annie daily visualized her cancer journey as an exciting travel experience. Within less than six months, she changed her incurable cancer diagnosis into a passport to life and became completely cancer free.

**Annie:** Thank you, Laura. It's such a pleasure to be here.

**Laura:** That's great. I'm really excited to get to know you and I'm sure our audience is as well. So, if you would start out by telling us a little bit about yourself and the journey that you have gone through.

**Annie:** Thank you, Laura, I'd be happy to do that. In 2013, like you read in my bio, I was diagnosed with incurable cancer. And this took place when I was recovering in the recovery room. I had just gone through extensive surgery to remove the cancerous tumour in my



abdomen. And I was just coming to actually, and the oncologist was there by my bedside as I was opening up my eyes. And to me, I thought this was a good sign. I was very hopeful that my journey with cancer was almost over. So, then she started to tell me. "Your surgery was successful," she said, "and we removed the tumour from your abdomen. But," she said, "your cancer has spread to the lymph nodes and the upper aorta. It's Stage 3, C4." And then she said two words that hit me like a ton of bricks. She said it's incurable. And to me, just hearing those words, it's incurable, really just lit a fire underneath me that really was a turning point in my life. So many might think it was a terrible thing that she did, but she really gave me a gift because it was in that moment that I made a powerful decision. And you know, in my anger I was pretty upset that she left me with those, those devastating words and at such a time like that, but I just determined in my mind, I said, you'll see. Just you wait and see. You'll be astounded because I'm going to live and not die, and I'm going to thrive and not just merely survive.

**Laura:** Wow.

**Annie:** So, from that point on then, I just determined I was going to find a way. And eventually I did because I had been writing this book about travel. And the book was originally going to be about how a person could overcome the post vacation blues. I had gone on this amazing six-month travel experience in Italy and Ireland in 2011. And it was just such a life transforming experience that by the time I got back home to my hometown in Victoria BC, my life completely tanked. And I struggled for so long that I started to realize well happy isn't a place in Europe. You know, it's not Italy, it's not Ireland. There must have been something inside of me that I did. So, I started to go back to those experiences and pull apart the gold nuggets, like search for the gold nuggets that I had found and started to write about it. And I realized I had a book. So, it was at that time of being diagnosed with incurable cancer that I was in the midst of writing this book, I had these really big dreams for my life. And simultaneously, while I determined I was going to thrive and not just merely survive, there was also this this other feeling that was coming up, you know. This feeling of it being so unfair. What?! You know, I'm on the cusp of my dreams, how can how can this happen right now? It just felt so like such poor timing really. So going back to the book that I was writing, I started to look at it and think well, if travel was that life transforming, then perhaps I can apply the principles that I encountered on my own travels, apply them to my cancer journey. And if it's successful, well that's an even better book. So that's what I started to do. I started to treat my cancer experience as an adventure.

You know, as you well know, through your daughter, if you've been diagnosed with cancer, the time of treatment is rather indefinite could be up to two years. Sometimes in some cases, it's up to five years. So, it was a self-imposed time off with cancer, and that's what made me think, well, I've got this time off I may as well treat it like a travel experience. Like I'm going somewhere. So, I didn't go anywhere, but I just traveled in my imagination. I used my former travel experiences and brought them into my everyday experience and just used them to visualize that I was still traveling to Italy and Ireland.



**Laura:** Okay, so explain to me how this works. So, you're in your hospital bed still, or you're in your home, right?

**Annie:** At this point. I recovered from surgery. I'm now home.

**Laura:** Okay.

**Annie:** And I had started to take three cycles of chemo. Although I was recommended to do much more than that - nine cycles of chemo - six to nine cycles, and up to 60 radiation treatments. But I just did three, so yeah, while I was going through treatment, then that's when I started to treat the whole experience as an adventure and chemo was part of seeing it as a big adventure. So, when I went for treatment, I looked at the chemo chairs as first-class seats in an airplane.

**Laura:** Oh, cool.

**Annie:** Yeah. Like cancer was going to be the very vehicle that was going to take me to where I wanted to go, traveling around the world again.

**Laura:** So, take us through this experience. You've got to go for your treatment. You sit down in the chair there, obviously, probably intravenously, or getting an injection, and tell us step by step – what did you do? How did you make this an adventure on those days?

**Annie:** Well, it was a lot of preparation beforehand. I listen to songs that reminded me of Italy and Ireland, predominantly Italy though. I visited like a little cafe that would remind me of being in Italy, and I would put up my requests on Facebook. That was like my prayer chain or my cheering squad, right? While I was in the chemo room it was so nice to see everybody's Facebook posts and say, you know, we're cheering for you either giving me their Amen, or their, you know, you can do it kind of thing. By the time I got to the chemo room, then yeah, I would view the seats as first-class seats in an airplane. And then I would also, you know, with my friend we told each other adventure stories. By the end of that day, she told me, you know, this didn't even feel like we were in the chemo room. We just had such a lovely time together.

**Laura:** So, did you spend some time visualizing while you're in the chair? Where were some of the places that you went in your mind?

**Annie:** Yeah, I definitely went to Italy. And ah, in my mind, I just imagined then going to some of the museums that I loved, and meeting some of the people that were important in my mind, but it wasn't just a past thing. It was also having a clear vision of what I wanted to do in the future.

**Laura:** Oh, okay. So were imagining yourself that “okay, once this is all done, I'm going back there, and this is the experience that I'm going to have”. So, you're visualizing now what it is that you want to do so you're obviously have to be well enough. You're visualizing yourself well enough in order to do those things as well.

**Anne:** Yeah, exactly.



**Laura:** Awesome

**Annie:** Which is where I am right now. Actually, Laura. I'm back in Ireland.

**Laura:** Which I think is just incredible. That's wonderful.

**Annie:** Yeah, so I've just been here for four days and so far, it's been amazing.

**Laura:** What were your favorite memories? Share with us what were you most engaged in in your mind? This is where I really want to go and show us the picture that you created in your mind.

**Annie:** Okay, the picture that I created was just, well actually, it had to do with a song and it was ... like music is very important to me. I'm a very visual kind of artistic person, right.

**Laura:** And auditory as well, I assume.

**Annie:** Auditory as well. So, there was a song that I played constantly just before my chemo treatments. And that was a song called shoot, I just had a memory blank. It's by Bruce Springsteen, oh, "Meet me at Mary's Place". Now, it's kind of an Irish flavor, but he's singing it in Spain, in Barcelona. It's a killer song that I brought up in YouTube. While he's singing in Spain, you know, he's using some words that make me feel like he's in Italy, you know. "Silencio", you know, and it's just this song with such a powerful message and he starts off very quiet, and he just builds and builds and builds and builds the song to like this powerful crescendo. And the message is "meet me at Mary's place", there's going to be a party. And he talks about how he brings in all these elements to keep his dream alive. He's got seven pictures of Buddha, the prophets are on his tongue, seven angels of mercy crying ... I'm trying to remember the words but anyways, he brings in all these elements to build his faith because his big goal is meet me at Mary's place, we're going to have a party. And that was what I was visualizing, was being back in these magical places, Italy and Ireland, and just having a party with friends near and far and celebrating. Not only have I survived cancer, but I just created this life, and everyone is just delighting in the joy of it. So that was the big image that I kept in my mind.

**Laura:** Oh, that's awesome. So, I think that's just so phenomenal, so many tools in what you've just shared. So, my next question is what is the advice that you would give to parents whose children have cancer? What is it you think that they can do with their own children as they go through their cancer treatments?

**Annie:** Okay, well, the first tip I would give for parents as well as kids going through cancer. First tip number one is treat it like an adventure. Now, you might not feel like it at the time, but as you well know, there are lots of people, celebrities and just regular people who have come through a cancer journey that can honestly say it was a gift, it was the best thing that ever happened to them in their lives.

**Laura:** So, is that is that what you feel for yourself, Annie?



Annie: Oh, absolutely. And same with the oncologist. She gave me a gift. I mean, I wouldn't have been able to create such an amazing life after cancer without her saying to me those two words in that very vulnerable moment. So, going back to treating it like an adventure, it's so important that when you change your perspective, things change. So, treat it like an adventure and then I'm going to give you some tools on how to treat it like an adventure.

So, the second tip is to see yourself as a superhero. Now that's important because going through this journey, you're going to get amazing superpowers that you never knew you had before. And you might not feel like it at the time because you've just been diagnosed with cancer. You could be lying on a hospital bed, you know, you can't go to school. A lot of things factor in that make you feel like, you know, I'm not a hero, I'm sick. How can you, how can I think of myself as a hero?

So, I would say the next thing is tip number three, find a hero to inspire you to believe that you can do certain things.

**Laura:** Who did you have as a superhero? Who was the hero that inspired you, Annie?

**Annie:** Well, I was looking for a superhero that had overcome incurable cancer and I couldn't find any of the time. So, what I did was because travel was so important to me, I then chose a superhero like Elizabeth Gilbert. She wrote the book "Eat, Pray, Love". I watched "Eat, Pray, Love" dozens of times. Also "Under a Tuscan Sun". To me, those two women were superheroes to me. You know, they created a beautiful life out of the pieces of nothing, so to speak. So going back to being a superhero, just find a superhero that you resonate with. And drink in their story until it becomes your own.

And then tip number four that I want to share is how you do that is you just take little steps every day to build on that faith. Pretend that you are that superhero. Like for me, I watched "Under a Tuscan Sun" and "Eat, Pray, Love" all the time. Those things made it easy to step into that experience of becoming a superhero.

**Laura:** I can imagine, for parents ... I know when my daughter Celeste was in the hospital, we had access to movies galore. They had a whole cupboard. The days that she was well enough to go down the hallway and take a look in that cupboard and say okay, this is the movie I want, or this is the movie I want. Or she'd send me down – "Mom, go find out if they have such and such". Children have that opportunity in the hospital they can - and they love to do it, watch something over and over again.

So, find something that inspires them, who they want to be like. Between the Disney movies and the superhero movies that are out there. There's so many whether that's Batman, Superman, The Avengers, the X Men, or some of the incredible superheroes in the Disney world. So, there's "Frozen" there's, okay, dating myself but "Aladdin", there's "Buzz Lightyear" and Woody in "Toy Story" ... those are incredible! Even Dory with the new "Finding Dory" movie after "Finding Nemo". Those are incredible because the adventures



that they go on, and Dory really is a superhero. She's incredible -what she overcomes, and who she becomes, her journeys and are willing to go through that adventure.

**Annie:** Exactly. That's a great tip. And I would say there's one more thing you got to do in order to remind yourself that you are a superhero. Find something that you can wear or put on yourself that makes you feel like a superhero. So, for me I kind of drew on Dorothy and her sparkly red shoes. And every time she wore her sparkly red shoes, she clicked them together and they transported her to magical places. So, I couldn't find red sparkly shoes. Besides it was winter. So, what I did find, because it was close to Christmas, was I found this they were skin tight ... they looked really hot. But they were a pair of sequined sparkly, like deep blue sequined sparkly pants. And every time I wore them, I felt like a million bucks. So, I would wear them to the grocery store, or just shopping around town. And whenever I wore them, people would say "wow, you look incredible". And when I said, "well, you probably would never guess but I had chemo the other day" and they would just, you know their eyes would ... their mouths would drop to the floor because you know it helped me to exude this vibrant energy that I wanted to step into, even though I have just had chemo.

**Laura:** That sounds like advice that moms and dads need as well. That moms and dads helping their child through this, are superheroes. Their kids are superheroes, for sure. And that gets talked about all the time. That these kids that are overcoming cancer that they are superheroes, but we've got some superhero sidekicks, their moms and dads are fabulous too.

**Annie:** Absolutely.

**Laura:** It sounds like parents need to put on their set of Robin outfits to support their Batman.

**Annie:** You know, Laura, it could be a cape, it could be a wand that they buy. I mean, you know, the imagination is limitless, right? But it has to be something that you resonate with. And you'll know it.

**Laura:** It seems like to me that kids would find that fun. OK, we're helping them to be superheroes but if mom and dad can be the superhero side kicks, and be a part of it, that just expands it for their world, and just helps them to get right into that role. And knowing that, okay, they've got a team around them. They've got a whole support team. If they're the Avengers, if you've got if you've got Captain America, if your kid is Captain America and mom and dad are Iron Man and Black Widow, just two kickass side kicks to help them through this, or maybe one of their brothers is the Hulk, and knowing that they have a whole team, that they're defeating this together.

**Annie:** Absolutely. And you know, transform the way you look at, or your child looks at things like a CT scan, or PICC line, you know. With say a PICC line and chemo treatments or radiations, you're getting injected with superpowers.



**Laura:** Just like spider man. You got bitten by the spider who had been radiated and it gave him his superpowers.

**Annie:** Or your CT scan could be like your magic vehicle, your Batmobile that takes you to the land of your adventures, land of your dreams. So, it's important, once again, to have a picture of what you'll look like at the end of your journey.

**Laura:** Awesome. So, this has been so incredible, Annie. Thank you so much. Do you have any other advice or can we finish with where people can learn more about you and your book?

**Annie:** Well, I think that the most important thing is, you know, see it as a big adventure. See yourself as a hero. Find an object that reminds you that you're a superhero. Step into your vision with those steps every day. And you will transform this into an adventure. Be inspired by someone that helps you to think of yourself as a hero.

**Laura:** Oh, that's awesome. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. This has been terrific!

**Annie:** You're welcome.

That was such a fun interview. I'm sure you could hear it in my voice. If you need any superhero ideas for your family, please reach out to me, I'd love to help you brainstorm ideas!

Please join me next week for my interview with Tattoo Tom Mitchell and our discussion about his Ultra Marathon fundraising and advocacy work he does for the Still Brave Childhood Cancer Foundation.

Before we end our show today, we have one last segment. Over the last few years, I have asked other cancer moms what advice they wish they had known when their child was first diagnosed. I have compiled that information and will be sharing their advice each week. You can download the top 101 pieces of advice that I put together as a mini E-book at [www.twomothersoneprayer.com](http://www.twomothersoneprayer.com)

Today's advice comes from Heather:

Heather says "Make a game out of everything you possibly can. Overshadowing or padding the bad with a 'game' can help children focus on the good in order to get past the bad."

Thanks, Heather, for sharing that.

If you have advice you have learned along the way that you wish someone had told you weeks, months or years earlier, I invite you to fill out the contact form on our website [www.twomothersoneprayer.com](http://www.twomothersoneprayer.com) and I will be sharing your advice with our listeners on future shows.



*[Music begins lightly in the back ground]*

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