

North Stars with Bonnie Prestridge  
Episode 6: Know Fear  
Guest: Jessica Guerrero

## INTRO

Jessica (J) - We don't really get anywhere, or at least not like in a fun or loving or compassionate to ourselves way when we just try to deny fear. 'Cause it's like a little gremlin that's running loose in your body, you know? It's like cortisol everywhere and you know, the house is trash. And when we just acknowledge it, that kind of pops the bubble of that kind of tension that maybe you don't even notice you have. But once it's gone, it's pretty great, I'm not gonna lie.

Bonnie (B) - Hello, I'm Bonnie Prestridge and this is the North Star Podcast. I'm a life coach for young people in their teens, twenties and thirties, plus their families who feel stranded or lost in life. If that sounds like you, this show is here to be a guiding light, to help you expand the horizons of what's possible for your life and build the practical skills to get there. In this show, we ditch the try harder and think positive mindsets of the mainstream self-improvement world for an approach to life that's more authentic, more effective and way more fun. If you're ready, let's get going.

--

B: Hey everyone, our guest and North Star today is Jessica Guerrero. Jessica is a health and wellness coach based out of Minnesota and her private practice is called, "This is Your Life." Good to have you here, Jessica.

J - Thanks Bonnie, it's so nice to be here.

B - I know, I've been looking forward to this for a while now. To start out, we ask all of our guests the same set of introductory questions, beginning with, what's your connection to the podcast theme of brains and bodies?

J - Well, when I was 24, I was diagnosed with cancer. I had CH3B, malignant melanoma.

B - And what would you say is the best part of having had melanoma?

J - I would say that the community that I found along the way is definitely something I treasure.

B - Yeah, and what would you say has been the hardest part?

J - Facing my mortality at a really young age was definitely challenging and not expected. And also there's been a lot of lasting side effects and things like that that come up, you know, mentally, emotionally and physically. So I think just having those kinds of things stick around has been challenging as well.

B - Yeah, absolutely. In the podcast and in my coaching practice, I often talk about this concept of a North Star, something that's a guide or an inspiration. Who or what have been your North Stars as you've dealt with these challenges?

J - My husband has been huge. We started dating, I think two or three months before I got diagnosed with cancer. And so it really changed our relationship, as you can imagine, and things got pretty serious pretty quickly and now, hey, happy ending, I married him. So that's great. But he was definitely a huge support and rock for me. And then interestingly enough, there's been so many people that I've met related to my cancer journey that have been kind of like soul guides for me. And they kind of each, for lack of, I just don't know what, how else to say it, but they kind of gave me a piece of myself or a key to unlocking a piece of myself that is a core to who I am. And without having had cancer, I wouldn't have met these people.

B - That's really beautiful. It reminds me that our personal development and discovering who we are is not something that we can do in isolation.

J - Yeah.

B - Like when you say that other people brought you or returned to you a piece of yourself. Yeah, that's really powerful. Thank you for sharing all that.

J - Yeah, thank you.

B - So I work with, in my private practice, I work with a lot of young people who have some kind of disability or health condition, medical issue. And one of the hardest things for young people to accept and to deal with when they have something going on with their body or their health is that they may be on a really different timeline than their peers. So while their friends and their classmates are going to school, playing sports, maybe getting jobs or going to college, dating, traveling, all these things, they're not, they are either struggling to do all those things or they're just straight up not able to be in school, not able to work, not able to do the things with their friends that they used to. And this can make people feel simultaneously like they are an infant, they're having to receive all this care. And also like they're in their seventies or eighties and kind of approaching the end of life. I'm wondering if you experienced this in any way.

J - I definitely did. Being 24, it was a long time ago now, but also, you know, it's a, it's a really special time in your life when you're like not committed into this relationship yet, or at least I wasn't. I had just graduated high school or college not that long ago. And I also was just like experiencing life in a really big way, you know, like so many of the people that I was working with, we were going out frequently, we were going on trips regularly, we were, you know, engaged in activities all the time along with work. Like there wasn't a dull moment. We were busy all the time. And I had a really busy social life, which was wonderful. And that all had to change. And when you're not able to kind of keep up with people, or additionally, like if your problems are so big, cancer is a big problem to have, you know? So if somebody had a crappy

day at work, or they had like a problem with their boyfriend or whatever, like there's a disconnection. They're not gonna come and talk to me about it 'cause oh my gosh, I can't bother her with my problems or whatever. And I definitely wasn't going out drinking, partying, dancing until the wee hours of the morning while I was going through treatment.

So it changed the dynamics of my friendships hugely. I also didn't live super close to my family. So I had to depend on people that I could really trust locally to support me through this. And it wasn't necessarily the people I expected, but it just forced me to ask for help, which wasn't something I was used to. It forced me to grow in ways that I wasn't prepared for. And it really made me feel lonely at times because there wasn't anybody that was my age going through the same thing.

B - That was exactly my experience too, of not having a single person my age, and even my doctors saying, "We've never seen somebody your age with these conditions. We tend to see this in people in their 50s and 60s who have arthritis or back injuries." And it's a really lonely experience. And even I think when friends want to help, want to be there for you, it's just like you're in two different worlds experiencing two different realities.

J - Exactly.

B - Did you have any fears when you were going through this about your ability to maintain friendships or date or like what this, I mean, I know there's the mortality question of having cancer, but that if you were to survive the cancer, what your social life or your personal life would look like?

J - Definitely. Well, I mean, I was like in a very new relationship as I was experiencing cancer. And so there's a lot that comes with that where you, you know, you don't normally share some of the things I ended up having to share until much later on down the road. And so we had to get very comfortable very quickly and that was unexpected. And you know, we laugh about it now, but yeah, at the time it was really uncomfortable. And you know, I actually tried to break up with him in the middle of all of it, because I had not had a super successful relationship. And you know, I knew that this was gonna be at least a year to 18 month long process of, and that was best case scenario, right? And so I was like, I'm not gonna have a breakup in the middle of all this, let's just do it now. And he was like, who said we're gonna break up? And I'm like, well, my track history, like has said that we're gonna break up. So let's just do it now. And he was like, yeah, no, we're not doing that. I was like, oh, okay, I guess we're not, but I tried. And he stuck around and proved it every day, which was beautiful, but that's not, you know, I didn't expect that. So it was a hard conversation to have in a super vulnerable position to be in.

And also with friendships, having to, you know, rely on my best friend to come and shower me. And some of that stuff when I had had surgery, couldn't lift my arm above my head to wash my hair. You know, there's things like that that you don't wanna ask for. And it does kind of change the dynamic in the friendship and certain friends that were like my best and closest friends didn't know what to say to me or how to treat me and they just kind of disappeared. And I don't hold any ill feelings for it, but at the time it definitely hurt.

B - Yeah, that's such a painful experience. I think so many people, whether it's cancer or another time of health condition, lose relationships. I certainly lost some relationships and then gained some. It's like this interesting balance sheet at the end, but people really don't know how to show up for a loved one. They don't know what to do. And it's, again, it's not through lack of caring or even necessarily lack of trying. So I'm curious, like for anybody listening who loves somebody who is going through a serious medical situation or serious, any kind of life situation, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, what would you advise people to say or do when they don't know how to show up?

J - I would say the best thing that you can do is just be present. You don't have to say anything. In fact, sometimes it's a lot better if you say nothing because we tend to fill the space with really terrible stories to try to make people feel better and it never works that way on the receiving end of so many of those stories. I can just tell you to show up, be present, authentically be there, maybe however you know the person, warmly greet them how you would wanna be greeted in that moment, whether it's I brought you a cup of warm tea or your favorite book, just showing up and being truly present and demonstrating to that person that they matter to you, that you care about their situation and you're there for them, whatever that means.

B - And just don't fade away. As long as you don't fade away, you'll be fine. It's like stay with it even when it's uncomfortable and scary, just stay with it.

J - Absolutely.

B - So going back to the timeline, I don't know about you, but when I was going through all of my stuff, I had all of these thoughts and fears of like what was gonna happen if I didn't graduate at a certain point, if I didn't start my career at a certain point, that there were gonna be all of these massive repercussions for my life and that things wouldn't work out. Now, looking back, I've realized that there's many paths and many different timelines that can all work out. And I'm curious if you have any, like what you would say to somebody who's young, also going through cancer in their mid-20s and who's terrified that they're gonna miss out on these critical experiences that they can't get back.

J - That's a big question. Yeah, I think for me at the time, I was really worried about, yes, ticking the boxes. I was 25 and in a serious relationship. Most of my friends were in the business of getting married, starting to have babies, things like that. The big one for me was I didn't know what my fertility situation was gonna be afterwards and my OB very clearly told me at the beginning of my cancer journey, this is off the table for you without very serious conversations. And so that had to be compartmentalized at the time. And it's something that I have had to unpack over the last 13 years. And it's been something that has ebbed and flowed, but there was a lot of fear about, number one, being a woman in today's culture and not having kids. It is not always easy out there. There's a lot of questions. People feel entitled to a lot of information and I can't tell you how many times people have been offended because I don't have kids, because I get asked that question at least 75 times a week, it feels like. And when I don't have kids, they always wanna know why. And I shouldn't have to be in a place where I feel

like they're entitled to. Well, when I was 24 years old, I got diagnosed with melanoma. And then my OB said that I wasn't gonna be able to have kids because blah, blah, blah. I shouldn't have to disclose that. No, I don't have kids or whatever should be enough. And I honestly just wish it wasn't a question that we went around asking people. Anyway, I get that it's a connector and whatever, but let's find some new questions or just something like how often are people's kids the most interesting thing about them? Never.

B - You heard it here, crew, it's time for new questions. There are so many things we can ask people other than do you have kids? So you mentioned there was a lot of fear around this. And I know you've also mentioned that one of the things that was different about your timeline was that you were facing questions of mortality at a much, much younger age than the majority of people around you. I'm curious, you've written really eloquently about how your experience with cancer helped you reconfigure your relationship with fear. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about that.

J - Yeah, I was on a kayaking expedition in New Zealand and one of my soul guides, his name is PK, he taught me this idea of reframing fear to be instead of N-O, no fear to no fear, K-N-O-W.

And I just think that it's so beautiful because I'm not a person who's ever believed in fearlessness, like I know that I get scared of things, we all do, and so it felt like such a gift to be able to just accept that at that time to thinking about death at such a young age when I felt like I hadn't accomplished what I was supposed to accomplish or live the life I was supposed to live. Or even when I faced friends mortality since then, it's so scary and being able to kind of warmly embrace that fear and accept it and say, I see you and you're here, you're not going anywhere, I get that. And we have to live in this life and this body together. So you don't get to control my life.

Elizabeth Gilbert says this really well in her book, *Big Magic*, she talks about putting fear in the backseat, you don't get to control the navigation system, you don't get to control the radio. I get that you're here and you have to be in the backseat, you're here, I love you, you're a part of me, I love you. And I accept that you're here and we're gonna do this together. But it's like a warm, it's a warm loving emotion and it helps direct me in places of like, oh, that feels too big, too scary, that feels too much. Then it automatically now strikes my curiosity instead of like, ooh, no, stop. I'm like, ooh, tell me more. And that has become a really beautiful relationship. It just feels so much better.

And not saying I wanna die tomorrow, but death now just seems like a beautiful gift and something that we can really create for ourselves, a beautiful loving relationship with instead of something that I need to be afraid of.

B - Yeah, something that you run away from that's always gonna be on your heels. Well, in the relationship you describe with death is so, I don't think very many of us have many models or the relationship with fear. We don't have very many models of this third way. It's either you have to crush your fear, banish your fear, or you let it drive the car of your life. You let it make all the decisions, inform how you feel. I'm curious, like, could you give us an example of, like in a real concrete situation, how you embrace fear, put it in the back seat?

J - Yeah, I mean, it happens every day for me now because I'm an entrepreneur and every day is scary. I'm just out here doing the things and I have to muster the courage to be able to, like, ask people for stuff and put myself out there and take up space and that takes a lot of intentional for your work because if I really, if I let it just run my life, I'd be downstairs eating popcorn and knitting my day away. That would be lovely. There's nothing to be scared of in any of that. So we intentionally have a little chat every morning in my morning pages practice that I do in my morning routine and then I'm okay. And if I'm not, or if it pops up, or I start to feel anxious somewhere else in the day, then it's another check-in, but it's always a mindful moment and like a reset rather than letting it take control because I know what happens when it does.

B - What does it look like to do some of these entrepreneurship activities that you're doing, which I'm also doing and can relate very strongly to what you just said. What is it like to do those while still embracing fear?

J - It is like patience. It's a big piece of it and practicing 'cause I don't get it right all the time, but trying to do my best to prepare for the day. So like going to a networking meeting, seeing my elevator pitch or my, like how I wanna be presented and making sure that I dress in a way that I feel comfortable and that I eat food because also I get extra gremlins of fear when I'm hungry. And just making sure I'm doing those baseline things to take care of myself 'cause then fear doesn't have anything that's gonna say to me about that on top of everything else. But yeah, like little internal dialogues. I'm the kind of person who will have conversations with my fear in my head. Like, I really appreciate that you're here right now and I get that you think that this is pretty scary and we can handle it.

We're gonna take a deep breath. Again, I acknowledge you're here, hand to my heart. I love you and we're gonna do it anyway. So we're gonna be scared. You're here and we're gonna do it anyway.

B - Yeah, for anybody listening who's really in the thick of the tough times, for Jessica and I, well, I'll speak for myself, Jessica. You let me know if this resonates with you. Like, yes, some of the really, really intense fears of when I was younger and my health was really unpredictable and my future was unpredictable, like a lot of those fears are gone or reduced. Like conditions have changed. But what I want people listening to know is that to be resilient, to make it through these kinds of situations, it doesn't mean that you just don't have fear on the other end. Like I still have fear around my health. I still have fear around my future. And so that's not necessarily the end goal. It's just like what you just described to hopefully some of the worst fears get diminished. And then it's learning how to manage it and work with the fear instead of it letting it either like stop you or trying to repress that emotion. So just like a reality check for anyone listening, like the fear is never gonna go away. And so if that's the goal that you're working towards, or if you're saying I'll do all these things when these fears are gone, I have good news and bad news for you. The bad news is that that stays never gonna come. The good news is like you just said, you can still learn how to do stuff anyways. And that fear, like you were saying, it can sometimes be a prompt to give yourself what you need to do the hard thing.

J - Yeah.

B - I need to eat something. I need to wear clothes that feel comfortable. Some of the things you mentioned. And the fear can actually be almost like a little guide that's helping you put your snow suit on to climb the mountain and telling you what you need.

J - Totally. It can be an ally. You just have to reframe it that way. And again, just accept that it's gonna be there. We don't really get anywhere, or at least not like in a fun or loving or compassionate to ourselves way when we just try to deny fear. 'Cause it's like a little gremlin that's running loose in your body. It's like cortisol everywhere. The house is trash. And when we just acknowledge it, that kind of pops the bubble of that kind of tension that maybe you don't even notice you have. But once it's gone, it's pretty great, I'm not gonna lie. And not that it's gone always, but it has gone often.

B - Yeah, like you said, there's a difference between, I imagine the fear as a toddler or a gremlin or even like a pet dog. There's a difference between having the fear driving the car and you're in the passenger seat holding on for dear life. And there's a difference between it being in the backseat as a sometimes friendly, sometimes grumpy, but ultimately strapped into its car seat.

J - Yes.

B - In the back traveling companion.

J - Yes. Those are two very different experiences of life. And again, it doesn't require the fear to disappear.

B - Right. So I think that's a good transition into the second part of these conversations that I have with guests, where we talk about nuts and bolts. Like, here are these beautiful concepts and these ideas that sound really nice in theory, but how in practice do we do it? And so I always invite guests to share a resource, a practice, a tool, anything that can help listeners make these ideas, like put these into work, these ideas into work in their real life.

J - Yeah. Well, I can only share what worked for me and everybody's gonna have their own thing. For me, a huge part of it is my morning routine. Like you couldn't take it away from me if you tried. It is my favorite part of the day. I mean, maybe not, but I mean, it's a good part of the day. And it really consists of me spending intentional time with myself, which I didn't used to get before I started doing this routine like five or six years ago. And it's something that started as like five to 10 to 15 minutes and then has grown to like a 90 minute routine every morning. And now it's got some movement in it. It's got some meditation or just contemplative practice and my morning pages, petting my dog, reading some, like a chapter from a book. And then I also have just a daily reading out of a book that I change every year. And I love this practice because it just really helps me again, focus on like, what do I wanna accomplish today? Get rid of the fear gremlins, kind of tame them, it's like you said, kind of feeding the toddler. We just need to like

give it the toys, give it the things. It's gonna be fine. And starting the day that way just really helps me.

So that's my number one thing is I would say, find your thing that helps you get grounded because that's really mine. And then investing in coaching is something that I've done as well. I am a coach now and I've also been coached because I think that investing in ourselves, whether it's therapy, whether it's coaching, maybe it's bowls if you're really lucky and have that kind of position, I think they're wonderful tools. And I think just the takeaway there is investing in ourselves. We all need support and care. And I love what you said that, this doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens amongst other people. And we all need guides and people to support us on our journeys. So find the person that's gonna help you invest in yourself and really walk alongside you for that journey and just take the time to get to know you a little bit more and what you want intentionally from your life. 'Cause it's really helped me stay and get grounded and like living a life that I actually am so proud to live. And really enjoy. And then the last thing I shifted to work that I enjoy and that really supports the little way that I wanna live. So I got really intentional about what kind of life do I wanna live? 'Cause this is my one wild and precious life and I don't get to do it over and I don't know how long I have. There's no guarantees. So I'm not gonna waste it doing anything that I don't enjoy, which is again, a very privileged position to be in.

And if you aren't necessarily in a position, how can you create time for joy every day? Maybe there's work out there, it's service, giving back, connecting with somebody, something. Even if it's just learning, how can you kind of fill that little bit of your cup? Because it's absolutely necessary for living a life that you love.

B - I think those are three solid pieces of advice. With the morning routine, I love what you said about, it can be five to 15 minutes, doesn't have to be an hour and a half. And one of the things that I am sort of constantly working on with my clients, and I'm sure you are too, both coaches, is the making change over time, like changing our ability to navigate a tough health situation, changing our relationship with fear requires steady, consistent work. It requires habits. And a morning routine could be an evening routine, it could be a midday routine, whatever it is, is one of those, like something that where you check in with yourself is so critical because if we don't set the agenda, if we don't choose the playlist, metaphorically and literally speaking, the rest of the world will fill it in for us. There will plenty of demands on our time, demands on our attention, there will be other people's thoughts and feelings that we absorb and take on as our own. And again, it's like if we're continuing the metaphor from earlier, all these other people are like hopping through the window in the sun roof of the car and grabbing the steering wheel.

J - Yes.

B - Right? So you have like four people hanging out of your car window, they're all fighting over the steering wheel, your car is like careening around. And this is the moment where we get to try to like retake control of our life. The investing in coaching, I think, what underpins that strategy is like, we can't do this alone, we need mentors, we need guides. There are people who have gone through exactly what you've gone through, and there are also people who have

parallel life experiences that are relevant and finding those people. People wanna help, especially if you're a young person listening to this. Older people love helping younger people. They want to, they wanna give back, they see themselves in you. And let's say you're in really, really serious financial situation, like I've been in a financial situation I do believe that in most situations, the full price of coaching will more than pay for itself because it will save you money and time. But let's say that's not an option. There are all of these coach training programs that need practice clients. And many of the coaches, like you're going through a second coach training right now, many of the people doing this are not newbies. They're coming from another career, they're getting a second coaching training, they were a therapist before. Like there are some really incredibly experienced people who still need like free clients to practice with. So it's out there. And then I really like what you said about, you know, making bold decisions. And if you're not in a position to make a major change in your work, finding like the five minutes in your work day you can do something that fills your cup or something outside of work.

J - Yeah.

B - It's, we have to fuel ourselves 'cause there are so many drains on our emotional and physical fuel.

J - It's true. And I love this, I don't know if you've heard this saying, but you know, it's like if somebody bumps into you, for example, whatever is inside of you will spill over. It's like, if you're a cup. So I think about my morning routine and these other things is like, I'm pouring love into myself. So that if somebody bumps into me or like something like that happens, I will have love to spill out instead of the opposite. Because if we don't take the time to really care for ourselves, then when the little thing happens, like somebody in real life bumps into us or a car is honking at us and there's a road rage happening right next to us that gets us really amped up and we have a really big reaction when that's not necessarily who we really are.

B - Well, it's funny you preempted my next thought, which was we try to fuel ourselves and then the communal question of how do we fuel each other? Because there's times when we can't fuel ourselves or it's really hard. And I love this idea of we're all just a bunch of, I'm imagining, yeah, like saucers of tea walking around the world. And it's okay if you're having a bad day and you bump into me, I'll just either intentionally or unintentionally spill a little bit of my tea into your cup. And if we were all just doing that for each other and for ourselves, what a beautiful world we would be in. Thanks for that image.

Okay, there are at least five other topics I would love to talk to you about. We'll have to save it for another time. I really appreciate you being here and sharing this deeply personal, vulnerable story with us. I hope that folks listening, whether they themselves are dealing with cancer or something else, we'll see some of their story in you and gather some, what I like to call realistic hope, grounded hope for what an imperfect, but satisfying, meaningful life can be what's possible for them. And I'm wondering if there's, if you wanna share contact info with our listeners, if you wanna plug anything that you have going on, tell them where they can find you.

J - Yeah, you can find me on, I just made a Facebook account. So I think I have approximately three friends right now, but please come and find me. My name is Jessica Guerrero. You can also find my business page, This Is Your Life Health and Wellness Coaching, and my website, I'd love for you to visit it and sign up for my newsletter. I send them out twice a month. They're not super spammy, and they're usually full of good stuff, like Know Fear instead of No Fear, and talking about boundaries and just all the things that I'm learning in my life along the way. My website is [thisisyourlifecoaching.com](http://thisisyourlifecoaching.com).

B - And we'll have links to all of that in the show notes. I also just wanna plug Jessica, as someone who has gotten to know Jessica pretty well over the past year. She's a phenomenal coach. She's doing phenomenal work. And her newsletters are so well written and such a delight to read, and definitely something you would enjoy having in your inbox. Thanks for being our North Star today.

J - Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here and share this space with you.

B - That's it for now. I hope there was something in this episode that helps you along on your journey. If so, we'd love to hear from you. You can send your thoughts, questions, and topic suggestions through the general contact form on my website at [bonneprestridge.com](http://bonneprestridge.com), or you can DM me on Instagram @bonnie.prestridge. These are also places where you can learn more about my coaching services.

This podcast is co-produced and edited by Sarah Williams. If you've ever dreamed of starting a podcast and are looking for an editor, I highly recommend talking to Sarah. Reach out to her at [sarahwilliamsedits@gmail.com](mailto:sarahwilliamsedits@gmail.com). Links to our contact info are in the show notes.

Follow or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. And if there's anyone you know who could use a guiding light, we'd love it if you shared our show with them.

This has been the North Stars podcast with me, Bonnie Prestridge. Until then, we're wishing you fair winds and following seas.