

Wynne Leon (00:02)

Hi Liza It's good, good and I'm so happy to be talking with you. not only because we're on a podcast and I I really enjoyed your book, but also because, you know, you were nearly not here. And so it's just must feel like a ~ it's it feels like an honor to be able to talk to you.

Liza Anderson (00:02)

Hello, how are you?

Yes.

~ thank

you so much. Thank you.

Wynne Leon (00:24)

You've written this incredible book, *The Crossing, My Near Death Experience with Jesus*. And I want to read a little bit from the book's description. One moment, Liza Anderson was planning joyful trips with her husband ahead of her birthday. The next, she was fighting for her life in the ICU, dependent on a ventilator, her body overwhelmed by infection, as doctors prepared her family for the worst. Placed into a three week induced coma.

Liza Anderson (00:32)

Sure.

Wynne Leon (00:53)

She hovered between life and death while her husband, stepdaughters, sister and loved ones kept vigil at her bedside, waging a desperate battle for her survival. So I I mean that's an incredible story. Can you tell us the story?

Liza Anderson (01:07)

Sure. when that happened I was in no way in bad health. It was something that like I said, we were planning trips, we were living our life, everything was, going forward and a it was just

Wynne Leon (01:17)

Yeah. You were about fifty

two, is that right? you're about to celebrate? Okay.

Liza Anderson (01:19)

About yes, it was fifty-two. Yeah. And

there was nothing that was amiss with my health at all. And everything kind of suddenly shifted. and it started with my husband had a flu. I thought when I had the severe stomach pains that I got, that's how it started. I thought, I just have his flu. I just caught something. So then I you know, several more days passed and I still had the incredible pain. it would kind

Wynne Leon (01:24)
Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Liza Anderson (01:46)
of

come and go, but I thought maybe I should go to the doctor. so I set up an appointment and my primary care doctor had left the practice. So I had to go to someone within her group, which was good because I did have my medical history, but I had never met this person before. But anyway he saw me and he deduced that the the pain was from scar tissue that I had from an appendix.

Surgery 14 years or earlier. So he said, We need to send you the ER for tests. It was late on a Friday afternoon. he was like, We gotta get you over there now because a lot of the doctors leave for the weekend. And so I was kind of whisked to the hospital, which is a major academic medical center in downtown Chicago.

And you know, I waited several hours there to be seen. They saw me and test did some tests and the doctors said that the test came back sort of inconclusive. So what they wanted to do was keep me over the weekend for dehydration, etc., watch me and then give me a CT scan on Monday.

And so at the time it was Friday night by that time, ten PM. I thought it was too late to like, you know, I thought it was too bad to just wait until Monday. But, you know, this was kind of the direction that that they were going with. And so,

Wynne Leon (03:05)
Right. Right.

Right, and and they're the they're the professionals,

right? I mean you what are you gonna do when they say, Yeah, you gotta wait, yeah.

Liza Anderson (03:17)
Right, right. I mean exactly.

Yeah, and Monday came I was told to take two liters of barium prior to the C T scan, which I hadn't eaten or drank anything all weekend. I was on IVs, etc. And I questioned the nurse

and she's like, Well, that's what the doctor ordered, and nobody monitored me while I was drinking the barium. I just kind of drank it fast because I wanted to get it over with. And so sure enough I began to feel nauseous and they

wheeling me into the C T scanner and

the tech said, if you get gonna get sick, just turn your head to the right. We'll go through with the test. And so sure enough I got sick in the CT scanner. And at that point when I was wheeled back to my room, I was feeling very lightheaded and dizzy. And I had to call for the nurse because I couldn't dress myself. I couldn't stand up really. the next thing I knew there were like eight doctors around me. My oxygen levels had really

dropped and so they're all saying she looks blue we need to get her the ICU and by this point my husband had come and he's like what's going on what's wrong and he's like we we don't have time to talk we just need to get her you to the ICU

the next day is when I really started fading in and out of being able to talk and things like that.

that day they did tell me the x-rays that I took under the CT scanner showed that scar tissue caused a blockage, and that was the original problem, which they could have done surgery on right away. However, the fact that I my lungs were covered in infection, they said we can't do the surgery. We've got to have her lungs be stable before we do the surgery.

Wynne Leon (04:57)

Yeah.

Because you when you'd thrown up the the barium, it had aspirated into your lungs. ~

Liza Anderson (05:03)

Yes. coated my lungs. Correct.

And what happened

was I got acute respiratory distress syndrome, which they later told us that's a thirty five to fifty percent mortality rate when you have ARDS. And so they took my husband aside and said, Your wife's doing she may not make it. we can't operate on the original problem because we've got to wait for her lungs to get stable. She can no longer fight this on her own because she's not breathing well.

So we're gonna have to put her in an induced coma. That's gonna be the best way for her survival. my husband signed the papers for that and I went into the induced coma for three weeks,

Wynne Leon (05:42)

I mean that seems so long. I mean th i l l yes, I mean it yeah.

Liza Anderson (05:45)

Right. Yeah. It was amazing. It was it was just

yeah, very traumatic. And so during those three weeks is when I had the two profound experiences. and one was the choice to live or die, and the other was an encounter with Jesus.

Wynne Leon (05:51)

Mm.

Mm.

you know, at at some point in here, you write about it. everything I was on earth as Liza Anderson was stripped away. And yet I was still there. My essence remained. Like you i it's such a profound thought just to think about having that stripped away and and, you know

Liza Anderson (06:15)

Yes, yes.

Wynne Leon (06:29)

being stripped from not only your body but that ~ that identity and still remain.

Liza Anderson (06:35)

Yeah, in the coma in

the coma I still had my identity, as best as I can describe it.

Wynne Leon (06:39)

mm,

Liza Anderson (06:40)

And so so when I was experiencing the choice to live or die, it was I found myself in a hotel room and I understood that I would watch the life review and then I would be going to heaven. That's that's what I understood. And I never really saw anything on the screen, but I felt a warm, comforting feeling and it was just very nice. but when it was over I realized

I am I was still alive and I actually was a little bit disappointed at that point for some reason. I thought it was gonna be this great, you know. so I walked out of the hotel room down a long hallway and

Wynne Leon (07:08)
Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Liza Anderson (07:17)
there was an entity at that end of the hallway. It wasn't Jesus or God or it was a shadowy figure, and it said, you know, if you go right, you can just drift off and everything will be so happy. And if you go left,

you'll suffer a lot but you'll eventually be okay. And so in my head I thought, wouldn't that be like committing suicide if I went right? Like, I have to come back and fight to live, right? And so with that, no more and that entity disappeared. And that's what I knew I was alive. And I I I chose that other dilight. So

Wynne Leon (07:53)
And then the other

profound b experience you had was with Jesus.

Liza Anderson (07:57)
Right.

And these experiences are not linear. it seemed to happen simultaneously. they were just experiences. And so the other

Wynne Leon (08:02)
Right. And that makes it so

interesting to write about, right? And talk about, which is like we're trying to apply logic and time and linear thinking to something that is beyond that. Is that right? Yeah.

Liza Anderson (08:07)
Yeah. Yeah.

Beyond. Exactly. Yeah. Yes.

So in the other experience, I found myself in an ocean like atmosphere. there were shadowy figures around me. I didn't know any of them, but it was just nice. I'm just experiencing

whatever was around me. And then all of a sudden I was propelled upward to bright lights, bright white robes I saw. And it was so bright I really couldn't look at it. So I was looking down. I couldn't, it was just too bright. But then I heard a voice that said, just look at me, just focus on me. don't worry about things swirling around you, just look at me. And so I looked up and I looked into the eyes of Jesus, which

Or like it's indescribable. It was a kaleidoscope of colors. I felt like I was looking through to infinity. That's why on my book cover I have the kaleidoscope of colors it was the most beautiful thing, and I didn't feel any judgment or just unconditional love at that moment of looking into his eyes, like you would never believe,

And then the next thing that happened, he touched my right shoulder, and then I went spiraling downwards. it was a brief encounter, but an impactful one and just just ethereal, really. So

Wynne Leon (09:33)

Right, right. And

so amazing. So you you come out of the coma and you have months of rehab and recovery to go. I think at one point, you know, you had to learn how to breathe, swallow, speak, and walk and all the things you take for granted. So you're doing all this work, but you came out of that experience with some really profound

And poignant lessons that you took away from that. Can you tell us about what those were?

Liza Anderson (09:59)

Yeah.

Yeah,

it was surreal coming out of the coma It was extremely frightening.

my hands had to be tied to the bed because I had tubes everywhere. There were multiple medical tests every day. the knowledge of my scars was traumatic to see, you know, you wake up and all of a sudden you're seeing yourself having a lot of scars and just traumatic surroundings.

Wynne Leon (10:24)

because when you were in the coma y the blockage from your scar tissue in your intestines became a problem, right? And so they had to do s yeah. And so they did

Liza Anderson (10:29)

Fantastic. Mm-hmm.

It became a problem, yes. And they had to do surgery

while I was still in the coma as well. Yeah.

when I went through all that terror, kind of the frightening stuff and the all the tests, you know, I really took back the message of to focus on Jesus and just keep my focus on that. Don't worry about things swirling around you. Which was everything chaos was swirling around me. So that that message I was able to take that back with me to help me recover and get through all this really traumatic and horrific stuff that, when you're not

expecting anything like this to happen and it does. It's it's a lot of trauma. So so that was that was one thing that helped me get through all of that in the hospital. the other

Wynne Leon (11:09)

Right, right.

So that's just sort

of a calm focus. It's it's

Liza Anderson (11:20)

Yes. Well when I'm sitting there in pain or when I'm sitting there waiting for a medical test, my focus is on Jesus and just the very

moment with him and how scared I am and that I feel love and that no matter what happens everything's gonna be okay. That's what I felt. And that's why I say that some of those moments were the best time of my life, we in the worst of circumstances, because to feel that strength is incredible. I always was very spiritual, but when you're really up against it and you really feel that going through it and it's it's an

incredible feeling.

Wynne Leon (11:56)

Yeah,

yeah. You know, one of my favorite authors, Mark Nepo, writes about it It's no secret that cancer in its acuteness pierced me into open living. And I've been working ever since to sanctify that open living without crisis as its trigger.

Liza Anderson (12:09)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon (12:12)

But can this

Liza Anderson (12:13)

Nice.

Wynne Leon (12:13)

be done without crisis pushing us off the ledge? That's the question now. Years from the leap. How to keep leaping from a desire to be real so as not to be shoved by an ever-lurking crisis. I mean and I thought when I read your story, it reminded me of that because you're trying to bring that lesson that you learned in that trauma and painful experience and recovery into your life, right?

Liza Anderson (12:39)

Yes.

Yeah. Yes. And it's a practice. when I came out of the coma I really felt like I was living that way. Like I was, living moment to moment, focusing on what needed to be next and just not analyzing anything, but just doing and being present. And our day-to-day life, most people don't live like that. you're kind of thinking of the future and the past and what did I do wrong or right and so for me it's a practice to

get back to that. because I know the value in it. And I mean I guess, you know, when I visit that time kind of space, it's mostly in nature or through meditation. that's how I get back to that state. But even just during a simple day, that's the other thing I wanted to mention was I had a different kind of knowledge in the other realm. And it was just

very pleasurable. Just, you know, moment to moment. Everything was moving seamlessly. Like I said, there's no judgment. There was no analysis of what's gonna happen in the future or anything analyzing the past. It was just really seamless living in the present, very enjoyable and it's it's something that I think is I strive to emulate every day.

everything is just the flow of life. Is if if you not don't resist and just go forward doing the best you can, and there's always challenges and goals, but you know, don't resist the out and don't look for outcomes, based on what you want necessarily, because they may not happen. But the adventure of life is just the doing and it's not is it it's not so much about the outcomes is really what I learned there.

Wynne Leon (14:06)

Yeah.

Yeah. It's such

a great takeaway from reading your story and hearing your story is is that whole wisdom of being present, not worrying about what happens next, not worrying about the outcome, just just being present for that moment and knowing that it'll all be okay. Yeah.

Liza Anderson (14:23)

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, yeah. And then

my roommate in rehab

Wynne Leon (14:35)

Mm-hmm.

Liza Anderson (14:36)

~ was a stroke survivor and she was an inspiration to me because she would go out every evening with her girlfriends she's probably in her sixties, but they would come, she'd have makeup on and a nice outfit And she was in a wheelchair, but she would go out laughing and, if you're ill and you feel like you're weak and you feel like, well, maybe I shouldn't be doing that. Maybe I should just be resting. But I was like I started to think, why can't I do that? At least for a time period.

Wynne Leon (14:45)

Mm.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Liza Anderson (15:03)

And so I did start doing that even in rehab. I my husband and I went out to dinner. We went by the beach and walked. I was in my wheelchair walking down the beach looking at watching a wedding one time just because it was happening. And I that for recovery is so important. And I did take that when I was home. I did the same thing. I wanted to to keep my life as regular as possible and go out and have, you know, dinners.

Wynne Leon (15:07)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Right. Yeah.

Liza Anderson (15:30)

and festivals and concerts and everything that a Chicago summer offers really, you know, I did that summer and that really brought me back to myself and helped.

Wynne Leon (15:35)

Yes. Right.

Hmm. And you write about

that so well because and I I I love your husband's response, but you write about it. John, I said one evening, I want to be like my roommate in rehab. I don't want us to stop doing things like go to plays and outdoor concerts and dinners and festivals this summer, just like always. I'm all in, he says, smiling. I mean, and that response and is so good because he's like, Y yeah, I I'm I'm there. Yeah.

Liza Anderson (16:05)

Yeah, yeah. And

we had a great summer. It was really yeah. And I don't keep in touch with my roommate from rehab, but I wish that she knew what an effect she had on me because it was really an ~ important lesson, I think.

Wynne Leon (16:15)

Yeah, yeah.

But while

you're experiencing all these great lessons, I mean one of the the things that was interesting to me as a reader of your book is that, your husband John is having to really navigate the medical system and advocate for you. you are are having to go through all the pain and trauma, but he you know, he had his own experience of of

Liza Anderson (16:41)

He did, yeah. Absolutely.

Wynne Leon (16:44)

there were so many things that were avoidable and that he was having to advocate for. What did you learn about the kind of the medical system through that?

Liza Anderson (16:47)

Right.

Yeah, yeah.

a couple things

the importance of a primary care doctor and the importance of family and friends as advocates for when you are in pain and when you're weak, 'cause hospital systems move very fast. it's somewhat chaotic, especially at a teaching hospital where you have a lot of different teams of doctors seeing you. I had so many different one team would see me one

day and the next team would see me the next day. there was notes and things, but it was very,

chaotic in that sense 'cause there was no continuity, I felt like.

Just a couple examples was the ER situation when I was sent off to the ER late on a Friday. my original primary care doctor I don't think would have ever done that. I know that because I talked to this about my my current primary care doctor said that should never have happened. with the pain I was in, the seriousness of it, you don't send somebody with no follow-up to the ER doctors. You gotta connect the dots.

My surgeon had told me later there's no way you should have waited till Monday to have the CT scan. that was an admitted mistake really. if you have a good primary care doctor, they're not gonna let that knows your history, that knows you well, that would have been a different situation.

the other situation was when I had to drink the two liters of barium. I was alone and I did question it, but I feel like there would have been more pushback had my husband been there or and even going into the C T scanner like saying, like, we gotta reschedule this, she's not well, you know. And I just feel like, you know, that was obviously the start of everything, that piece. And so

Wynne Leon (18:18)

Yeah.

Mm. Mm-hmm.

Right.

Liza Anderson (18:27)

That was another moment when I didn't have family and friends with me and everyone in good, faith was trusting that I was at a top hospital, you know, that nothing like this would go wrong. But, you know, it does. And you kind of get lost in the system sometime if there's not family and friends there. ~

Wynne Leon (18:47)

And if I

understand right, the the hospital changed their procedure about the barium.

Liza Anderson (18:51)

They did, yeah, after we wrote them

and the whole the barium, yeah. 'Cause that is a very controversial practice to have someone drink barium when there might is a potential blockage, which they didn't know about.

And then the other time was when I was in the induced coma and my husband had to say, My wife's blown up to two times her size. there's something really wrong. And, you know, they said, Well, we still can't operate on on her because of the, you know, the lungs aren't stable enough, and then there are more discussions like you gotta do something. And that's when they operated on me when I was in the coma. ~

Wynne Leon (19:29)
Right, right.

Liza Anderson (19:30)
Because

Wynne Leon (19:30)
Wow.

Liza Anderson (19:31)
again the hit no one would have known that I wasn't truly that size because there was no consistency of doctors. And so you need the family there to be watching out for that. So those were like three moments that I found as a patient, kind of traumatic, scary, and

Wynne Leon (19:35)
Yeah.

Right, right.

Mm.

Mhm. Right. And you're in

a coma, so you you have to have other people advocating. Yeah, right.

Liza Anderson (19:52)
I mean at that point. Yeah. But in the

other moments, you know, I was kind of alone and it was like what you know, it is sort of, you know, if you had more it's just something that's really, really important.

Wynne Leon (19:57)
Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, true. So I'm delighted that you chose to come back because we're having this conversation, but what what now in retrospect, what do you think you came back to try to do? Do you have wisdom about

Liza Anderson (20:18)

Yeah, you know, I it when I the originally I really wanted to come back,

because I didn't want to leave my husband. we had only been married eleven years and I really wanted to you know, have more life with him, you know, grow old together, experience retirement, grandkids, travel, you know, I that was the initial callback. I feel like I was really being that's where I wanted to come back most was for him. And then after reflection I realized, you know, you know, I was called to kind of really tell my story, tell what happened.

And I was living proof of the power of prayer. You know, countless people were praying for me. and I came back and handled impossible situations through that power of prayer. So that's a very important, I think, message to t to tell. and then just simply that, you know, if I want

people to take something away from the story it's like that you're truly loved, you're never alone. prayer does matter and heaven is real. And so I experienced all those things. And you want to tell that story, as many other people have done with near-death experiences, obviously too. So

Wynne Leon (21:38)

It's

just beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. And I'm so grateful that you came on to to tell us your story and and pass on your experience and and message. Thank you, Liza. ~ my pleasure's mine. Thank you.

Liza Anderson (21:47)

Thank you. And thank It was great talking with you.

Yeah, thank you.