
A STAGE 4 CANCER DIAGNOSIS AT 25 CHANGED HIS LIFE. NOW HE HELPS OTHERS TRANSFORM THEIR MINDSET AND REBUILD FROM WITHIN.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

cancer survivor, hodgkin's lymphoma, holistic healing, fitness, mindset shift, fatherhood, personal development, emotional health, the dad project

SPEAKERS

Dilan Patel, Naroop Jhooti

Dilan 00:00

When you actually really face the possibility of dying, you realize how short life is. You can lose it at any time. And I was just like, I'm just going to do what I want to do, what makes me happy, and I'm not going to compromise that for anyone. That's how I've been living ever since, and I guess it's freeing. When I turned 25, a part of me died, but a new version of me was born, and I love the new version. Looking back previous to 25, I can't even believe that was me.

Naroop 00:27

Imagine carrying the weight of expectations, silent struggles, and the pressure to always have it together. The Dad Project is a space for open, honest conversations about men's mental health. Raw, real, and long overdue. In Season 2, we go deeper, sharing powerful stories and fresh perspectives from those who've lived it and those who help others through it. Filmed at The Old Court in Windsor, this season is about breaking stigmas, redefining strength, and starting conversations that matter. I'm your host, Naroop Jhooti. Let's talk.

Naroop 01:12

Dilan, why do you think it's important for people to hear your story?

Dilan 01:20

Straight into it.

Naroop 01:21

Straight into it.

Dilan 01:21

I always see myself as your normal person, just as everyone else sees themselves as normal people. When you hear other people's stories and you can relate to them or learn something from them, there's nothing like that. When I hear someone else's story and it hits me or resonates with me, that stays with me. We consume so much every single day, but those things tend to stick with me and I always remember them. With my story, it's just a bit different in a way, but very relatable at the same time. From what I've learned throughout my whole journey up to this point, there's a lot people can take away from it.

Naroop 02:09

So you started life as a young kid who was, in your own words, overweight.

Dilan 02:19

Mhm.

Naroop 02:20

And you were insecure about the way you looked, right?

Dilan 02:23

Very, yeah. Confidence was non-existent to me growing up. People that know me, like friends and family, know I was very shy, very quiet. To the point I remember when I was really young, we'd have people come around the house. Back then, someone would be coming around every single day. I would hide under my dining table until the guests left.

Naroop 02:49

How old were you?

Dilan 02:51

Probably up until five or six at that point. I just remember hiding underneath this dining table. The guests would come, they'd know I was under there, and they'd pop their head under and try and speak to me. I would just be silent. I wouldn't speak, just hiding there.

Then the moment they were gone, I'd come out. So yeah, confidence was non-existent to me.

Growing up, I had habits with food. I ate a lot of crap and gained a lot of weight. Stemming into school, not that I got bullied or anything like that, but I just felt a certain way. We'd have PE, and most of the time I'd bunk it.

Naroop 03:31

Why do you think that was, looking back at it now?

Dilan 03:34

One, I didn't like going to the changing rooms because I called myself the fat one. In my school, everyone or most of the people were quite athletic. When you're looking at those guys, you're like, "Oh shit." So that was one part. The other part was I was just very unfit. If they were going to make me run 400 meters, I knew I was going to be the last one on the track. I didn't want that. So I just bunked PE pretty much, which is weird because of what I do now. It's quite funny.

Naroop 04:04

What I'm hearing is you never felt like you fit in anywhere, didn't want attention, and wanted to hide away. Was there anything that happened at a young age outside of your weight that made you feel like that? Because it's normal for kids to feel shy, like they don't want to talk to people. With my daughter, I need to tell her to say goodbye, say hello. That's normal, but what do you think made you want to hide under the table? Because it's quite an extreme response at such a young age.

Dilan 04:39

It is. At the time, you don't think anything of it, but now when I look back at it, I'm like, "Yeah, that's not right." For me, I always did feel like I didn't fit in anywhere, even within my own family and within friend circles.

At a young age, me and my sister (she's older than me) didn't get along. She used to always just tell me that I was ugly and embarrassing, as siblings do. Then when it came to family friends or relatives, all the kids around my age or slightly older were just very different to me. I didn't really fit in with them, and I didn't build those strong bonds. My sister gets on with so many of them, and I just never used to speak to them. Because of that, I never felt like I fit in. I felt like an outcast within those circles.

The other part is growing up, I didn't have anything to boost my confidence. How I am with my daughter now, for example, I'm so encouraging and I praise her a lot. I didn't have any of that.

Naroop 06:05

What was your relationship like with your parents?

Dilan 06:08

I had a good relationship in the sense like any normal kid would, but my parents just worked a lot. Immigrants, obviously. My dad's dad died when he was quite young, so he had to become the head of the household at a young age. All my dad's done his whole life is work. I get it, that's what he had to do at that time. But my parents were never involved in my school life or what was actually going on.

Back then, everything was community-based. When they all came to this country, you had to stick to your communities and you didn't want to upset anyone in that community. I remember there were times where we'd go to someone's house and a kid would say something nasty to me, and a fight would start. Or there was a time where a bunch of kids at a family friend's house were playing football, and I tried to play with them and they wouldn't let me play.

One of them pushed me over. I was young, like six or something. I started crying, and all the adults came out because they saw a kid crying. Instead of the kid who pushed me getting told off, I got told off for causing drama. Things like that make you feel like no one's really got your back here, so you kind of just go inwards, if that makes sense.

Naroop 07:39

I totally get that. I was quite naughty when I was young, and I'm the one who did the naughty stuff and got in trouble, so I understand it. How did you manage that at a young age? Do you remember? Did that start showing up as bad behavior? Could that have caused your eating and gaining weight, or how did that show up?

Dilan 07:56

Yeah, I got in trouble a lot. Everyone always described me as naughty. Even in school, I'd get in trouble. When I started secondary school, in my first or second week, I got like three detentions because I punched one of the kids.

Naroop 08:18

Anger.

Dilan 08:18

Yeah, a little bit violent. Not violent to the point where I'm trying to cause serious harm, but if someone said something that pissed me off, I wouldn't hesitate to hit them. It was mostly that I ended up processing it as anger throughout most of my life. Obviously, because of that, you get in trouble a bit more, you're the naughty one, etc.

Naroop 08:40

So from secondary school, you gained weight, had low confidence. What was that like for you? You said you weren't bullied, but how did you eventually get in shape and become this guy now? Tell me about it.

Dilan 08:57

It got to a point where I was just like, I don't want to feel like this anymore. I bought a pair of dumbbells, and that was it. I didn't know what I was doing with them.

Naroop 09:11

How old were you?

Dilan 09:11

About 15.

Naroop 09:11

Yeah, that's quite young.

Dilan 09:11

15. People start younger now, but at that time, no one around me was. There were a few boys in school that used to lift weights, and they'd go to gyms that allowed younger people. For me, if I'm being honest, I just wanted to have nice arms. I was just like, I want big arms.

Naroop 09:33

So no legs. No leg day.

Dilan 09:33

Didn't care about legs. Did not know what legs were! I bought dumbbells and I just used to do bicep curls every single day of my life. I'd come home from school and just do bicep curls. Obviously, it didn't get me the big arms because there's more to it than that,

but at the time, that's all I knew.

When I was around 17 is when I properly started looking into the nutrition behind things, how to train properly, and what leg exercises actually look like. I started taking it a bit more seriously. I joined the gym, the weight came off, and I just started feeling good. I started feeling a way I'd never felt before, and that was the confidence starting to come from it.

Naroop 10:14

I love this. And then just hooked ever since. Describe that feeling because I totally agree. When you start going to the gym and you start feeling good, it does boost your confidence and people start saying to you, "You're looking good, man." There's nothing like that feeling when someone says you've got a bit of size.

Dilan 10:34

Yeah, it's great, right? It's a buzz.

Naroop 10:34

How would you encourage someone who doesn't understand the benefits of having a good physical activity routine, going to the gym, etc.? What does that do for their confidence? How would you describe the need for a man to take care of himself physically, specifically for men?

Dilan 11:00

I think it goes further than just confidence. I'm not saying you have to have the most amazing physique in the world. You don't need to be ripped, shredded with a six-pack. But to actually take care of yourself in that way and commit to something, like "I'm going to exercise x amount of times in a week, I'm going to do these sessions, my food is going to look like this, and I'm going to start walking more," to commit to something like that matters. I always think your outer world is a reflection of your inner world, and it shows so much.

It takes discipline, it takes courage to some degree, and it takes patience. It teaches things like delayed gratification. For men especially, in the world we live in now, everything is so fast-paced and there's so much going on in a man's head at any given time. For me, it almost became like therapy and meditation. That hour or so I spent working out, nothing else in the world mattered to me. Still doesn't. I have something heavy down there I need to pick up, I need to pick it up this many times, and that's all I'm

focused on. It shuts out the noise. What you learn from doing something like that for yourself transfers into pretty much every single part of your life.

Naroop 12:38

I know what lifting a weight can do for your muscles. But lifting the weight, what does that do for your mind in terms of your mental well-being, how you view the world, and how you view yourself? Because we talk about fitness as a body thing, but I think it's more about how it makes you feel mentally, right?

Dilan 12:56

100%. Scientifically, it releases endorphins which are going to make you feel good. We have so much in terms of depression and anxiety right now, and I honestly feel like exercise should be the number one prescription for that because it can make a huge difference.

Mentally, for me, it was an outlet. I did have a lot of anger in me when I was younger, and that was a place to go and take it out in a constructive way. Even to this day, if I wake up on the wrong side of the bed, I go to the gym, and by the time I come home, I feel good and ready to get on with the day. I don't feel negative in that same sense anymore. Mentally, it plays a much bigger role than physically. That's kept me going all these years. I started when I was 15, and I'm 35 now. That's 20 years. To consistently exercise for 20 years is not easy, and it has to go further than just the physical side to have that sort of longevity.

Naroop 14:09

I love going to the gym. For me, it's like my hobby, one of my favorite pastimes. But when I reflect back on why I'm so dedicated to going, I think it's less about trying to have muscles and build more muscle. I don't think I'm really interested in having the biggest muscles or trying to compete; that doesn't really make a difference. I think it's more about being proud of myself, of holding myself accountable and not saying no when I know I should be saying yes. Is that a healthy relationship to have to physical fitness, or is that maybe a step too far?

Dilan 14:49

I'd say similar, because when you get past certain barriers in the gym, like you said, you feel proud. Even just being consistent, you feel proud that you actually committed to this and saw it through, doing it even when you didn't want to. That transfers into other things. A lot of the people I work with say, "Because I've done this and achieved this, I am

proud, and that makes me feel like anything's possible in other parts of my life if I can stick to this and see it through."

I don't think it's an unhealthy relationship at all. I think that's what it becomes for most people. For most, it starts off aesthetic. Even for myself, I wanted the big arms. Now, like you, I don't care if I have the biggest muscles. It shows me what I'm capable of, and it shows me that I put myself first. I say yes to me even when my brain is telling me to say no. That's very powerful in everything you do in life, and that's where a lot of people struggle in general. They don't say yes to themselves.

Naroop 16:05

What do you think stops people saying yes?

Dilan 16:08

Guilt. Guilt in the sense that, and it's slightly different for men and women, I can explain it from how I experienced it. When I had my daughter, I was religiously going to the gym. When my daughter was born and my wife was recovering at home, I really wanted to go to the gym, but I also felt bad leaving my wife with my daughter and going out for an hour or so. The guilt comes from feeling like you can't put yourself first and that other things are more important.

I've learned, even with the women I work with, when you do put yourself first, that's when everyone else actually benefits. It got to a point where I said to my wife Ren, "I'm going to go crazy if I don't go soon." She's cool though, she was just like, "Yeah, just do it. Do what you need to do." Even when I've been injured and not able to go, she knows I'll go nuts if I don't do something physical. If you need that sort of outlet, it's so important that you do put that first, because no one wants me at home just going mad at the end of the day.

Naroop 17:32

A lot of people say, "I'll die for my family," but how many people say, "I would live for them"? Living for them means being healthy, right? Looking after yourself.

Dilan 17:41

Having a kid is just different. I'd never experienced anything like it until I'd been there. Now, I want to be around as long as possible. I want to be in my daughter's life for as long as I can. I want to see her grow up, experience life, do things, and be there for her. So I have to look after myself, not just physically, but mentally too. I want to make sure I'm in

a good mental space for her. Like you said, most people would die for their families, but when it comes to living for them, it's not as easy.

Naroop 18:19

What does it mean to be in a good mental space for her? How does that show up for you?

Dilan 18:25

For me personally, I had to do a lot of work on myself for that. I just want to be the best dad I can for her. I want to raise her in a way where she's confident, strong, and capable. I don't want her to grow up like the child that I was, hiding under a table when people come around. The dad's role is so important for a daughter in building her self-esteem and confidence. I knew I had to do a lot of work. Just going to the gym wasn't going to cut it; I had to do a lot more inner work for that to happen. Being in a good mental space for me just means I need to be happy above and beyond anything.

Naroop 19:25

And what makes you happy?

Dilan 19:25

My daughter makes me happy. There are so many other things that come into your mind on a daily basis that can make you unhappy. For me, it's like: okay, how do I deal with these situations better? Previously, if something frustrating happened, I just lost my temper. How do I now deal with that in a different way?

If I've just had a long day and the hour before she goes to bed she wants to play with me, how do I still make myself do that rather than just slump on the sofa for that hour, and give her what she needs? I'm the happiest, it sounds so cheesy, but I'm the happiest when she is actually happy. I can't describe that.

Naroop 20:15

I get it. I watched this clip where someone said, "If you want to be happy, just remove the things in life that make you unhappy." Sometimes it's as simple as that: this thing doesn't make me happy, so I want to stop doing that; I don't feel good after I do this, so I want to stop doing that. When you were at home training at 17 with the dumbbells and seeing changes, were you happy? Did that make you start feeling confident initially?

Dilan 20:45

Yeah. That's what you realize about the aesthetic side of things: you're never going to be 100% happy. You're always going to pick flaws in your physique or body. "I don't like how that looks," or "Okay, I've got big arms now, but my shoulders aren't that great," or "My chest isn't that great," or your legs. Initially, it can make you a lot happier when you see these changes happening, because it did. But then it always gets to a point where you're chasing something that has no end.

That's when you need to step back and start thinking about why you are actually doing this. Is it for the physique, or is there an intrinsic reason behind why I'm doing this now? Unless people figure that out, that's when they struggle to stay consistent with it for so long.

Naroop 21:36

So you were healthy though, in your late teens, early 20s.

Dilan 21:40

Healthy as you can be. I wouldn't say I was super healthy. I'd say I started trying to be a bit healthier in my early 20s. Up until then, it was just exercising to try and get big and strong, just eating loads. I was still eating crap, don't get me wrong. I went to uni, was still drinking a lot. Those three years at uni were probably the three unhealthiest years of my life.

Naroop 22:09

That's the same for all of us.

Dilan 22:09

Yeah. But after uni is when I started looking at health more, and then from my mid-20s onwards is when I really started paying more attention to the actual health side of things.

Naroop 22:25

But something happened, didn't it? Mid-20s.

Dilan 22:26

Yeah. At 25, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is a type of blood cancer. It was diagnosed at stage 4B. I went to the GP literally two weeks before my 25th birthday, and on my 25th birthday was my appointment with the hematologist where she said, "Yeah, this is pretty much what you've got." I found out on my 25th birthday.

After that, it was like: okay, now it's not just about exercising and getting protein in; I need to actually figure out what's going on with my health. When we say health, I don't just mean physical. It's very multifaceted, and I really had to take it apart and figure it all out.

Naroop 23:13

Let's go back to that. 25 years old, you've been healthy, just eating stuff like any young man would, having a burger here and a drink. No one worries about cancer at that age. You thought you were normal going for a routine checkup, and then...

Dilan 23:34

No, I had all the signs.

Naroop 23:34

Oh, you did?

Dilan 23:34

I just didn't know they were signs of cancer.

Naroop 23:34

What were the signs?

Dilan 23:41

I had crazy itchy skin. Really itchy, my arms and legs, especially my legs. I'd scratch my legs until they were bleeding. I used to carry a tub of body butter around with me in my bag when I went to work, and I'd sit at my desk rubbing it on my legs. I just thought I had really dry skin and the body butter would help. Turns out that was one of the symptoms.

I used to get night sweats very bad. I'd wake up and my bed was drenched to the point I had to change all my clothes and change the sheets. That would happen at least twice a night, sometimes more. But I'm a very hot person; I get hot very easily, and even most nights now I still sleep with a fan on. This was during the summer, so I just thought it was hot and I was getting hot. Looking back at it now, that's not right. I should have got checked at that point.

Fatigue like crazy. You know when you're talking to someone and they say, "I'm tired," and you say, "Yeah, I'm tired too"? It was like, "No, I don't think you understand how tired I am." It was in the bones. I can't describe it. But again, I used to work really long hours. The job I had at the time was very demanding, very cutthroat. I wouldn't finish work until maybe

11:00 p.m. or midnight, and then I'd be up at 4:00 the next morning training, then going to work again.

Naroop 25:12

You worked in the City, right?

Dilan 25:12

Yeah, I used to. I used to work in recruitment. I'd come home from work around 7:00 or 7:30, eat dinner, jump back on my laptop, carry on working until late, sleep a few hours, wake up, exercise, and then head off to the office again. Do it again every single day. I used to work on weekends. I was just working a lot. So my fatigue I just put down to working a lot and traveling and all of this.

Then I also had some lumps on my neck. I honestly just thought it was my muscles growing because they were really firm and solid. One of my best friends who used to work with me asked one day, "What's that on your neck?" I was like, "Yeah, I've been training hard." But then I used to do a lot of martial arts, and one day I went for training in the morning and something just felt uncomfortable under my arm. I felt under there, and there was a really firm lump. That's when I was like, "This doesn't feel right."

I went to work the next day and said to my manager, "Do you mind if I just pop out for an hour? I just really want to go to the doctors and get this checked out." She said, "Yeah, cool, go." As soon as the doctor felt the lumps on my neck, she printed out a piece of paper. She didn't say a word, she just printed out a piece of paper, and I saw 'Cancer Referral Form' at the top. I was just like, fuck.

Naroop 26:48

And how did that make you feel?

Dilan 26:48

Scared. You're scared. You see that word, right? The word cancer has so much weight behind it, and especially at that age, you don't expect anything like that. When you're 25, you feel invincible, you're young. You're always told serious illnesses don't happen to young people, only old people. When I saw it, I was like, fuck, what does this mean? She said, "I'm just going to refer you to see a hematologist. I can't say if it is that or not, but I just have concerns." Two weeks later was the follow-up.

Naroop 27:31

You came home, told your parents, told your family after that first appointment?

Dilan 27:36

I don't think I did. When someone's diagnosed with cancer, you can't help but think the worst. At that point, because it wasn't actually a diagnosis and it was just the referral form, I think I told friends. My wife Ren, we were friends at the time, and I remember I told her what happened. I think I told my sister. I don't think I told everyone straight away. I just needed to digest it myself, and maybe a couple of days later I started telling them.

Myself and everyone else were kind of in that mindset of "it's probably not that." To be honest, I thought from the get-go this is what it is, but I almost was trying to convince myself that it wasn't. Deep down I knew it was, and obviously everyone around you isn't going to say, "Oh yeah, it probably is." Everyone else is like, "Let's just wait for them to do tests and see what they say."

Naroop 28:51

So on your 25th birthday, you get diagnosed with stage 4B cancer. What does that mean? How bad was that?

Dilan 29:01

Stage four is when it spread to your organs. I had a tumor in my lung. I had three in my neck, one under my arm that I went and got checked, and then one in my lung. Once it spreads past one area, it goes past stage one and two, and when it spreads to an actual organ or more, it's stage four. It was quite serious at that point. I'd had it for about two years before I was actually diagnosed.

Naroop 29:26

Wow. So then you must have been scared.

Dilan 29:35

Shitting myself. But I didn't show it. I still have text messages on my phone from my sister like, "Are you okay?" and I'm just like, "Yeah, I'm fine. It's fine." But for at least the first two to three days after being diagnosed, I genuinely thought I was going to die. I didn't know much about the cancer; I just knew I had a type of cancer at stage four. That's it for me pretty much. But after two or three days, I started wrapping my head around things a bit more.

Naroop 30:15

Did you feel immediately like, "Okay, I'm going to fight this, I'm going to get through this, I'm not going to let this kill me"? Or were you deflated, like, "Oh God, that's it, it's over, it's done"?

Dilan 30:25

The first two or three days, completely deflated. I was just like, that's it. I don't know how long I've got; I'm sure the doctors will tell me at some point. At that time, anytime you heard of someone getting cancer, you pretty much then heard of them dying. So I was like, "If I've got it, then I have the same outcome."

Then I started researching into it a lot more, and I just looked at it as an illness just like any other illness: you take whatever medicine you need to take for it, you get better, you recover, and then you carry on with life. That's the mindset I went into it with: it's going to be really shitty for this period of time, I'm going to have to do what I need to do, but I will get better and then life goes on. Initially though, no, I thought it was game over.

Naroop 31:21

So what was your treatment?

Dilan 31:23

I had chemotherapy, which is horrible.

Naroop 31:31

Describe it.

Dilan 31:31

You go into this room where everyone else is having chemotherapy. You sit in a nice comfy sofa that reclines, brilliant, and then they put a drip in you. You can have it in different ways. I had it through my hand. You can get a port put straight into your chest, but that's in you for six months, and I didn't want that on me for six months as a reminder every single day. So I'd rather just have a drip put into my hand.

Then they just pump you full of chemicals. Some of it burns your veins. I had veins collapse during it, which is crazy painful. The side effects of it are horrible: nauseous 24/7, falling asleep, no energy. You literally just feel like you're dying anyway. It's not fun.

Naroop 32:22

Did you lose your hair?

Dilan 32:22

Yeah, all of it, everywhere. You lose it all over your body. I'm fairly hairy, but it all went. To the point my eyelashes even went, and I'd wake up in the morning with my eyelids stuck together, having to literally use my finger and thumb to pull them apart.

Naroop 32:38

Wow.

Dilan 32:39

That's when I realized how important eyelashes are.

Naroop 32:42

Doing that chemo, what was your support system like? The people around you.

Dilan 32:48

Really good. My family were brilliant; I never went to a chemo session alone. Anything I needed, they were there. I went down a holistic route at the same time as the chemo. My diet changed a lot, and the foods I started to eat you couldn't just get from normal supermarkets, so my sister would go and find them or go online and get them. Close friends were great, because it's a very isolating period of time. You see everyone else getting on with their life, and it was during the summer as well, which is the worst because everyone is out having fun and you're at home unable to move.

I used to go on long walks every single day. Some of my friends were either not in work or were teachers with summer holidays, so they'd come on walks with me just to give me company. The support circle around me was brilliant. I can't knock it.

Naroop 34:00

Tell me about your diet, because I heard alkaline food is really good.

Dilan 34:00

I started eating more alkaline. To this day, I still only eat predominantly organic food. Our bodies function better in an alkaline state, and unfortunately the modern diet is very acidic, and cancer thrives in acidic environments. The idea behind it was: if I can create a very alkaline environment in my body, it can help kill off the cancer cells essentially.

Apart from diet, that's when I started really looking into meditation and breathwork, because cancer struggles to survive in highly oxygenated areas. If I can get my body to be as oxygenated as possible through my breathing, it gives me a better chance. Any

little thing I could do, I was going to do it. I was pretty much on a vegan diet at that point, just lots of vegetables that were alkaline, stopping any food that was even slightly acidic. I'd treat myself every now and then to chicken and chips just so you don't go crazy, but for the most part it was that.

A friend of mine used to go see this lady who practices Ayurvedic treatment. He was like, "She's brilliant, go and see her." At this time, I was so skeptical. I had just been diagnosed and was like, "Let me just have my chemotherapy and deal with it." He said, "Just go and see her for my sake. If you don't want to do anything she says, don't do it." So I went to see her, and she absolutely blew my mind.

She does everything through the pulse. He hadn't told her a single thing about me, just that his friend wanted to come see her. First, she checked my pulse and said, "You've got a cancerous pulse. Have you got any health issues?" I said, "Yeah, I was diagnosed with cancer the other week." But I have bulging discs in my lower back too. I could see her with her finger on my pulse, eyes closed, going, "L1, L2, L3..." exactly where I've got a bulging disc. She stopped there and said, "You've got a problem in your lumbar spine." My mum didn't even know that! How did you figure that out from my pulse?

After that, I was all ears. She made me change my whole diet and prescribed lots of different herbs in pill form. I was taking 30-plus pills of these herbs per day. They don't have side effects, so she said they were completely safe to take even with chemo. She asked me, "Do you want to go through chemotherapy or do you want to do this purely naturally?" At that time I was scared; I knew chemo was going to keep me alive so I was still going to do it, but I was happy to do what she told me as well. She said, "In that case, it's just damage limitation. Chemo is going to wreak havoc on your body, so we need to do everything we can to keep that minimal so after it your recovery is as smooth as possible."

I can't prove whether it worked or not, but my recovery post-chemo was very fast. I bounced back from it very quickly. I speak to a lot of people that have had the same Hodgkin's lymphoma and purely gone down the chemo route, and they've relapsed so many times. One girl I know is waiting for a stem cell transplant because she relapsed so many times. Touch wood, I've not had anything since my treatment, so I do think that helped massively.

She also introduced me to meditation and breathwork. She got me to defragment my whole life and look at where I wasn't happy, what wasn't aligning with me as a person, soul, and spirit, and look at health in a broad way. That played a massive role in my treatment and recovery.

Naroop 39:11

So you're quite skeptical or critical of how cancer and treatment is viewed by the health system, and you have your own opinion on how it should be seen and treated. Tell me a little bit about that. Tell me why you've backed out of working with certain organizations because they didn't align with what you believe in.

Dilan 39:35

When I was diagnosed and before starting chemotherapy, you have an appointment with a doctor and a nurse to give you a heads-up on how it's going to go and the side effects. They talked about food and said, "You're going to need to eat throughout your treatment to keep your appetite up. Eat as much as possible, even if you don't feel like it, because your body needs to be strong enough to fight the cancer."

At that time, I used to go to the pub every week with my mates, so I asked, "Can I still go and have a beer?" She said, "Yeah, you can." I asked, "If I don't feel hungry because of the chemo, what should I do?" She said, "Have things that are super high in calories, like milkshakes."

Doing my own research, alcohol is probably one of the worst things you can put into your body when you have cancer and chemotherapy. On top of that, dairy is one of the things I cut out, because chemotherapy basically makes your digestive system stop working, and dairy is much harder for the digestive system to process and break down. So logically, telling me to consume things that go against the treatment and illness doesn't make sense. That's when I really started questioning things.

It's not their fault; they're taught from a textbook that just tells them this. I get their priority is keeping calories up to fight the cancer, but at that point, I wasn't fighting the cancer, I was fighting the chemotherapy.

Looking back now, I genuinely feel I got cancer because that was my body trying to give me a wake-up call. I was deeply unhappy with so many parts of my life, and things I was doing weren't aligning with me as a person. My body had probably sent me warning signs

saying, "You can't keep living like this, something's got to change," and I just didn't listen. So it forced me to listen.

Traditional Western medicine focuses on physical health and chemicals. But I also feel there is emotional health, mental health, and spiritual health. Unless all four are aligned, you're going to have issues that manifest physically. I used to work with some charities to raise awareness for lymphoma, and some things I said they didn't agree with. They said, "We don't want people to feel a certain way," because if you tell someone their mindset plays a part, people can start blaming themselves for getting an illness. I understand that, but if that's what I believe, that's what I believe. I ended up not working with them anymore.

Naroop 43:09

How would you describe that to somebody when you say your mindset is causing it, or your body is giving you a sign? Why would your body give you a sign? You're in control of your body, you know what you're doing. How is your body telling you something that you don't already know?

Dilan 43:21

Your body has one job and one job only: to keep you alive. It doesn't care about anything else. You're going to the gym to get big muscles, lose weight, walking, sitting on your sofa, it does not care. All it cares about is: how do I keep this person alive? When things aren't aligning, it's going to try and tell you, "I can't keep going like this."

Naroop 43:48

What does it mean to align with it? What does that mean?

Dilan 43:48

When I dissected my life: first, my job. I hated my job. It paid very well, but I had to be a bit of a nasty person to do well in that job. I'm not that person in my core; I'd like to think I'm a good-hearted person. In that job, you have to be a bit of an asshole. That wasn't me, but that's what I had to be every day to perform.

In my relationships, I wasn't happy. I was with a partner at the time, and we had grown apart, but we were still sticking it out. God knows why, but I knew deep down this wasn't the person for me. In terms of family and friends, because I was working so much, I was barely seeing them. I care a lot about the people close to me; I don't have a big circle, but I'd die for them. Not being able to spend time with them and feeling isolated didn't

align with me.

When I broke down all these different parts of my life and asked myself the basic question, "Are you happy with this?" all of them came out as no. Your body knows that. With my job, stress was super high all the time. When cortisol is constantly pumping around your body, your body is like, "Mate, I can't keep doing this. I'm working overtime just to keep you going."

It sends you signals, like getting a cold, forcing you to slow down. Every time I get sick now, it's when I'm burnt out and haven't rested enough, and my body is saying, "You need to slow down." Before, I was just knocking back medicine and cracking on. Now, when I get a cold, I realize I need rest. If you don't listen to the signals, eventually it has to smack you in the face and make you listen.

Naroop 46:22

So your cancer was an awakening.

Dilan 46:28

Definitely. It changed the whole trajectory of my life. I just stopped giving a fuck, if I'm being honest.

Naroop 46:41

About what? What does that mean? What does that look like?

Dilan 46:42

When you really face the possibility of dying, you realize how short life is. You can lose it at any time. I was like: I'm not going to waste another minute of my life living a certain way because of what I think I need to do, or what others think I need to do, or what others might think of me. I'm just going to do what I want to do, what makes me happy, and I'm not going to compromise that for anyone or anything.

That's how I've been living ever since, and it's freeing. I think of it almost like a rebirth. When I turned 25, a part of me died, but a new version of me was born. I love the new version. Looking back previous to 25, I can't even believe that was me.

Naroop 47:37

Tell me about the new version.

Dilan 47:39

Happy. Happy in every part of my life. I decided to stop working in the job I was working in and pursue what I actually enjoy doing. That was crazy to the people around me at the time, because I was earning a lot of money and leaving it to become a personal trainer. Everyone was like, "Are you crazy? You're leaving such a high-paying job to work in a gym." People worry about money and status. I was like, "I don't give a fuck. I love being in a gym, I love the energy, and that's where I want to be every single day."

I ended up with Ren, who is now my wife, and I always knew she was the person for me. I have much better relationships with my friends and family. The cancer brought my family closer together. I'm a lot more open now.

Now that I have a daughter, what I want to instill in her is so different to that 25-year-old version of me. Back then, I probably would have told her: you need to work hard, you need to get a job. Now I just want to teach her to do whatever makes her happy. I've got her 100%. Whatever you want to do with your life, go do it, regardless of what it pays or what people think. That's the biggest turning point for me: it allowed me to live unapologetically.

Naroop 49:36

When you were going through cancer, what was your mental health like?

Dilan 49:44

Up and down. You have your good days and your bad days. Sometimes you feel proud of yourself, like "I'm doing so well with this," with lots of positive self-talk and reinforcement. But then you have bad days. Full circle to where I used to hide under the table: when I was having chemotherapy, people would come around the house and I'd pretend to be asleep because I didn't want to talk to anyone or see anyone. I just wanted to be by myself.

One time, a family friend came around unannounced. I was lying down on the sofa in the sitting room, and it was quite far into my chemotherapy so I didn't have a lot of energy. If I had the energy, I probably would have run upstairs before the front door opened and pretended to sleep. I didn't have time, so I just closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep the whole time they were there. I didn't want them asking how I was; I didn't want to talk about it. It's a roller coaster. You feel every emotion under the sun, good and bad.

Naroop 51:04

What were you feeling when you were lying on the sofa? Was it shame of having it?

Dilan 51:10

I felt that at the beginning, but then I owned it. At that point, it wasn't shame, I was just fed up. Really fed up of feeling like shit every single day. The way people talk to you when you're having chemotherapy is very different to how they normally talk to you. I get it comes from a place of caring, but sometimes I didn't want to talk about it. My whole personality had become cancer to people. Anything anyone would talk to me about was cancer, and you just get fed up of it.

Naroop 52:05

What would you have wished they had done instead?

Dilan 52:28

Just treat me normally. Like there is no illness. What would you ask me if you were here on any other day and I wasn't sick? Would you ask me about work or what I've been up to? Rather than just purely asking about cancer. Sometimes it almost consumes your life, and you don't want to talk about it anymore.

Naroop 52:58

What do you think gave you hope in that time? Because part of the battle with cancer is having hope, that mindset that you want to beat this. It's easy to say, "I just didn't want to die," but what was it that you really wanted to live for?

Dilan 53:22

I wanted what I have now. I knew I wanted to come out of this and marry Ren. She might not have known it at that point, but I did. I knew I wanted to get married and have children. There was so much more I wanted to live for. It was never a case of "I don't want to die," it was more "I still want to live," because there's so much I still want to do in my life. I'm not ready to call it a day here. That was the determination: this isn't the end.

Naroop 54:07

A lot of times when someone goes through a really traumatic time, they have a shift on almost a soul level. Everything changes, and they see the world through a different lens. When we chatted on Zoom, you said you've become much more spiritual, learning about soul purpose and your journey. Tell me a little bit about that.

Dilan 54:37

Before, I was very black and white, which is why when my friend told me to go see this lady, I was skeptical. I never looked at myself as a soul; I always looked at myself as a person, the physical.

There was this moment in my mum and dad's house where I walked into the sitting room and went to sit down on the sofa during my chemotherapy. In that split second, I don't know what happened, but it was almost like I saw the future. I messaged Ren straight away, and I said, "I don't know what just happened, but I know I have a much bigger future ahead, and I know you're going to be a big part of it." At this point, we weren't even going out. I felt something I can't describe, and I said, "It's going to be from February next year onwards."

Me and her got together that following March. Looking back, I started reading a lot more about us being soul and spirit, different dimensions, and healing on a spiritual level. Illnesses manifest physically in our bodies from these deeper things. I started seeing myself as a soul: this is just my physical body, this is not me. That is life-changing in itself because your perception of the world is so different.

Naroop 57:28

How do you perceive the world now?

Dilan 57:28

Temporary. I used to place so much importance on this life, and now I genuinely believe I am a soul. We are all connected as one being. I leaned away from religion and more into spirituality. I believe in a higher power, but we are all a part of it, interconnected. Energy can't be created or destroyed.

My belief is that we were in this other place as a soul, and we said, "Look, I'm going to come to this world to have a physical experience to learn about myself." Once I've done that learning, I'll return back. If I still have stuff to learn, I might come back in a different way. This is my soul right now learning what it needs to learn. Once it has, I'll be gone back to wherever that was. I don't see this as the be-all and end-all anymore. Previously, thinking "Oh fuck, I'm going to die" was very finite. Now I have comfort in knowing it isn't the end.

Naroop 59:13

It makes sense, because I share those exact same beliefs. There is comfort in that. But it takes something extreme to shift your consciousness, to start leaning towards meditation, stillness, and understanding greater purpose. From having had cancer and always being into fitness, you created DNA Fitness as a vehicle to share your learnings. Tell me a little bit about that.

Dilan 1:00:05

When I first started, I was just a personal trainer helping people work out. But now, the work I do with people is probably 80% around mindset, identity, and purpose, and 20% around exercise and nutrition. Over the years, the more I've learned and experienced, I'm trying to help people in a much deeper way than just "let's help you lose some weight and look good."

Naroop 1:00:47

I know you work with women, but if I came to you as a potential client and you said 80% of your work is mindset and identity, what would you do? How would that look?

Dilan 1:00:58

Most people come to me because of the way they're feeling. If they want to lose weight, it's because they're feeling a certain way. So we keep asking why. When you ask why enough, you get to the deeper reasons in terms of what's happening inside this person's mind, and you can get to the root cause of these issues.

For a lot of the women I work with, emotional eating is a huge part of it. We dissect where that comes from: past trauma, generational trauma passed down from parents, or thought patterns from childhood. It's not a case of "you need to eat this many calories and this much protein"; it's rewiring your brain and thought patterns.

When it comes to identity, moms are the best example. When they become moms, they have a massive identity shift and no one teaches you how to deal with that. Same as when you become a dad: your identity changes overnight from just a man to a dad. No one teaches you how to navigate that while still following your purpose or doing things important to you.

I want to transform a person's life. When someone says, "For the first time in 20 years I actually feel good in myself, not about how much I weigh or the clothes I wear, but confident in myself and no longer hanging onto past traumas," those are the real

transformations I want. If I can change my life and live 100% being myself and happy, I want to show others how to live that way too.

Naroop 1:04:26

What can someone do if they are not feeling good and want to shift and address the root cause? What are some takeaways or tips to start that journey to feeling better?

Dilan 1:05:00

First, people need to understand where they are at. Tony Robbins speaks about the six core human needs. Human beings have core needs like Certainty (the need to feel safe, comfort zone, resistant to change) or Uncertainty (chasing new experiences, putting yourself out there), Growth, etc. Identifying where you are right now is key. If someone is in Certainty, anything outside their comfort zone is scary, and their subconscious creates reasons why they shouldn't do it. For someone in Certainty, it has to be small steps, like peeking out of the cave first. For someone in Uncertainty, it's about reigning it in so they don't get overwhelmed.

If that's too deep, the number one thing I recommend to anyone is journaling. A simple way is a 'brain dump': get a piece of paper and write down everything in your mind—fears, worries, things you're excited about—until your brain has nothing left in it. Not in any order, as messy as you like. Then you can organize it to see what's holding you back or what you want to do. The brain is like a computer, and the paper is an external hard drive; downloading it frees up space and brings clarity.

Naroop 1:09:00

I know you work with women, but how much of what you teach is also applicable to men?

Dilan 1:09:10

A lot. The only things not applicable to men are what we teach around hormones and menstrual cycles, because biologically men are different. But in terms of mindset, identity, and structure, that benefits everyone. I'm a big advocate of therapy and journaling for both men and women. Anyone can implement the rest of it.

Naroop 1:09:56

Do you have therapy now?

Dilan 1:09:58

I haven't for a while. I had a lot before my daughter was born and a couple of sessions after, so it's been about a year and a half since my last session.

Naroop 1:10:20

What were you talking about? What did you feel you needed to address?

Dilan 1:10:20

When Ren was pregnant, I knew I was becoming a dad. If I wanted to be the best dad possible, I knew there was stuff about me I needed to work on. The biggest things I learned through therapy weren't even about myself; they were about my parents, how I was raised, and their lives. I see so much more from my dad's perspective now that helps me with my own journey of being a dad.

My parents worked a lot, and there was a fear element with my dad. He wasn't around a lot because he was working all the time. But he had to be the man of the house looking after the whole family. He sacrificed his life to give us ours now, and I never saw that before. I always used to wonder why he wasn't interested or why he wasn't at my school plays. I want my relationship with my daughter to be one where she can come and speak to me about anything, ask me for advice, and feel comfortable. I never had that with my dad.

Naroop 1:12:35

What do you think has caused this shift in fatherhood? I'm noticing that a lot: dads wanting to be present. It would take a lot for me not to go to my daughter's sports day or recital; I'd move meetings for it. What's caused that shift?

Dilan 1:13:01

Two things. First, we've experienced what it's like not to have that, and we don't want to pass that to our kids. I know what it feels like to have parents not involved, and I don't want that for her. Second, because of what our parents sacrificed as immigrants, they've allowed us to have a life where we don't have that constant fear around money. If I want to take a few hours off work to see my daughter do something, I can do that without struggling to pay bills. Their hard work gave us the freedom to be more present. I never want her feeling like I felt as a kid.

Narooop 1:14:47

I really want to touch on this idea of healing and self-healing through meditation, because my father overcame a blood condition through meditation and breathing, to the point where doctors didn't know how he did it and he doesn't take medication anymore. Tell me about your understanding of how the mind influences the body when you choose to heal yourself.

Dilan 1:15:25

That's amazing that he did that; it's not easy. There is a brilliant book called *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise Hay. The premise is how your thought patterns manifest into physical illnesses. Louise Hay had so much trauma in her life, had physical issues as a result, and treated them through changing her thought patterns and rewiring her brain. Meditation calms the brain and gives clarity.

In the back of the book, there is an index of physical ailments, the thought patterns that cause them, and affirmations to rewire those thought patterns. For example, acne stems from not finding yourself attractive or telling yourself you're ugly, which manifests on your face. It shows how powerful the mind is. If thought patterns can manifest negatively, they can also manifest positively. We need to pay attention to what we are saying to ourselves.

Narooop 1:18:50

Tell me about some practices you do to keep yourself in a positive mindset.

Dilan 1:18:54

Journaling every day, mainly gratitude journaling. I can spiral a bit, so gratitude brings me back to earth. Meditation first thing in the morning gives me calm before everything kicks off. I also used to speak affirmations in front of the mirror, looking myself in the eyes, which is very powerful, and visualizing. Meditation and journaling above all else have helped me massively.

Narooop 1:20:42

What do you think is something we should discuss for helping men who are going through challenges?

Dilan 1:21:01

Therapy. If every man did deep inner work and resolved issues and traumas, men's mental health and the world as a whole would be in a much better place. Relationships would thrive.

Naroop 1:21:45

Do you think saying 'go have therapy' is too simple? You have to be ready for it. How would you help a man become ready for it?

Dilan 1:22:19

A community style where men are more open to talking to each other. Growing up, you never talked about issues or how you were feeling because it wasn't the cool thing or you might be seen as weak. Having a meetup group or physical place where men can hear other men speak makes them comfortable.

When we first spoke on Zoom and realized how many similarities we had, it made me comfortable talking openly about things I've never spoken about before. Being around like-minded individuals creates the shift and makes you feel safe.

Naroop 1:24:31

I totally agree. We need more community and connection in real life, off devices. I've really enjoyed talking to you today. You're really inspiring and I'm proud of the journey you've been on. Rebuilding your life isn't easy. How do you want to be remembered?

Dilan 1:25:53

I just want to be loved by the people closest to me: actual love. I want my wife thinking, "This is the greatest man I've ever met," and my daughter thinking, "This is the greatest man I've ever met." I want to be remembered as a loved person who just did good. It might sound basic, but that's what's important to me.

Naroop 1:26:45

It's not basic at all, it's an honorable thing. When you ask people what they want to leave, it's usually that they were there, loved openly, and helped. Thank you so much for being so open and coming down. Your story will impact so many people.

Dilan 1:27:34

Thank you. I appreciate you having me, man.

Narooop 1:27:40

I'm glad you enjoyed it. Thanks, brother.