



Choosing to Stay Together Despite a Chronic Condition: Sandra and Casey's Cancer Love Story

Sandra Dillon

Myelofibrosis Patient Advocate

Casey Turk

Care Partner

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Casey Turk:

I had finished my school and moved to San Diego to start my career. I'm a scientist, biochemist, molecular cellular biologist, so San Diego was a natural fit. And after about I think it was 10 months in San Diego was when we finally met and we I mean, you could hear the story of our first date, and it was just like as soon as we kind of we just met at a brunch place and as soon as we realized that it was us, we both just kind of lit up, and it turned into an entire day. We went bicycle riding. We went to the beach and then we finished fish taco obviously, San Diego.

Esther Schorr:

My favorite.

Casey Turk:

At the beach was first kind of clue, right? Because she had a scar from her spleen surgery that she had years ago, before she even really knew what she was diagnosed with, and I just kind of asked about it and she said it was surgery. We really didn't go into it. It wasn't until like, I don't know, the third or fourth date.

Sandra Dillon:

Yes.

Casey Turk:

When you told me.

Sandra Dillon:

After that first date I thought, oh, gosh, I just thought...

Esther Schorr:

All the butterflies. All the good feelings.

Sandra Dillon:

And I have to tell him. I have to tell him. I have to give him an out. You know, this is not something he's going to want to stick around for. So we went to dinner, and I said, I have to tell you something. I have this disease and I don't know how

long I have, and if you need to go, totally you should go, but I really have feelings for you already and if you feel the way that I do, you know, we should be open and honest with each other about this.

Casey Turk:

It was probably one of the emotional parts of the whole thing because I knew by that point that I was already in.

Esther Schorr:

You were sunk.

Casey Turk:

I was sunk. And I'm like well, this—you know, you kind of think about how you're life is going to go, and now you realize it's like, well, everything is different now. The whole trajectory that you might think that you have going is going to be different one way or another. But accepting that. And I remember calling several friends, just being like (?) ah, I found someone and, you know, we don't know how long that she has.

****How did Casey encourage Sandra to find a treatment that worked for her?**

Sandra Dillon:

And Casey again, a scientist of course, he kind of he's like I support you in any decision you make, and I'm here for you. And I thought in, like I'm in. And all I ask is that you commit to yourself as much as you're committing to me as much as I'm committing to you. And in saying that he was really saying at least try. At least try to go see a doctor.

Esther Schorr:

And you did.

Casey Turk:

And I did.

****Where is your relationship now?**

Casey Turk:

Well, we're about to head probably to Palm Springs for our seventh anniversary.

Sandra Dillon:

Yes, we got married in 2012.

Casey Turk:

So I've drug her to Costa Rica. I've drug her to the John Muir trail, 22 days of backpacking.

Esther Schorr:

Wow.

Sandra Dillon:

Yes.

Casey Turk:

Which was kind of scary because at that point your medicine needed to be refrigerated.

Sandra Dillon:

Yes. And I'm hiking with it for three weeks straight on my back and with all of our food and supplies, but that's just how powerful these treatments are and the hope that comes with them and the hope that comes with a partner that again he doesn't hold me back and say, you're too sick, and he doesn't push too hard to say, you know, you just go out and do these things. Like no, we're kind of on this crazy journey together

****What advice would you give to others in the same situation when you first started dating each other?**

Sandra Dillon:

Follow your heart because it's a better guide than all of the fear that, you know, doubts that you hold, and somehow, you know, the universe, life, God, it found a way and brought me to San Diego. It brought me to Casey. It brought Casey brought me to here to Dr. Jamison, and brought all of these amazing advancements that I never would have seen coming to be in a short amount of time. And so every turn where I thought, oh, no, this is it. It's all over. You're not going to make it. It's something just takes it back home for me.

Esther Schorr:

I think that might have hurt. Casey?

Casey Turk:

I would say it's really hard that once you kind of fall in love with one to make a different decision, right? So I would say as a joke find out before you fall in love so you know what you're getting into, but, you know, the time that you can spend with someone even if it's not an entire lifetime you enjoy your time with that person, then it's worth it, right? Like you can't like it's hard to put a price on enjoying spending time with someone because there frankly aren't that many people that you really enjoy being around. So, yeah, like you said, follow your heart. Like you can't...

Sandra Dillon:

And then it's precious now, in retrospect, no matter what happens it was a good time and so precious and so to share that is precious.

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