

[SPECIAL EDITION: Making of the Movie: Doctor/Patient with special guests, Burke & Alyssa Larson](#)

Dr. Jill 00:00

Welcome to *Resiliency Radio*, your go-to podcast for the most cutting-edge insights in functional and integrative medicine. I'm your host, Dr. Jill, and in each episode, we delve into the heart of healing and personal transformation. Join us as we connect with renowned experts, thought leaders, and innovators who are at the forefront of medical research and practice, empowering you with knowledge and inspiration, aiding you on your journey to optimal health.

Dr. Jill 00:23

Guys, it's out! I am so excited to be able to share with you a special episode today about the documentary that's been in the works for over three years. And today, my special guests, Burke and Alyssa Larson, were part of this process. We're going to dive deep into what it was like to film the movie, what it was like to share our lives on film and on screen, and the heart of healing.

Dr. Jill 00:46

What we want to do is empower you—in your suffering and in your difficulties, whether it's family, friends, or whatever—to know that you're not alone. And I think we even started by talking about that briefly before we got on this recording—how powerful it is to know that you're not alone in suffering. I think now, more than ever before, with phones, we feel connected. I heard Esther Perel talk about the other day, we have thousands of friends, but no one to feed our dog when we're gone—like this practical connection with people.

So first of all, welcome, Burke and Alyssa, and thank you for taking the time to be here.

Burke Larson 01:19

You're welcome. How are you?

Dr. Jill 01:21

I'm doing well, and I am so excited to dive in. We're going to show people a little clip, Burke. This will take you back. So right now, I'm just going to stop, and we'll share a clip. And then we'll dive in, because I think that'll frame our discussion.

01:36

Burke Larson: We found Dr. Jill sort of happenstance. I walked into her office, met with her for a few minutes, and went: "Okay, this is some... This is a whole 'nother level of doctor." Sixteen years old, at spring break, I ended up with horrific sores in the back of my throat. And we went into the Vail hospital, and they said: "You most likely have mono. Here's some stuff to help you take care of it. Go home, rest." And it just kept getting worse. By the end of the summer, my dad had to carry me into children's hospital. I'd lost so much weight. I think I was around 115 pounds. Crohn's, Behcet's, MS, early-onset Parkinson's—all that came out negative. And I mean, we were trying anything and everything and nothing—nothing is doing anything. And then I spent the next decades with no answers.

Dr. Jill 02:56

Wow. I still see that, and I get so tore up, Burke, because you are the prototype for so many people out there who are suffering. And they're suffering silently, or their spouses don't believe them—thank God you have Alyssa—or the medical gaslighting. Let's talk about that first. How did it feel in those decades to go to doctor after doctor after doctor and then maybe finally give up [hope] after a while that anyone would ever believe you? How was it to feel sick? And you knew something was wrong, yet no one was giving you answers.

Burke Larson 03:36

Yes, it's horrific. I can't imagine how many people also deal with that. From my point of view, I started at 16, pretty young. I don't have a big voice of advocacy behind me. So I'm looking at all these doctors and thinking: "Hey guys, I've got a giant mess on my hands." I'm in horrific pain. [My] mouth ulcers [are] out. I can't function. I've dropped out of ski racing. I've dropped out of bike racing. I've dropped out of life. I'm being handed pain medicine and stuff to spray down my mouth to function in high school.

Burke Larson 04:23

The best doctors were the ones who looked at me and said: "You know, I don't think I can help you." The ones that I had some trouble with were the ones that meant well, likely, but didn't want to hear the story and didn't want to dive any further. I guess I'm not really putting this into words very well. I was alone.

Burke Larson 04:52

I had parents that loved me, adored me, family, all of that. A well-to-do family, [which] thankfully was not trying to find how we were going to figure out how to go to the next doctor and pay for it. But [there were] zero answers.

Burke Larson 05:08

I was in a children's hospital at 16, like I said in the clip there, at 115 pounds, 6'1", coming out of starting to ski race around the country. And then fast forward a number of months, and my dad is literally carrying me in at 115 pounds to the children's hospital. We were there for 10 days. Panels and panels and panels [were] being run. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. They can't find anything wrong. Effectively, I'm a healthy person. But I'm nuked; I'm in trouble.

Burke Larson 05:44

They were saying, "We're going to put a port in you to feed you, or you've got to start feeding yourself." And I had these horrible mouth sores. That was the giant thing that was the most horrific. There was a bunch of other fun stuff that was occurring too. And I thought: "No way at 16 are you going to send me back to high school, and I'm going to be feeding through a tube." So I started spraying my mouth down with benzocaine, this stuff that you prep your mouth [with] before the dentist gives you the big shot—the little stuff that they swab on. So that became my best friend for decades.

Dr. Jill 06:20

Wow. I think, Burke, the thing that you're saying here is so common. First of all, I want to frame that you were on your way to become a world-class skier. You have been training. You truly were not only an athlete but [also] on your way. And this obviously changed things for you. And then, like you said, you had resources. You had family. You had so much that maybe even some other people don't have. And even so, it didn't matter, did it?—because you didn't have the answers to get to the healing or the root cause of what was going on.

Burke Larson 06:58

Yes. And they told me to stop high school. They told me to not go to college. I got into CU Boulder, finished high school, and did it in a horrific condition, thinking: "Nobody can give me an answer or even close. Nothing. So I am just going to force my way through this."

Dr. Jill 07:19

I've got to do this on my own. I know that journey.

Burke Larson 07:22

I would guess a lot of people are... I know. I get a phone call. I had a talk with a new construction project I've got going with family up here. And the owner's rep heard this out, and then he said: "God, I've got somebody who thinks they have Lyme." Off goes this, and then we end up talking. I'm losing a little bit of train of thought, but—

Dr. Jill 07:47

Let's fast forward to when we met because you had gone through all these decades of the mysterious illness. First of all, this is one thing I admire in you; you were just like: No matter what, I've got to take care of myself. I've got to push through. It's a common story to me too. "No one's really going to understand, and no one's really going to know. So I'm just going to have to either fake it, push through, or whatever." So there's a sense of resilience that you've had that has gotten you through. But even so, you were suffering; you were suffering alone. And I think from what you've told me, you felt like you had to give up on someone really getting you.

Dr. Jill 08:21

Let's fast-forward first to meeting Alyssa—because your story is so powerful—[and] when you met. Alyssa, I'd like to hear your side of it too. How did that play into your chronic illness and finally finding someone that you could start to share your journey with and not hide it?

Burke Larson 08:38

Yes. That was the first time that I wasn't... So, effectively, I tricked her into marriage. I'm not sure how I got that one accomplished with as horrible as I was, spraying my mouth down, dating, and then marrying.

Dr. Jill 08:58

So you were trying to hide the fact of all the suffering and illness.

Burke Larson 09:02

I was embarrassed. Yes, embarrassed. I didn't know what it was. Nobody could tell me what was going on. Half the doctors are insinuating you're doing something to yourself or that you've caused this yourself—a myriad of things. You're like, "What?" And now I would be a little more vocal, but as a young guy, when you're in the midst or mix of it, you don't know exactly what to say. So Alyssa comes along.

Dr. Jill 09:34

How did you guys meet? Tell us a quick story of how that happened.

Burke Larson 09:37

Yes, you can tell her.

Alyssa Burke 09:38

Our roommates were dating. They had been dating for about a year. So we met the summer before, but I was dating somebody at the time. And I remember meeting him after he had just come home from his family lake house for three weeks. His hair was blonde. He was all tan. And I thought, "Oh, he's good-looking," and then just went on. It was probably nine or ten months later, closing weekend in Vail, [when] my roommate said: "We're going to go up and party and ski for closing weekend." I had just broken up with this other guy a week before.

Alyssa Burke 10:12

So we came up to Vail, and they were like: "Remember Burke? He's coming over later." He was helping his family move down in Genesee, Golden. When we went over to somebody else's condo to kick off the night, he came there after having moved his parents in no power because there was a giant snowstorm the night before. Instead of going home and going to sleep—again, resilience—something drew him to the party. He came to this condo and came in. And he looked totally different because it was the end of the winter. His hair was brown and his skin was a little bit lighter. I thought, "Oh, okay."

Alyssa Burke 10:53

We spent the whole night talking. And because we had just gotten out of non-communicative relationships, we said everything. We stayed up all night long talking and said everything. It laid the foundation—not for the illness but for everything else—about what we wanted in a relationship and what we didn't want.

Burke Larson 11:16

I knew right then. I was like, "Yes, this is it." It took her a few more minutes.

Dr. Jill 11:21

I love that. I think I'd heard that before. But even now, it's just so powerful. It's funny [that] before this podcast, I thought, "What is the real message here?" I think, at the core, it's: People want to be seen and heard. Whether you're out there suffering with an unexplained illness or your family member is... The most powerful feedback we heard after the movie was that two or three spouses of someone who's been suffering for a long time came up to us and said: "There's been a time when I was almost ready to leave or divorce this person because I thought, 'What is wrong with them?'"

Burke Larson 11:52

That's fair to them too. We had a firefighter acquaintance who asked for help. Alyssa got to talk to the wife. He would come back from a 48-hour shift or whatever the firefighters do. You can talk to Mr. Sutter on the other side of this; you'll get that. He's an acquaintance who was up here. But he'd come back. She's like, "I've got the kids," and he goes for the couch and can't do anything. I believe his [illness] was Lyme as well. Alyssa got a chance to sort of say: Give him a chance and then let's see if we can help you. Not having the support and knowing that [inaudible].

Dr. Jill 12:40

It's so important to know this, isn't it? Otherwise, people isolate. So you guys had this conversation. And it sounds like just from that, you knew: This is the kind of woman that's going to listen to me. I'm guessing there were so many things in your heart, thinking: Maybe I could actually share my whole life and all the suffering.

Dr. Jill 12:56

Eventually, I remember you telling me, Alyssa, that with the mouth and stuff, you started to see what was really happening behind the scenes. How did it come to the conversation of how much suffering you were in, Burke, with her?

Alyssa Burke 13:12

Do you want me to answer?

Burke Larson 13:12

Yes. She has a better idea of how exactly it unfolded.

Alyssa Burke 13:16

We spent every weekend together.

Burke Larson 13:19

After the day we met.

Alyssa Burke 13:21

Yes, after the day we met. I was in Denver; he was in Vail. And during the week, he would just do whatever he needed to do to recover. But I didn't see any of the illness on the weekends. We partied. We went to bars with friends. We did the Kentucky Derby. We dressed up. Nothing. It was normal—a normal dating relationship. And then I finally decided I was going to move up here to be with him. Once I moved, which was almost 14 years ago, I moved in with him. That's when I started to see more and more. And it was still slow. But it was probably over the course of six months after we moved in together that I could see something was wrong. Then finally, you started to open up more too, because we were in the same space.

Dr. Jill 14:18

You can't hide everything then—the suffering days. And on this journey, for those like you and me—Lyme, mold, toxicity, and all these things—there is this roller coaster ride. You can have a good day, and that's where people can't believe it. You can show up so well. Even for me, people think I'm out there—flying around, speaking, doing all this stuff—and I still have these rough days. And they don't see that.

Burke Larson 14:41

No. We had that.

Dr. Jill 14:44

Yes, this is like sharing. So obviously, you shared. But this journey was still not a lot of answers for many more years, right?

Burke Larson 14:52

No, no. Right. I think we started with some of the doctors we knew. Then, Alyssa and her personality—she effectively took it over and was like, "This is not working!"

Dr. Jill 15:07

You're like the beautiful bulldog. I remember talking on the phone. And it was awesome. I respect that so much.

Alyssa Burke 15:13

[laughs] I know. There, I did not take no for an answer.

Burke Larson 15:18

The first stop was him. I'm grateful because it ultimately led us to you really quickly. I've said you've saved my life—both of you. He said, "Please don't bring Alyssa." And "she can't be a part of this," because she was like: "We talked about that last time; let's move on. What else?" There were no answers. Then I was being accused of doing things that—how would I have known?—made me sick and that this was my fault. And she's going, 'No!'

Dr. Jill 16:07

Good for you, Alyssa, because what happens, Burke, is that there's this gaslighting. Let's just talk about that. 'Gaslighting' is this confusion because someone alters your perception of reality. So you're suffering, you know something's wrong, and you go into a doctor who you respect and think: "Okay, they're trained to help diagnose and treat me." And if over and over again you get told, "It's all in your head," "You're making this up," "You're part of the problem," "You need an antidepressant"—which is really common—"It's just all your mood," "You're depressed," or something, there's this piece of you that starts to be like: "Maybe they know better than me."

Dr. Jill 16:41

I think one of the big themes of the movie was trusting our intuition, our internal self, and our spirit, which knows what's right and wrong and what's true for us, and

advocating. And what happened for you was that you outsourced advocacy to Alyssa. And now you've really grown in that. Thank God for her because she came in at a time when you couldn't advocate for yourself anymore after being beaten down and beaten down and beaten down. And then here comes Alyssa, like: "No, let me be your advocate." I can see how that was so powerful. Alyssa, how was that for you—going to doctors? You saw, "He's not okay, and we need answers." How did that feel for you?

Alyssa Burke 17:18

I was just frustrated. So I just stopped them in their tracks and said: "You already said that last time. And here we are the next time. And it's not helping." Or "You already suggested that. We tried it. It did nothing. What else? What else?" After, I think, six months of that, I got told that I was not welcome on the next call because I undermined the doctor. I said: "Have a nice day. We're done." And I called you.

Alyssa Burke 17:52

It was a very well-respected doctor of the family. That's why we started there. He had helped his family through some other things and helped them over the years for a long time. So we thought that would be a great place to start. And it really was because he connected us with you. There are synchronicities in that.

Dr. Jill 18:15

I don't remember how. I do remember sitting in my old office. It ended up having water damage. That was the place where we first met. It ended up hurting me with mold and all. It's a long story there. First of all, you guys are so likable and so beautiful. It's so neat to have a couple come in and they're this unit and they're there to be supportive of one another. As you said, Burke, she saved your life because she was part of that support network to come in. And I want to give you credit too, because of your resilience and your persistence. You've been the one to suffer through this. Do you guys remember that first visit at all?

Alyssa Burke 18:53

I can feel it.

Burke Larson 18:56

The couch. Exactly the side.

Alyssa Burke 18:58

Where you were sitting. Your desk.

Burke Larson 19:00

[inaudible]. We had one earlier visit with you that was sort of: "Hey, go see Dr. Jill. Let's see if we can get"—without getting into too much detail—"some panels run. She'll help you out with that." Are we one of your longer-standing patients?

Dr. Jill 19:20

Yes.

Burke Larson 19:21

Okay. So it was earlier on.

Alyssa Burke 19:25

You had said you [had] just moved here.

Dr. Jill 19:27

It was probably 2011 or 2012, right? Because 2010 was when I moved, so I bet it was maybe 2012 or 2013.

Burke Larson 19:35

It was earlier on for lots of different reasons.

Dr. Jill 19:37

It's going on a decade.

Burke Larson 19:39

But we went back to the gentleman and then had this: "She's not welcome." And I was like, "That gal that we saw that one time had an ounce of compassion." Even though you were trying to respect the other gentleman's [professional opinion], you could tell you wanted to say some stuff. So we got an appointment, and then we ended up in your office. For the first time, I told a doctor—I told you—a physician, or somebody [who was] going to help me everything.

Burke Larson 20:13

I held so much back because there was so much judgment and so much BS. I don't want to knock a bunch of doctors. There are a lot of people who mean well. Like I said, I had one who heard my story and was like, "I don't think I can do anything to you." I swear I could have high-fived him and been like, "That's the best thing ever." It was huge. So we got with you, and we're in tears; I'm shaking. I read scripts on the way in there because I didn't trust. I didn't trust. I was not going to get blamed for being sick.

Dr. Jill 20:50

Burke, you have been traumatized and beaten down. Let me just say how it is: You had PTSD. And you had been completely traumatized by the medical system. I have to say that because there are people listening who feel the same way. The truth is that the space of unconditional acceptance and, like, "Tell me your story" is where the healing starts.

Burke Larson 21:11

And you did that for us. You gave that space right then and there. Somehow, with the brief interaction we had before, I felt like: "That is the person we need to talk to. Whether she has a clue, has all the answers, or has nothing, I think this person will actually listen to me as a doctor-physician." And you did, and we got through it. And you looked at me. It's seared into my brain. That's a decade...

Alyssa Burke 21:40

I was just going to say that it was 12 years ago.

Burke Larson 21:41

So 12 years ago. I can remember the feelings, the emotions, the couch we were sitting on, the angle of it where you were sitting, your test kits behind you—I mean, everything. And then you looked at me and said, "I think I know what this is" or "I know what this is." I was like, "Is this crazy or..." I didn't know whether to cry or walk out and be like, "She's gone crazy." You said, "We need to test you for Lyme disease." That was your thought. I was thinking: "Another several-thousand-dollar test. Great!" And I was like: "I'm not sure." You effectively looked at me and said, "No, you're going to do this," in a very kind, amazing way. I went: "Yep. Okay." We got the test results back. It pinged hot. You went through that with us.

Burke Larson 22:47

There was still a bit of: Okay, great; we've heard this a million times—"we think it's this," "we think it's that." I'd say it took us a little bit to let it set in. And then we googled it one night in Vail and the symptoms slammed. Did you ever have those points in your life where you go into a twilight zone and everything slows down, like in the movies? Everything slowed down and I was like: "Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep. Okay, this is 100% it." This is two decades—not quite two decades—of horrificness that is summed up. Google didn't exist when we started. That was huge. I was in tears. We were staring at this and then you all went to work.

Dr. Jill 23:38

Well, just that validation. And I'll tell you, from my perspective, it's interesting. And this is where part of the movie too brings in science, faith, intuition, and all these things together. The truth is, if I had purely clinically, academically, and analytically looked at the situation, I don't know that I would have jumped to Lyme. But there was a deep intuition. What I've seen, for those listening if you're out there and suffering, [is that] most of the complex chronic illness is toxic load—that could be mold exposure, metal exposure, some toxin in our environment that you may not see or feel, but it's just slowly taking you down—and infectious burden. So things that we've been exposed to maybe years ago.

Dr. Jill 24:18

I always give this example because people get it: Chicken pox. We've all had chicken pox—most of us. When we get shingles when we're 70 or 80, that's the same virus from decades earlier that pops up when we have a weakened immune system. When I see the complex chronic illness like you... And there are some clues, like fatigue, brain fog, joint pain, or just neurological things that don't make a lot of sense, like one-sided neurological symptoms. There are a whole number of things. But those kinds of cases—and the list could go on and on—often end up being these old infections that maybe we got. Here's an example that's interesting too. You're in Vail. You're in Colorado, right? There are a lot of doctors who are like, "Lyme doesn't exist in Colorado." But that's not true.

Burke Larson 24:58

I had them say it to me straight to my face. And I still have some friends that are like... But...

Dr. Jill 25:03

Yes. And I think we found tick-borne relapsing fever. Often, what happens is that there are other types of ticks and other types of infections, and it's usually a conglomeration or a mix of things. But it's interesting. What I was going to say from that perspective is that I had to jump from an analytical mind—I just listened to your symptoms, that was it—to my intuition, like, "I think this is Lyme." Then I was actually brave enough to tell you when I wasn't sure, right? I wasn't positive.

Dr. Jill 25:29

But the really good testing is expensive. And this is always a conversation I have because I'm like, "Oh, I'm so sorry." The testing starts at like \$1,500, but it's so worth it to have the answer. And with that test, I know that I'm going to have really good data to hang our future plan on. So I remember being there too. And this is way back. Nowadays, I have no problem being like: "Let's do this test. You need to do it right away." And I'm really confident. Just like your confidence was low—that was at the beginning of my functional medicine practice here in Colorado—I would say my confidence was pretty low too. It was like, "Oh guys, can we test?" But, again, we came together, and it was perfect how it worked out.

Burke Larson 26:06

We did. You did get the guts up to be like, "No, you're doing this" [inaudible] because I pushed back on the one friggin test.

Dr. Jill 26:22

And it's way more. For those of you listening, it's not just that it's just that infection; it's way bigger than that because there's inflammation in the immune system. There's ongoing dysfunction and so many things, Burke, and anyone else suffering out there, that it's not just a one-size-fits-all. But the core was that we had something that really made sense to put the whole picture into and then something to even target to get you functioning.

Dr. Jill 26:45

Now I want to shift just a little bit because when we first came, this is also a divine thing because I remember when Dan and Aaron came and we were talking about the movie and we said: "We need some patient stories. We really want to follow some people who've been through this in functional medicine." Of all the thousands

of patients, I can't remember exactly how you guys came to mind. But obviously, sharing your life journey and sharing the patient-doctor relationship is super personal and super intimate. And you guys were so beautiful at sharing that. How did it feel when we first came to you and said, "Do you want to be part of a documentary and share your journey?" Was it scary? Was it exciting? Were you apprehensive in the beginning? How did it feel?

Burke Larson 27:27

I think yes to all of what you just said, mostly. Yes, we had to have a little talk about it. The answer was yes, right away. The second force [was] sort of, "What are we doing or getting into, getting it out there?" A number of years earlier, I would have said unconditionally: "No, I don't need anybody else knowing my history. I don't need repercussions. I don't need people coming after me for a false diagnosis," or whatever it may be. So 100% it was, yes. And then we had to go through the emotions of "Are we good with this?" And you asked me several times: "Good? Are you really good with this? You haven't been good with sharing this in the past"—outside of people with a need, help in small settings, and stuff like that. And then enter the beginning stages of talking about this and starting to film and stuff—talk about a cathartic release! I was in tears the whole frigging thing. We had to put me back together. I'm sure you edited out a ton of that just to make it make sense. So that answers your question.

Dr. Jill 28:42

Yes. And I didn't anticipate this. It was the same for me, Burke, here. I'm like showing my life. We joked in a text about the vulnerability that all of us show in the film. I would joke about the ugly cry scene, which is a scene that they didn't have in the first multiple drafts. And then finally they were like, "Jill, we've got to put this in." I'm like, "Ugh!"

Burke Larson 29:03

That's where people connect and that's where they're like, "Oh, I can do this" or whatever pushes forward and [inaudible].

Dr. Jill 29:11

Right. That's our goal, right?—to encourage and inspire. But what I want to ask too—this is where I think we're both going to [comment]—is the filming itself was so healing, wasn't it? I think part of healing is [self-reflection]: How can we be our

most authentic selves and really share? The more we share with the world the truth, [the more we realize] we're not unique and that we're not the only ones who've ever suffered. And all of a sudden, we become common with those people out there. And not only do we feel the love and support but we [also] feel free because we're fully able to share every bit of ourselves. How did that feel as it was finally happening? Did you feel like that was a little tiny piece of the healing too?

Burke Larson 29:50

That was like the last 10% of what I needed to do with my journey. And there's always a journey, I think, going on. Whether you're the picture of health or not, everybody's got something they're working on, so I'll continue to. But 100%—the filming of that... And I think we've had some conversations along the lines of the movie, filming, and after. Seeing it was huge. And then watching it at the family lake house in Idaho on a MacBook Pro at the table outside with the giant lake out and everybody in swimsuits in the evening and—

Dr. Jill 30:32

Was that when you first saw the final cut?

Burke Larson 30:34

Yes, when we first saw it with the family. They all knew the journey better than anybody. People [were] in tears, [and my] parents [were] in tears. But for me to let that out and put that on digital film—I cried through the whole friggin thing. [It was] the biggest release. It jumped me far forward in healing big time, and it was such a release. Yes, like I said, cathartic. I don't know the words. They're escaping me [inaudible].

Dr. Jill 31:15

No, that's perfect. I can just see you there with your family. I had the same experience, Burke. My family knows me and loves me. And amazing! As I've shared with all of my siblings, my parents, and everybody, it's been so powerful to open up conversations. You know how it is; they see you as a son or brother. Or there's a role you've played your whole life, especially when you're someone who's strong and resilient and doesn't complain. We have a lot of similarities.

Dr. Jill 31:43

This work ethic and this kind of thing that you brought through life—I always think that was the thing that saved us. But it also created a little distance because we had to show up. And we didn't ever either ask for help or think that we were worthy of help. So all of a sudden, shifting and showing our family first and then the world about deep vulnerability, people were just like: "Oh my gosh. I had no idea." Even some in my own family, to some extent, were like: "I didn't realize that piece was so hard for you."

Burke Larson 32:13

That hit—exactly—with the family, with us. Even between us, a little bit.

Alyssa Burke 32:20

We watched it together first—just the two of us.

Dr. Jill 32:22

How was that?

Burke Larson 32:25

At that lake house table.

Alyssa Burke 32:27

It was up in the evening.

Burke Larson 32:27

Forget it. So anyway. Minor point.

Alyssa Burke 32:32

When we went to the lake house last summer, we went for two weeks, which was the first time we ever went for that long. We brought the dogs. Burke had just started this huge transition. We watched the movie. We talk a lot about it. We were up late that night. When we did it with the family at the dinner table, your mom got up from the outside. She's really strong-willed as well and usually is fine about everything. She scooted herself in between me and his sister and held on to both of our hands the whole time because she didn't know what she was going to find out. His story is shorter than your story in there, but it was powerful.

Dr. Jill 33:22

I don't think I've shared this publicly, but I'm going to share it. We did a premiere—unfortunately, you guys weren't able to come, and that's why you watched it privately—in Denver and my parents were there. I was kind of scared because I get so vulnerable about... Kind of like you, I had amazing parents—the best in the world. And yet, just because we're human, there are these little traumas in childhood. It's more about the farm and being tough. It's not about my parents at all. But I was a little nervous because I love them so much and want to honor my dad and my mom, especially my dad, who's like my hero.

Dr. Jill 33:55

I sat in the theater beside my dad, and I held his hand. He looked over at me and said: "Jill, I'm so sorry that I wasn't a better dad." And he was the perfect dad. He was so good. He didn't need to say that but [with] that moment of connection between us and him saying that to me, I felt like: "Oh my gosh, dad, you are the best." But in seeing my suffering, what happened in my parents—they were amazing!—was they were like, "I'm sorry you had to suffer." Also, because you and I hid it, it wasn't that they weren't there for us; it's that we did not ask for help, right?

Burke Larson 34:34

No. Friends, family, all of that—100% that hit with my family. My dad too, but mom was the one that was [like]: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry for all this" and that. I looked at her and I was like: "We're all good! It's fine. We've done okay." Friends is another tough one. There are probably people out there who have got their family and this and that. Another part is that they told me I couldn't have kids. We have two kids that we're going to have to go get here in a minute.

Dr. Jill 35:08

I remember that because I was like, 'Hmm.'

Burke Larson 35:11

You held out on me. Apparently, you felt the same as the other doctor who got us to you, thank God. And then I found out in filming or in the movie that you too felt that that was probably not going to happen either.

Alyssa Burke 35:28

Thank God you never told us that.

Dr. Jill 35:28

That's so exciting. The first time I got the Christmas card with your kids, it was like: "Oh, this is why I do what I do!" That was the highlight of my year. Yes, that was awesome. Obviously, this is transformational.

Dr. Jill 35:44

My hope is that as people watch this and have conversations with their loved ones, their partners, and their parents, it'll just be a catalyst. What would you guys say is your goal, hope, or desire for, say, a friend, a family member, or just someone you don't even know who might have an undiagnosed chronic complex illness? What would be your deepest desire—and I'd like to hear from both of you—for someone watching the film?

Burke Larson 36:09

What do you think?

Alyssa Burke 36:11

I don't know.

Burke Larson 36:12

What to tell somebody and how to go about it?

Dr. Jill 36:17

Say they watch it; what would you hope they take away?

Burke Larson 36:23

Don't hide it as best you can. Grab somebody and spill it out. I swear, the friends I hid it from—I got so much shit from them for coming out. Like you said, holding it together. I held it together to go to work and then was done. And they were like: "Come out. We're going skiing" or "We're going party and we're doing this." And I was like, 'Nope!' They didn't know. I don't think they've seen the movie yet but they've started to understand this a bit more as we've all matured. I don't know what to tell somebody. I'd say it was once a month; now it's like once a quarter or maybe a couple of times a year, that I get somebody who hears the story and is like: "Burke, can you talk to my friend?" I just had a guy out of California—it may have been someone you've seen—[who said], "I just want to hear the story."

Burke Larson 37:20

I'm not doing a great job of putting it into words, but find a way to connect with somebody. You have podcasts now. You've got some of these things where you can hear some of this stuff. When we started this journey, I had dear friends who were like, "Sick boy" when I was in high school. That's just what they called me. Honestly, it was their way of saying: "I got your back. We don't know what's going on." And I was like, "I don't know what's going on either." I'm not doing a great job of what I would do with somebody.

Dr. Jill 37:54

It's perfect.

Burke Larson 37:56

Keep fighting.

Alyssa Burke 37:57

Knowing your story and being your advocate and your caregiver is... I come from a family where everybody lays everything out on the table. There are not a whole lot of secrets, so I didn't understand keeping some things private and not explaining all of it. But then I couldn't help. Like you said, you keep yourself hidden. Nobody can truly love you for who you are because they don't know who you are. I've never been in your shoes, but share the whole story because that's you. And that's where you're showing up. But I get the other side.

Burke Larson 38:39

But after decades of getting crushed and people second-guessing you, like, "I just wanted to crawl in a hole and I'm done." Yes, I'd given up. My dad asked me a couple of times when I was young, in high school: "Are you going to knock yourself off? Are you going to kill yourself?" I looked at him and said: "No. No!" To each his own. But that's a pretty hard-core question to ask a kid. In my mind, it was: "No, I'm running this out until I figure it out or die trying." It's not exactly the point you're getting at but [inaudible].

Dr. Jill 39:28

No, that's perfect. It's so perfect. What do you think it was, Burke? Because I hear this, and this is the thing I see in you and in a lot of the characters in the

movie—this resilience, this will that you are not going to be taken out, even if it's really hard. What do you think that is? What is it in you that kept you going?

Burke Larson 39:49

You talk about a connection to God, the universe, this, that. You're very religious. I don't fall into that category. Do I believe in something else, synchronicities, and somebody? Yes, 100%. And I think everybody's had moments where they're like, 'What?'

Dr. Jill 40:10

Yes, "How did that happen?"

Burke Larson 40:15

It felt like there was a journey I had to go through, and I probably couldn't have put it in words at all times. Anybody who's like, "Well, that's good for you. You were able to suck it up for two decades"—less than that but we'll call it two decades—of horrific pain and trying to live a normal life at the same time... I knew we'd come to something at some point. I just did. And it wasn't a daily thing that I knew. There were days when I'd walk into a doctor and say: "I tried to stay away from all the pain medicines and all that stuff because it brings on its own bizarre stuff." And there were days where I was like, "Fine hit me; I don't care anymore"—for the moment. That's about the best I can give you.

Dr. Jill 41:11

That's perfect. I think you're describing this really important mix because, for someone who's suffering, it's that roller coaster ride. In December, I was getting ready. I had to be at a place for speaking and book signing. I woke up that morning—I probably had mold in the hotel room—and I was like: "I don't know if I can get out of bed today. I don't know if I can do this." And I love what I do. I love my life. But the truth is that anyone who's had chronic illness has those days where you're like, "I don't know if I can do this." It's not that I didn't want to live, by any means. The same with you. There was never that. But then there's this deeper something inside of us. It's like, "Somehow I'm going to get through this and somewhere there's going to be answers." You never gave up, really. That's the core.

Alyssa Burke 41:51

Alyssa, like we said in the theater, in the premiere, we saw a lot of spouses that were either frustrated, about to give up, or just had a difficult run of it but who also love their spouse. What would you say to them as far as keeping on or digging deep? What has been the most powerful lesson for you in all of this?

Alyssa Burke 42:16

I had to find my own people who knew what we were going through, supported me, and lifted me up. I was a Pure Barre teacher through it. I had my front desk gal; she and I are dear friends now. Our husbands are friends too. She knew everything. We would have these mornings after I would be done teaching before I had to go to work, where we'd just sit and chat. It would be like, "Man, this happened yesterday," or "Here's my big win!" And they would celebrate all of it with me. But his mom—if I didn't have her, I don't know that I would have made it through. We were newly married and that's a lot to take on in a new marriage, along with all the other things that you do normally in a new marriage. She had been through it with him in the early stages and knew some of the struggles. I didn't share everything with her, but she was always supportive.

Dr. Jill 43:27

That's beautiful.

Alyssa Burke 43:31

And listening to him. I sometimes got my own ideas in my head of how he should be, do, or act. He was like: "I can't do that. I can't do it all." Or "I'm not interested in that," just taking that for what it was. Versus saying: "You need to be off sugar and you need to take all of these vitamins. And stop eating this" and do this and do this. He was like: "Stop it! That's not helping me." And it would be hard for me to just shut up and listen sometimes.

Dr. Jill 44:07

Aw, bless you. It's beautiful to even interview and see you guys together, because I do see that deep respect and the humanity between the two of you. It's obvious that there's deep dedication. I know life isn't perfect and we all have these ups and downs, but it's really beautiful to see you guys on screen together interacting.

Dr. Jill 44:26

Burke, you can share just a little or as much as you want. But I feel like what I've seen too is that even in your career, you've taken some changes and challenges and are doing some things. What's next for you guys? Again, share as little or as much as you want. But I feel that on every level, I'm seeing transformation and exciting things and you're even taking your work hours and situations and making a beautiful thing out of them. Do you want to share anything about Burke's future?

Burke Larson 44:49

Yes, really quickly. We've boiled it down to [this]: I have been—for my entire adult life and prior to that—in survival mode, so I only know survival. I'm really good at absolutely running myself down to the ground or enduring, enduring, enduring, enduring. This summer, I broke a tendon on a wrist by breaking a stick in half for dogs. That had me in for some surgery. And I had a work situation—big money stuff and lots of big things accomplished. I was running myself ragged—exactly the opposite of what I needed to be doing. But you have to make money. You have to live. Unless the lottery or the unknowing trust comes in.

Burke Larson 46:04

I did sort of do a mic drop with my last group. I wish them well. They sold the company. They didn't say a lot to me, but it was the most beautiful thing. It was the universe, God, the guy upstairs, the gal upstairs, or whoever you want to say it, saying, "Hey, go." I ran out, dropped it all, looked at Alyssa, and said: "I am going to fall flat on my face. I'm going on my own. It is going to be ugly and beautiful and terrible and awesome. And I don't know how to do this." Even the family that supported me all along initially was like, "What?"

Burke Larson 46:49

So fast forward: I was driving up the street down the way on a 36-acre build, watching the two dogs go up the road that was just cut. And I'm driving it to see how it drives and if we can get machinery on there. Two dogs are running in front and I've got a half hour to do this before I go and pick up the kids. I've still got a little ways to go and some things we've got to work through. But what a huge lesson to flip into life—to go for it, do it, and try these things.

Dr. Jill 47:31

I love that so much! I want to share for those people listening that you're in Vail.

And tell me exactly, what are you doing? So if people are listening, they might be like: "Hey, Burke, I need you to help me on a project. I want people to know about what you do and share that." What's your company? And what do you do?

Burke Larson 47:46

Builder/construction. We have Vail Custom Homes. And I've got a consultancy with Konic Builders. That's a national group. We're seeing how that's all working. There are some neat projects in the works and things are coming together. I got a chance to take a breath. I have the expensive finances and stuff like that. But it's all something that she and I bonded together to go: "You know what? This will work out."

Dr. Jill 48:17

I have no doubt because the same tenacity and everything that you've just shared with us is going to be there. That's why I know people already love you guys. And I want people to know if they can support you in any way. Where could they find you? Do you have any information on the web right now?

Burke Larson 48:33

The companies are so new that not as much.

Dr. Jill 48:36

Stay tuned; we'll share.

Burke Larson 48:39

Burke@vailcustomhomes.com is the current email address.

Alyssa Burke 48:46

Burke@vailcustomhomes.com.

Dr. Jill 48:55

Got it. And we'll share that if you're listening, anywhere you're listening. Just in case you want a custom home in Vail, call Burke. Awesome. You guys, it is always a pleasure. Thank you for diving deep with me today. We could talk for hours.

Alyssa Burke 49:08

We could.

Dr. Jill 49:09

But the movie is out so if you're there and you want to go see it, you can go to DoctorPatientMovie.com. You can see it now, rent it, or purchase it. And I just want to say that if it's touched you guys, share comments with us—anything that you have to say. Also, share it with those you love if they're suffering or if there's someone out there that you know. We're all excited because it's been a long time and here it's finally out.

Burke Larson 49:34

That would be awesome. I've said this many times—I believe it's in the documentary and movie—but thank you to you, Dr. Jill, and to you, Alyssa, for saving my life.

Dr. Jill 49:49

We're grateful. And thank you, Burke, for enriching our lives. I appreciate you guys so much!