

Hannah Scott
Short Walks In An Ideal Mediterranean Forest
2022

Audio transcript - English

Hannah: We went to Joya in October 2021, just after we'd got married. It's an amazing place because it's very remote. Although you are quite close to civilization, you're still in the south of Spain, but it feels like you're really far away from everything. There's no sounds of traffic and people there's just nature.

And actually, it's very peaceful; bird song and the sound of the breeze. And being there was a really amazing experience. But I suppose on a personal level, it was challenging for me, because on the day that we arrived, I received a phone call from the hospital in London to ask me to contact them as a matter of urgency, but they didn't explain, you know, any details.

But I assumed that it was to do with the biopsy that I had two weeks previous to that. So, I just panicked. Cause I thought, that they were going to tell me that I had cancer. And because we were in such a remote place, there wasn't any mobile signal and there wasn't any way of getting in touch with anyone to actually find out really what was going on.

And so, I found it really difficult to engage with where I was, and make the most of that experience. To be creative and to concentrate. And then we both became quite ill. I think we probably had COVID, although we did test negative. And so, I spent three or four days in bed, and then I had the second week in Joya without you, because Juana, you were there with me for the first week. And I just couldn't get into it. And I kind of just wanted to leave.

Juana: Yeah. I think the place is amazing. It was nice to be there in nature, you know, in, in this environmental project. But at the same time, it was your problem. No, we were very worried about if you have cancer. But at the same time, we had nice walks, and we discovered it's very dry. There's not much rain there. You remember when we walked, and we saw the river with no water, and the animals. So, I think it was very interesting as well, to see these things, and to see how, how they collect water, how they do everything.

It was difficult waiting for the doctor to call. And then you were running. You were, that was funny. Running all the way up. Your hand in the air, with the phone: "Ahhhh. I need a connection. I need a connection". So, I had bad moments. But I had nice moments as well. Yeah, because we thought you have cancer, and I didn't think about me.

Hannah: No.

Juana: I didn't expect I had cancer.

Hannah: No.

Juana: And I started in that time, to feel a bit weird, my belly.

Hannah: We thought it was the water, didn't we?

Juana: I thought it was the water. So, I asked them, where come from this water? And they say, no, this water come from the village. So, I thought it can't be the water, it's impossible. And they cook very delicious food, and I was eating and felt, like full, very quick. I was like, what's wrong with my belly?

Hannah: Yeah. I had an appointment with the consultant in the oncology department at the hospital. And, they told me that I had quite a large tumour, it was 10 centimetres, attached to my uterus. Um, and I think this is something that's quite common in women, but they couldn't tell if it was benign or, or not. And so, they told me that the only thing that they would suggest I did was to have a hysterectomy to remove my uterus and the tumour and my ovaries. Cause if they just took the tumour out, and it was cancerous, then there was a risk that that could spread. So, my operation was scheduled for December.

Juana: Yes, and I was with you in that meeting

Hannah: And you were with me, yeah.

Juana: And me, I never thought, I could have cancer.

Hannah: No, it was like they were talking to the wrong person, wasn't it?

Juana: Exactly.

Hannah: So then, you had your appointment with the gynaecologist for your ovaries, because they said that you had an ovarian cyst.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And then they did an MRI scan, and they told you that you definitely didn't have cancer. But they said that you had to have an operation

Juana: To take the cyst out.

Hannah: To take out the cysts. And they scheduled you for an operation in December as well.

Juana: And then I went for my operation and, they, they opened. They discovered I was full of cancer. And they said, you have cancer, you are full of cancer. I said: "What? Cannot be possible". And they said that I have cancer in my abdomen, the

peritoneum, in my intestines, ovaries, uterus, vagina. And then it was very bad time after that, because...

Hannah: It was a big shock, huh?

Juana: Yeah. It was a big shock and, and it was COVID, and then, you were in the house, you couldn't come to visit me. And, and then it was Christmas and, and then all the doctors and everyone went on holiday, and I didn't have any oncologist; everyone disappeared. And me, I was getting worse and worse, and it was, it was very, very bad time. Very. Yeah, very desperate, no? Desperate to speak with a doctor with someone. It was like, I, I, I felt like I was abandoned.

Six weeks after everything happened. Finally, they say, okay, you are going to have your, your colonoscopy. And then I, they couldn't finish the colonoscopy, because it was my intestines blocked. So, the tube couldn't pass through.

And then we were like that, desperate. What are we going to do now? We cannot wait other two weeks to, for the meeting of oncologists. You know, what's going on? I remember that morning, I, I was crying like, "oh, what are we going to do? No one cared about us". And then I remember you were sending emails to the hospital to everyone.

And then that morning they called, you have an appointment tomorrow with a doctor. And then we went to the doctor. He said, you are full of cancer. You don't have cure and it's inoperable. And then we were in shock. And then, when we left, I, I remember you asked me. Do you understand what he said? I said: "Yes, estoy jodida".

Hannah: So, I had the operation in February in the end, and they removed everything. And they told me afterwards that the tumour I had was benign. So that was, a big relief, but it was difficult at the same time, because it was in the same moment that you started your chemotherapy. So, I wasn't able to, to support you. The first two weeks I was, wasn't able to do anything really.

Juana: I remember with my first chemo and second, it was very difficult because the first one I was constipated. So, I has to go to the hospital and I spent like, there like three, four days. And then I lost a lot of weight, there in the hospital. I was like 49 kilos. And in the second chemo, it was the same, I was, I was kept, keeping, losing weight. I was like, this cannot be possible. It was,

Hannah: Yeah. So, you went from, cause originally you were like 59 kilos, your natural weight.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And you went down to 49 kilos.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And it felt like you were sort of dissolving in front of me. I think it's the most shocking thing I've ever seen. Yeah, it was so frightening.

Juana: Yeah, it's very frightening, for me was very frightening when I looked to the mirror myself, and the only thing what I could see was a skeleton. With a...

Hannah: A skeleton

Juana: A skeleton, with skin, and a very big belly. I couldn't recognise myself there.

Hannah: Yeah. I remember I bought you a pair of jeans at Christmas, and they were your size, and then two months later, they were just falling off you.

Juana: Yeah, because with the chemo, I lost the appetite. I couldn't eat. So, I thought, maybe eating just a little bit is enough for my body, but it wasn't because the cancer was eating everything. The cancer was eating me very fast. And then it is like, let's do something, because at this rhythm, you die. And then I started to have a lot of smoothies, supplements, and food all the time, every two hours eating something.

Hannah: But we had to really force you to eat.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: Because at that point you didn't want to eat. And I don't think you could see what was happening, how quickly you were losing weight.

Juana: Yeah, because it was so difficult to, to swallow the food. You know, because I put in my mouth and I, I was chewing and chewing, but something inside me was like a wall in my throat.

Hannah: What other side effects have you had.

Juana: Very tired, very exhausted. Lost the, the finger...

Hannah: The fingertips.

Juana: The fingertips, and you lost the sensitivity, and then you have cuts. And the chemo that they give me is sensitive to the cold weather. As soon I have a little bit cold wind, or, I take something cold, my throat, my fingers, my hands are frozen. My hand, my face get rash. You have a diarrhoea. Sometimes you just start crying just because you feel very vulnerable.

I remember when, when we were after the operation, and we went to have the, my second jab for the COVID, Hannah, she said to the, to the guy who was giving the number and organizing, she said, she's a vulnerable person, and, because vulnerable people have priority.

And I just wanted to cry that moment. I was like, I don't want to be vulnerable person. You know? So, in the beginning it's difficult to accept, because with the chemo and everything, I, I felt very, very tired and, and very, very, very, very weak. Like I need someone close to me just in case something happened.

Hannah: It's really difficult for me to see you feeling like that, because you've always been very strong and healthy and proactive in doing things. And then suddenly you weren't able to do the things that you wanted to, and it was really upsetting, seeing you being upset, when you want to go for, for a bicycle ride, for example, but you can't, or you want to go...

Juana: Or I want to cook something and I can't, you know, because I tired, or my hands are cut.

Hannah: I found it really, really difficult as well to come to terms with what was happening. It wasn't like, oh, you've got cancer, but we can, we can fix it. It was like, oh, you there's, there's nothing we can do. All I could think about at that point was, that I was going to lose you. And, I didn't really know how long, that we had together. You know, it sort of felt like, it could be a matter of weeks, or just a few months.

Juana: Meow.

Yeah, me, me I thought the same, I was going to die, but in one moment I say I'm not going to die, I don't want to die.

Hannah: Yeah.

Juana: But you can't, sometimes you can't control your thinking.

Hannah: I just thought the worst, you know? I was so scared.

Juana: Yeah, it was very difficult.

Hannah: Every time you have the chemotherapy, you have, like a, like a day or two days, where you feel very down and you, and sometimes even though you are positive for the whole of the other times throughout each two weeks, there's that day where you have a bit of a cry and you feel like everything's too, too difficult.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And you always say to me, I don't want to be in this situation. I want to be strong.

Juana: Because it's difficult, be so weak.

But everything passes. Just, it just that two three days after the chemo.

Yeah. You just have to wait. Have to wait.

Yeah. And always your, your hugs made me feel better.

Hannah: You were a bit sick at the beginning, weren't you?

Juana: Yeah, but not that much, luckily. I mean, I throw up sometimes. Because it's very difficult drink water when you are with the chemo. The taste of the water changes. My hair is, is very thin, now. So, it's falling a lot.

Hannah: Yeah. But you haven't lost all your hair, have you?

Juana: No, no, no.

Hannah: In fact, it's maybe the opposite in some way. No?

Juana: Yeah. yeah, because with the steroid and the, and the hormones and everything, all the hair, hair in my face came out. It's blacker now. My eyelashes, they grow up. They, they are very big and very black as well. Everything in my face is blacker, but my ulcers in my mouth. I cannot eat with my ulcers, and now are better as well.

Me, I would like to be more, the opposite, what we have before now. Like more relaxing, more time to do more walks. More time to do, to do more art. To be more inspired. To, to, to try to, to do more, more things there. Enjoy. Enjoy the people, enjoy the place and, and, and try to be a little bit more into the project as well. And try to do there more things, because me almost, I didn't do anything.

Hannah: Yeah. I, it's the same for me. So, to have a time that was, really relaxed, and creative, and engaged. And to have none of that stuff going on in the background. So that, we'd be able to really get to know the people that were there, and feel like I could be a hundred percent committed to the time spent with them, and learning about Simon and Donna's project, and the, the work that they're doing, trying to, to rescue the land there, and the environment. And to find my own creative voice within that. I feel like I didn't really get to do any of that.

Juana: Yeah. I, I, I would like to go, I want to go back.

Hannah: Yeah. I think it's really interesting, Cause for me, there's always been this kind of link between personal and ecological loss in, in my art practice. Cause when I started it was after my mum died, from lung cancer. And it was sort of the same time that I'd started learning about climate change. You know, I'm sort of having to revisit that, duality of loss. I feel like I lost the time that I was supposed to have there.

Juana: So, for you, maybe it was very difficult when you, when you knew that I had cancer, you know?

Hannah: Yeah. When we found out that you had cancer I just thought, oh, I can't believe it. I've just got married and now I'm going to lose my wife, and I've already lost my mum, but then I felt really bad for thinking that, because I felt like that was a really selfish thing to think, because all I really should be worrying about is you getting better and, you know?

Juana: Yeah. But the first thing, when they, when, when, when the doctor say cancer, the first thing, what you think is, you are going to die. You know, because cancer is a big word. It's like, oh my goodness. Now people, there are a lot of people, they, they survive to cancer, you know, mm-hmm.

Hannah: Yeah.

Juana: But for me it was the same. When they say cancer, it was like, I, I, I don't say I'm going to die. I say, I don't want to die, but of course, many time, many, many time, came to my, to my mind. I'm going to die. And me many times I thought about you as well. I was like, now I got married, she lost her mother, now she's going to lose, to lost, me as well. Cannot be possible. You know? I think just to think this kind of thing gives me a strength to, to, to live, to go, to say, go forward, you know?

Hannah: Mm. But it's difficult. Huh?

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And it's very difficult when the, when the doctors and the medical team that you're working with, they didn't really give us any options at the beginning, they just said, oh, this is incurable and inoperable. And then that was it. We didn't really say anything when we had that meeting with them because we, we were in such shock.

Juana: With your eyes open, very open, like. Your mouth, like, ahhh.

Hannah: Yeah

Juana: Just telling, yes, yes. Moving your head like that. Yes.

Hannah: Yeah.

Juana: He said, just go to chemo. Give, give, give a treatment and see. Yeah.

And then, I say yes, but we have to do something. We, we, I going to have everything. We are going to look for other therapy. We, we have to do something. Ill body can cure. I, I'm going to cure for sure. And after, the oncologists, they were a bit, a bit more positive.

Hannah: Yeah. The oncologist you've got now is, is much more positive.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah. He said, if you, after six months support the chemotherapy, and if the cancer is stable, and maybe if it reduces, if you're lucky, that you might be able to have an operation. So, because of that, we thought, well there's nothing to lose really. And we're going to try everything that we can find. So, we decided to try this alternative protocol as well, with off-label drugs.

Juana: And change my diet as well, eating a lot of vegetables, and no sugar, no salt.

Hannah: So, you've been taking, what, what drugs have you, have you been taking alongside the chemotherapy?

Juana: One is for the cholesterol. One is for the diabetes. One is for worms. For the, when, the pill, that you give to the children

Hannah: Yeah.

Juana: For the worms. And the other one is an antibiotic.

Hannah: Yeah.

Juana: Yeah. And many, many, many supplement like curcumin, berberine, and green tea.

Hannah: So, you're taking like 20 pills a day at the moment, aren't you?

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: With herbal supplements, plus these four prescribed drugs.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And the idea is that these drugs could work alongside the chemotherapy. To try to block some of the, the cancer pathways.

Juana: I, I, I think this, taking this pill have made big difference. Because when I had the, the result of the scan after three months, the oncologist, he was very surprised. He said is better than what he expected.

Hannah: Because the, he said that everything is reduced by 50%. No?

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: And then, the liquid in your abdomen has gone, and the, your lung has completely healed.

Juana: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah. So, it's really positive.

Juana: For me, you have been very, very strong. When I told you the first time I, I have cancer. You remember, in a video call? I was in the hospital, and you say, we will pass through this, like very confident, we will pass through, whatever it, anything what it is. We will pass through. Like always, I knew you were, you are strong, everything, but now, you know, with this, you prove how, how strong you are, and how positive we have to be. We have to pass through this, like, like confident, you know, like with what you were telling me. And then that get me confidence as well. So...

Hannah: I think that you are the one that's more positive and stronger, because you always, all the way through this have said, you know, everything's going to be okay. You know, that you're going to make it, and that you're not going to need an operation, and that you're going to be completely cured. You know, by the end of the chemotherapy. You're, you know, you're kind of completely focused, and you've been adamant, as well, all the way through that we're going to do all the things possible, to make the outcome, you know, the best possible outcome.

So, we've been walking every day, you know, after every meal, even if it's just for 10 minutes. Even, even on the days when you had absolutely no energy, and you've been sick. And you haven't been able to do anything. And, but regardless of that, we've always gone after every meal for a walk. To keep your body moving, to make you feel better mentally as well.

Juana: Yeah. But, but it it's that, no? You always have been there, you know? Like I, I go for a walk to the park. You've been with me. I, in the night-time, after dinner, zero degrees outside. Maybe you don't feel like to go for a walk 10 or 15 minutes around the block. And you always been there. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's fine. It's fine. You know? And you've been very positive as well.

You've been very, patient. Like before, for example, I knew all these qualities of, of you, but now is like more, stronger, you know? Like we have been, like a team

together. Before we were already, but now it's like, all these things are stronger. All the lines between us have helped make us stronger. Now...

Hannah: Umm-hmm

Juana: I have the best wife in the world.

Hannah: I think that the, the biggest, and probably most obvious thing that I would like to have changed in life now, is for Juana to be healthy. And for me to be healthy. And for both of us to recover from this, so that we can get back to doing all the things that we had planned to do. Perhaps before felt a bit more like, sort of a given, you know? I never expected at this age that we'd be facing this. Of course, though, many people do. And, and younger still.

We were both really fit and healthy before this happened. You know? We'd spent the last couple of years cycling around the world. And Juana, you are super healthy anyway. You don't smoke. You, you eat very healthily. Your vegetarian. You keep fit.

Juana: Yeah, I've been, yeah, I've been vegetarian for more than 22 years. Normally I go to work on the bicycle. I've been cycling for two years, and sailing for other three four years. Normally, I have a happy life. So, me after this, just what I want is to be healthy and, and, and do the things, what I really want to do.

Hannah: It's been quite interesting, because you've had some coaching sessions. From what you've said, one of the things that's come out of that is learning to be happier with the things that you have around you, and the small things. Being grateful for being able to walk around the park. Appreciating being in a safe and comfortable home and being with your friends and...

Juana: Yeah, to realise, no? To see how, to be happy you don't need, for example, now I have cancer, I cannot be traveling with my bicycle, but I can do other things. And me, for example, me, I forgot to be grateful, no? To say thank you. And to be more connected with the universe, for example.

We've been lucky to have the house next to the park. We can go every day and say, thank you to the beautiful flowers. And it's like, you know, simple things like a flower, to make you happy because it smells good, and you see it's beautiful, and colourful, and it's like, wow. To look the sunset or sunrise, or the colours in the sky, to say, wow, that's, that's beautiful. Thanks universe.

So that little things, I forgot, you know, I forgot to, to look, a, around me, and say thanks for what I have. Cause I'm lucky to have, to be in a nice house. And I'm lucky to, to have my friends supporting me. And I'm lucky to have you, to have my family, the things that you need to live. And now that the more important thing is, it's not the things; it's your health, it's my health, you know?

Hannah: For me as well. I think it's, it's really important that we spend as much time as possible together. You know? I don't want to, to commit, for example, to going and having a full-time job. I want to be able to be in the house. I want to spend the time with you. I think that's the most important thing. That's the most precious thing that you can give to somebody, your time. And, to share and to be supportive, and to be together. That's one of the things that I really regretted after my mum died. Cause I felt like I didn't really spend enough time with her when she had her cancer diagnosis.

The whole project is a way of working that I've never worked in before as an artist. And it's a way of working that you've never worked in, cause you're, you have never worked as an artist. So, it feels like something very uncertain, and parallel to the experience that we're having anyway.

We're getting to know each other in a way that we haven't ever known before. You know? Going on walks and then sitting and then talking. I don't think we would've had these conversations, if we hadn't gone through this process.

You know, the painting obviously is, is about Joya, but it's also about the whole of Andalucía, because that's your home, that's where you come from. So, there's this idea of touching on and reflecting on all of that, and bringing that together with our environmental concerns, that we both share, that are becoming more acute. And, I suppose at the same time, thinking about the whole process as being an outlet for us both, emotionally, like an art therapy. And it's something that we are doing together, which is really exciting and fun. It feels like it's a really positive thing. And it means that we're sharing time, doing something really constructive. And yeah, I just really like the whole thing. I just really like the whole experience of it.

Juana: Yeah. For me it's, it's the first time I'm going to do something, something like this. So, for me in this moment, to do this art, is therapeutic. All this made my, my mind, don't think about the cancer, you know? Concentrate in the art, in what we want to do in, in the Mediterranean forest, and all these things. It's something very nice.

Hannah: How do you feel about making a painting?

Juana: Yeah, I think, I feel excited. I'm looking forward to see how it's going to be.

Hannah: And how do you feel about sharing this conversation with other people?

Juana: It's going to be good because, um, maybe if some, someone, listen, maybe someone knows someone with cancer or maybe, anyone can have cancer sometime. So, it's, it is good for the people to say, you can make it, and, and don't worry because, no because you have cancer, you're going die. So, you can survive. It's going to be a big celebration because for the moment, everything going very well and it's going to be okay. Yeah.

