

VANESSA

That's wow, that's amazing. So, what does that award mean?

YANE

So, I guess normally each year in every university, they select a person for finishing a PhD, has to be only one person through the entire university. So it's a competition from each department to the faculty from each faculty going to the top. So I didn't make it to the top top, but I probably was second or third rank. So still, the nomination is huge. It's an accomplishment.

VANESSA

Wow. That's really, really awesome. Congratulations.

YANE

Thank you.

VANESSA

What would you say then inspired you to pursue a career in STEM?

YANE

I always knew I would be a scientist. I was an inquisitive girl who loved nature. I think my father in particular encouraging my curiosity and introduced me to experimentation. So he wasn't a scientist, but he had a mind of like one. I was always going to study science. I was just so comfortable with learning. So I wanted to be a paleontologist. In fact, because I love evolution, but I didn't know, I would become an immunologist, until I witnessed the devastating effects of cholera epidemics in my country. So, I knew then that I wanted to devote my life to saving others from disease.

VANESSA

So, would you say that that was maybe not a defining moment, but a defining experience that you had?

YANE

Definitely, I that changed my appreciation for life, or science, for everything. It's very, very hard when you have when you see kids particularly, being afflicted and dying. Yeah, I mean, you can't be in different. Yeah, so I changed from wanting to be a paleontologist study evolution to study infectious diseases and hopefully save people from those diseases.

VANESSA

So going from studying things that were in the past, sometimes the very distant past, to studying what was happening basically right in front of you.

YANE

Exactly.

VANESSA

So how would you say, your undergraduate or graduate studies or both helped to mold your career path?



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YANE

Not an easy answer. So I took a pr

to bump into these walls, or I call it the negative data and that directs you to find your way of exit, you know, so it's, you have to follow the data, and you don't know what you're gonna get. So they just go after the data that you have. So experimentation can be quite frustrating. Slight percent of experiment do not work. So having a plan B, keeps you moving forward. I always had two or three projects going on at the same time. So if I get stuck in one, so if you are just like, the experiments are not working, you can always jump to the next one, or to the next one, and keep making progress. So yeah, it's not easy. Yeah. But you can do it, you can manage.

VANESSA

Awesome, thanks for that. I would like to move a little bit into some of the more, shall we say negative aspects of your experience, just because I think that people listening can really learn from hearing about how people have overcome issues, and also can then relate to those in many ways as well. So do you have a less than great moment or an issue that you had to overcome that you might be able to share with us?

YANE

Absolutely. I have many.

VANESSA

Please, yeah. Whatever you're comfortable with.

YANE

One of the biggest hurdles I faced, I guess, is the sexism in academia. It's real. And it's strong. So I was always pitted against men, and when I show my strength and competency, I was eventually respected. It was particularly hard because my interests have always led me to male dominant spaces where my leadership was not necessarily appreciated. I would say that some resent me for my leadership skills now.

VANESSA

Right.

YANE

Whether it was in Peru or in Canada, I had to work hard to be respected. My expertise was not always valued. At first, I found that the higher you climb the ladder, the harder it is to be heard as a woman. That's why I feel so strongly about mentorship. So my female mentors gave me the recognition of freedom to shine. And I was capable of generating and sharing my ideas. And that's how I feel I advanced. In contrast, I found that male mentors, especially the younger ones and macho ones to be less open and supportive.

VANESSA

Interesting.

YANE

I guess something that's important to share with the immigrant community, a difficult hurdle for me was the language barrier. So I arrived in Vancouver with an understanding of the language but my spoken English was very poor. So I had lots of knowledge to read, and I was an incredible, hard



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worker. But, I never felt that I was taken seriously because I didn't master the language or the accent. So I guess my Peruvian accent affected my credibility as a scientist and as a leader. So even to this point, I feel a bit self conscious about it. And that my language is like a barrier.

That's awesome. I'm curious if you have an idea of how your field or your research topics will be changing in the future,

YANE

I guess in my case, and I feel for many scientists, this is an important time. Like the pandemic actually highlighted the research and scientists, specifically immunologists, we can finally see their efforts translated into cures for many diseases now. So if we just go back 60 years ago, 100 years ago, we barely knew what cancer was. Even four years ago, scientists were baffled by HIV.

VANESSA

Yes, that's right.

YANE

Now cancer is better understood and treatable. Patients with HIV have greatly increased life expectancy. Scientists even developed a COVID vaccine in we think a year so this is fantastic for the world in general. So, I think hopefully now, the population are valuing the scientists because before, not many people knew what we do you. Yeah, hopefully the governments do understand that we need science. Without science, we can't progress. And we can see now how what is happening in our own country, we can't produce the vaccine, here in Canada not even reproduce, because we don't have an infrastructure for that. So, hopefully we can understand now that we need support for science and scientists.

VANESSA

Yeah, absolutely. 100% agree. And actually, kind of on that note, in terms of how your work kind of relates to the world at large, I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about your community, ImmunoLatinXs? Tell us a little bit about what that is and what you're doing with it.

YANE

Sure, this just came out in I guess, in last year. So due to my background in immunology and infectious diseases, I have been invited to give some talks in Latin America, especially for an audience for the population. So because everybody was wondering, what is a virus? What is an antibody? What is a vaccine? What is a pandemic? So we need to put a lot of the, knowledge translated a little bit about a science communication. So I was giving those talks and then one day I decided why not that I'm working more in Twitter, why I don't start doing this science communication, mobilizing the Latin American or Hispanic community to start delivering more science in Spanish. So I created ImmunoLatinXs, but also I didn't do it, just in Spanish, but also in English, so we can have more collaborations, we know that collaborations produce better results. So then the Latin American community could interact with the world in like, not only North America, but Europe, because now we are in a global pandemic. So we need to communicate what is happening. And so it just came out like that. So I started talking and then luckily, I have a partner, that is an immunologist, and I have my daughter, so we were all as a family working. And yeah, and that's how I started. And now it's like growing very fast. It's gonna be a year in May. So we are, well, actually, we're gonna celebrate the one year anniversary by promoting videos and more videos for the audience. And I'm already recruiting a lot of specialists. So they can inform people what is basic concepts of immunology, and also in general about the virus and the variants. So we can form a committee and talk to people and like populations. And that's exciting, because you see now that people are actually learning, before you couldn't see the person talking about an antibody, what is this like protein? And now everybody, it is like, common language for everybody here.

VANESSA

Yeah, yeah. I mean, when you're in a pandemic, and that's pretty much all everybody's talking about. But in a way, it's positive, because it helps to get the awareness out of the things that you're doing, for example, so yeah, very interesting. And what positive impact would you like to see that work have in the future? Especially coming out of this pandemic, and sort of where we go on from this?

YANE

Yeah, so over the years, I have been fortunate enough to mentor a lot of students in lab funding

make, or how many people are going to know your name, you know, like, there are different levels of success that you can strive for. So I love that.

YANE

Thank you.

VANESSA

What about work life balance? This is something we ask a lot on our podcast, and also get varying answers. So I'd love to hear what work life balance looks like for you. And if you feel like you have a balance, or is it even a balance?

YANE

It's taken me forever to reach a point where I can actually rest without feeling guilty, you know? Yeah, I can sleep without having to rush at the door and start my day feeling stressed, you know that you, I don't know, arrive late to school, or just the traffic and all this. So just until this last year, like I was, I could say, I was so busy in my successes that I often just ignore myself, you know? Yeah, ignore myself. I achieved many things at expenses of my health. But now I'm feeling more balanced. I could rest take care of myself. And yeah, it's this year, despite the pandemic and all the negative things, actually

but has a lot of opinions. So each of us have differing opinions. And dinnertime everybody raising their hand because we want to talk. And we do the same for cooking. We all experiment. Yeah, so we have a nice place in Saturna Island. So I love going there because we can see nature. I love seeing the whales, whales is just like so fascinating. And even now in Vancouver, we're watching Netflix. And what else, I mean, we cook while I'm drinking my glass of wine. We did wine at home, we have a wine time, which is like one o'clock, I would like to say wine o'clock is fine. So then we all come and start cooking. And yes, yeah, it's just a family. I really, really, I guess, I will always call myself first I'm a mom. And then I am a scientist and all the rest. But I guess my family is my jewel, it's something that I appreciate.

VANESSA

Lovely. That sounds like a lot of fun. So, like to go into the lightning round. These are just quick questions where you just say the first thing that comes to mind and they're a little bit fun and help us get to know you a little bit differently, or a little bit better. All right. If you were trapped on an island and could only bring three things with you. What would they be?

YANE

So the island has water?

VANESSA

Yeah, I would say so.

YANE

Well, I guess it's just water so I will bring wine. So maybe fruits and maybe something like for shelter blanket or something? Then maybe yeah, I will say a blanket and maybe a knife so I can cook and wine.

VANESSA

Sounds good. You're making it into a little vacation.

YANE

You might as well, you have only one life.

VANESSA

I love it. That's great. If you weren't working in immunology. What would you be doing?

YANE

Oh, art. Definitely art. I will be painting. I love painting. I decided watercolor first, but now I'm moving into acrylic. Pouring, which is fun because you just mix colors and you don't know. So they will come up different colors. Yes. Cool.

VANESSA

Very, very cool. On that note then let's say you're a new addition to the crayon box. What color would you be and why? And you can make one up if you want.

YANE

Teal. I think I would be teal. There is no teal in the crayon. So I like something unique and beautiful.

VANESSA

Nice. Love it. And let's see, if you could travel back in time, what time period would you visit?

YANE

I'm crazy and I like the idea to go back to see the dinosaurs, guess this is my evolution and paleontologist. Yeah, part of it. So I would love to see how they live in this world. I would be a fly and watching, so I don't get eaten by them so just observing them.

VANESSA

I was just gonna say that way you can just, you know, land on a little rock and just watch what's happening. Love it. Alright, my last question would be if we were not in a pandemic, would you go to a movie alone?

YANE

No. Yeah, no, I will take somebody.

VANESSA

Yeah, more fun that way, I guess. Awesome. Well, thank you for answering our lightning round questions. We're coming to the end of our episode. And as we finish up, I would love to hear if you have any advice to give to the next generation of STEM professionals, especially those who have immigrated or immigrating to a new country.

YANE

Yeah, you know, if you're coming to Canada, I think the first thing that you want to do is seek and build a support system. So there are a number of organizations that offer help. I actually missed that and I wish I could have had that before. So I never had that. And I had to learn to do all by my own but no, now I see myself belong to many, many groups. We talk about the International Women's signs. And there are many, many more sites, we have lots and lots of groups. And also there are individuals like me that are willing to offer mentoring and advice, you know, so, but I guess the most important advice that I have is do not feel alone. And connect with other immigrants. That's something that I wish somebody could have told me when I arrived because I did feel alone. And I wasn't alone for a long time. So now I don't want any other women or any other immigrant to go through that journey. So that's why I'm working. Because we are here and we can help each other.

VANESSA

Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for doing that important work. And on that note, where can people connect with you?

YANE

So I'm not good at social media. The best way would be to put your Twitter, I'm becoming more a Twitter person. So my handle is @YaneValdezT so maybe LinkedIn. Yeah, so my daughter is pushing me to do LinkedIn lately. So I mean, I guess Twitter is both my own Twitter account and

Twitter and LinkedIn in our show notes. So everybody look out for those. So thank you so much for joining me today.

YANE

Well, thank you. It was fabulous. This is my first podcast, and actually it was cool. Very fun. Yeah. Thank you so much.

VANESSA

You're so welcome.

Outro

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