

Speaker 1 ([00:05](#)):

A diagnosis of breast cancer can cause a life changing ripple effect of impact affecting those. We love the most and those upon whom we lean for comfort and strength in the most challenging of times, my name is Aisling Hurley, and I'm the CEO of breast cancer Ireland. And you're listening to more than a lump, a podcast that talks openly and honestly, to a selection of guests about their very personal connection to breast cancer, be it through their career choice, their own firsthand experience of the disease, or through sharing the experience of close family members. My conversations will center on how breast cancer has informed their perspective on life, love, family health, their goals, and indeed their aspirations. Although each story is utterly unique. The one common thread that runs through each one is that breast cancer is more than a lump

Speaker 1 ([01:00](#)):

Juliet. Connell was just 41. When she was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer, a chance checkup. The GP led to the unexpected news that threw her world upside down. The Limerick native admits. She was simply not breast aware at the time in prime fitness and taking her health for granted. Juliet is now an outreach coordinator with breast cancer, Ireland bringing important messages of good breast health to the likes of transition year student, teachers, as well as community groups and companies in the Munster region. In today's episode, Juliet talks about how she didn't think for one minute that she would be the girl diagnosed and that the rash she spotted that later turned out to be a breast cancer diagnosis was more than a lump.

You're so welcome to more than a lump Juliet. And I'm thrilled to have a fellow Limerick woman here with us today. Um, there was no breast cancer in your family. Um, you're a keen cyclist. I know. And only 41 years of age when you were diagnosed. Tell us a little about your story.

Speaker 2 ([01:54](#)):

Okay. So thanks very much Aisling, for having me here today. And I suppose for me, yes. At the age of 41 was in breast aware, hadn't a clue of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, never self examined, um, fit well healthy. Um, you know, every three kids, um, didn't think for one minute that I would be the girl that would be diagnosed with breast cancer. But unfortunately I was, um, back in the 9th of March, 2012, I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Um, and I suppose 10 months before that, which would bring me back to June of 2011, when I first recognized a rash running across my collar bone on the left hand side and slightly down onto my, the top of my left breast. Um, I suppose every time I came back from a road cycle or even a spinning class, I used to do spinning classes, I'd recognize the rash, wasn't sort of touch it, wasn't itchy.

Speaker 2 ([02:47](#)):

And the only time it bothered me was when I went in to have a shower and the pressure of the water used to actually pierce me when I'd come out of the shower, I'd dry it off and I'd put Sudocrem on it. And within maybe less than 24 hours, the rash would be gone and wouldn't come back out again until maybe I was back out on the bike or exercising and to come back out. And I suppose the truth is I was never going to go to the GP with this. Um, number one, I did not know this was a sign or a symptom of breast cancer. And number two, I was probably too mean to spend the 50 euro with the GP, which was the biggest thing. Um, so I suppose a local chemist I went to and I spoke to a lady called Bernie, um, I'd know Bernie all my life probably and a great lady.

Speaker 2 ([03:31](#)):

And I asked her, would she give me cream, pulled on my top, showed her the rash? No, she said, I wouldn't be able to give you anything for that. You'd be better off going to the GP insisted I go to the GP. Um, but, um, didn't take her advice, obviously went home and still put the Sudocrem on cuz it was the cheapest option. Um, so then moving on to the 23rd of October, 2011, which my son got sick that, and I took him to the GP. And while I was there, I suppose Bernie's message was ringing in my ears, get it checked with the GP. So I happened to mention it to the GP. She examined me, um, asked me the irrelevant questions. Is there breast cancer in your family? Um, was I feel any way unwell had I lost any weight? The answer was no to every one of them.

Speaker 2 ([04:19](#)):

I, um, she said, look, I'm going to send a letter into the breast care unit at Limerick region hospital, just for precaution reasons, nothing to worry about. So I suppose I left and went home happy that she was happy and I was okay with it as well. And then that a appointment arrived out for the 9th of December. And I obviously I did go in, um, met the consultant, also told early, examined me and found nothing wrong. Asked me all the questions I answered no to them still. Absolutely feeling fine. Still out cycling, still spinning. I mean, we used to cycle a good bit on Sundays, like, and maybe some Wednesday evenings we'd go out on the bike. So we were training a good bit. My aim was the Wicklow 200 with my brother in 2012. And that was my plus the Ring of Kerry was thrown in there as well.

Speaker 2 ([05:04](#)):

And I suppose, um, and on top of that, I suppose that was the main aim was the cycling coming up. Um, so I had three kids at home and I suppose she wanted to send me for a mammogram that morning, I suppose. And I asked her like, was it today? And then she said, no, actually it won't be today. Um, you know, it's not urgent. You can, we'll wait for the appointment to come out on the post. So I left and went home and I suppose, uh, that appointment, uh, was three months by the time that appointment came out, which was March the 9th of March. And I suppose realistically for me, um, I suppose other things started to happen then, um, in January, my nipple started to get very sore on the left side, started to secrete a liquid from the tip of the nipple. Um, didn't contact back.

Speaker 2 ([05:49](#)):

The consultant I'd met in December, didn't ring my GP. I actually told nobody about this because part of me was a bit embarrassed. I was a bit vain. Didn't want anyone to know this was happening to my nipple. Thought it was a part of getting old. Um, so the Sudocrem was put on it but it didn't make any difference. It got really sore as time went on. So I suppose, um, lack of education kept me at home again. So then I went in for that mammogram and the 9th of March. Um, I had the mammogram first, uh, followed by an ultrasound, followed by a biopsy and then walked up to the breast care unit where the consultant I'd met that December was waiting to speak to me. And, uh, I suppose she had called my ex of kin, who was my sister, Mary. And, uh, she actually was there when I arrived up.

Speaker 2 ([06:34](#)):

So she kind of had a fair idea. Uh, so I hadn't a clue still as green as grass sitting there thinking everything was fine, but I kind of knew by my sister's face when I kind of saw her, I knew there was something wrong. So then she sat me down. The consultant said we've found cancer of the breast. Absolutely massive shock to me. I mean, I didn't take too lightly. Now I can tell you that, but I still age three. Yeah.

Now she actually couldn't tell me the type of cancer at the stage it was at, but she knew, I knew that it was, you know, fairly bad looking like, because she'd said they'd found the tumors two in the breast one in the lymph nodes, she said they were quite big tumors in the breast. They weren't at the surface of the breast. They were deep into the breast.

Speaker 2 ([07:18](#)):

You, um, so she said, look, you know, the following week I'd scanned in tests. And they came back and showed the cancer was still contained in the breast and in the lymph nodes. And I suppose more tissue sample tests and blood tests were taken again to be sent off to see what type of cancer it was and what stage it was at. Because as you all know, there, isn't just type of breast cancer out there and there's different stages. So that test took about three and a half weeks to come back. And it showed that I was diagnosed with Stage 3 HER -2 Positive Breast Cancer. So I suppose this is known as an aggressive type of breast cancer. And I suppose for me, um, I was very grateful with the treatment that I got at Limerick Regional Hospital at the breast care unit.

Speaker 2 ([07:59](#)):

The oncology unit was brilliant to me. Um, my treatment plan was to start first. They felt it would be best. They wanted to try and reduce the size of the tumors, uh, before I had to have the breast removed. And I suppose that day, I suppose, if I go back to that day, the night of March, they actually told me that day, what was going to happen? Chemotherapy, mastectomy, and radiotherapy. I definitely knew that day before I left the hospital. So I suppose they just needed to see what type of cancer it was. And thankfully the treatment was really went well. And, um, when I had the breast removed after the treatment, it showed a phenomenal result for me. There was actually no cancer found left in the breast. So chemotherapy Herceptin and the clinical trial drug, the passion of I was on that, um, three tablets I had to take every day at the same time. And then the Herceptin was with the chemo one every three weeks. And I suppose outstanding result was the cancer was completely gone when they removed the lymph nodes. They found one damaged, but my cancer was completely gone. So I, an outstanding result from fantastic the treatment. So,

Speaker 1 ([09:01](#)):

And you are still thankfully several years, several years later, cancer free which is amazing

Speaker 2 ([09:06](#)):

10 years. Uh, just since the 9th of March gone.

Speaker 1 ([09:09](#)):

Fantastic. Wow. Years. Yeah. That is remarkable. Yeah. And I suppose the support services of your family were key in your, your recovery, your journey. Yeah,

Speaker 2 ([09:19](#)):

Really. They were like, I mean, I have one sister, one brother, and at the time my mom and dad like were alive and I suppose the biggest worry was to give them the news. That was my biggest worry. I know I, kids were small. I was trying to spare them, but I needed, we lived in a small little parish and Limerick. So news travels very, very fast. And I think everybody was in shock when they heard that I was diagnosed

with breast cancer because I never got off the bike. I was constantly running, racing around the place. So I suppose my family were a huge support to me, my sister, my brother, like she was like constantly there, like, you know, constantly there for my brother was always saying, we'll go for, still go for a spin on a Sunday small cycle. We'll get back into it. And you know, everything will be fine. I knew by them, they were broken hearted. Like, um, you know, my mother and father were broken hearted and you know, it, it was tough. Like my, my, my friends as well, rallied around me and huge supports, you know, the dinners were being made and, you know, a huge support all around. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([10:22](#)):

And you need that at that time, you know, I hear definitely so many and it's amazing families and friends and neighbors who just, you know, take a road on board to just, you know, help out with somebody that has a diagnosis.

Speaker 2 ([10:33](#)):

The appointments were really, you know, coming fast in the door and taking the kids, making the dinners, asking can to do the washing and the ironing and, you know, even quick up and clean the house, fewer, you know, everyone was so good. Like, but you know, everyone was in such shock, like in the whole parish, like, you know, everyone was,

Speaker 1 ([10:55](#)):

I suppose, it's interesting, you know, 10 months, 11 months you waited. And I suppose that wait brought about your diagnosis of stage three, where it was very aggressive and very advanced. Yeah. Had you known, what would you tell your younger self?

Speaker 2 ([11:11](#)):

Okay. If I had had known, I mean the very minute I'd have noticed that rash, I would've went straight to the GP P um, I leave nothing to chance now. I mean, I'm probably over, I suppose, going to the GP a good bit, more like, you know, anything at all, I'd notice or recognize I'd be there in a flash now I leave nothing to chance. So what I would say is like never, you know, turn around and say, it might be nothing, or I'll leave it a week. I'll leave it two weeks. I'll leave it with, you know, so, you know, it's going, getting things checked out, checking them out early, early detection is definitely key. Absolutely. It is key going forward, to be honest.

Speaker 1 ([11:49](#)):

And now, um, thankfully you've joined Breast Cancer Ireland as an education and outreach coordinator, I suppose, because you are passionate about how you didn't realize that there were eight signs and symptoms for breast cancer diagnosis, and you didn't realize that it could happen to younger women. Yeah. And I suppose, you know, now in the Munster region, you're out there talking all the time with the complementary program to schools and to companies and to community groups. Tell us a bit about that work.

Speaker 2 ([12:14](#)):

Okay. So I truly love my job. I really do. I mean, I, I just, I feel so positive about giving this information out there because like I said, lack of education for me was huge. If I had known those eight signs and

symptoms. So I feel, you know, traveling around to school, speaking to transition year students, 50 years, six years, um, teachers, people in the community, people in the workplace it's given them, I suppose, and given this information from a young age as well. So it's going forward in their lives. The idea is no matter what they notice, no matter how small and significant it may be, the idea is please go and get that medically checked out. It doesn't always have to turn out to be answer, but at the same time, the important thing is that you are getting it checked out and you're not sitting at home. Exactly.

Speaker 1 ([13:00](#)):

And I suppose things we've always spoken about at breast cancer Ireland is knowing your norm, you know, knowing your baseline, if you know where you are, say this month, and you check yourself if something arises that's abnormal in, anyway, you go immediately to your GP. Yes. You know, you triage on a medium, high risk, low risk yes. Basis. And then you're moved on into a breast clinic. Yes. If there's any concern, but you are seen. And I think that's what I noticed over COVID in the last two years that women sometimes were hesitant about going forward because they were fear of COVID and hospitals, et cetera. Um, and we were trying to reassure them. The hospitals are now so safe. The protocols are in place. Yes. Safety measures are in place and you will be seen. And it was interesting even pre COVID with you and your fellow coordinators, because we have coordinators in Lester and in Munster in providing this free program that you had met in the region of about 35,000 women and young girls over a 12 month period. And there were a few early detected cases as there was.

Speaker 1 ([13:56](#)):

And that's what makes it work.

Speaker 2 ([13:58](#)):

That's what makes it so worthwhile, to be honest, to meeting those people and helping those people. And I suppose, um, it's, it's being passionate about giving the information out there and people want to listen to this information. They're so grateful because you're showing them the eight signs of symptoms on our medical mannequin you're also showing them how to visually check and self examine once a month. And we're offering them a fantastic app, the free to download app to wear, which is absolutely unbelievable. I use that app myself every single month. So I'm really on top of my health. Like, and, you know, people are so surprised when they hear about the app and, you know, they're so straight away you'd even see like some of the students even going straight online with their phones now, because the majority of them can have their phones in classes now, and they're online, straight away downloading the app. So, you know, it's going to help people going forward in their lives. Definitely. You know, because it's important.

Speaker 1 ([14:51](#)):

And I think even more recently in, I suppose last October, we did a huge piece of research. Um, and we found that pre October, which is breast cancer awareness month, the level of self checking, the level of knowledge and the consistency monthly to check yourself was very low, which was shocking. Yeah. And I think we, you know, we take for granted that people understand about breast cancer. And I think people say, oh, I do understand about breast cancer. And I know you have to catch it early, but I don't necessarily know how to check this up properly. And I don't necessarily know the eight signs and symptoms, for instance, the majority thought it was just a lump, hence the podcast name it's more than a lump. Yeah. And hence, you know, your diagnosis was the rash. So I do think that it's, and I, I love some of the

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commentary and the feedback that I get from the schools where, you know, you're talking to young girls of like 15, 16, 17.

Speaker 1 ([15:39](#)):

Yes. Um, and it's not necessarily to, it's never to scare them, but it's more to use them nearly as social ambassadors. Yeah. That they then go home to mommy and granny and auntie. Yeah. And they're talking about it. I had one feedback from a school recently, the principal who said that a lady, a parent had rang in to say she was thanking them for the amazing talk that had been given because her daughter brought the shower card home, talked about the app and the following day she was having a shower and noticed she had two of the symptoms yeah. And signs and was later diagnosed and has, you know, had her full mastectomy. Yeah. So, you know, it does work, awareness will save

Speaker 2 ([16:13](#)):

Lives. It's powerful. It really, really is. And like that, you know, when you're presenting in the schools, the T wise and 15, six years, I always say, and like, I always say to them, take that card home, you know, leave it on the kitchen table, leave it on the workshop. You don't even have to have the conversation. If you don't want to, you can just leave that there. It's lovely. It's pink that get up all the signs and symptoms on it. The information about the app is at the back of it. And you know, you'll be helping a loved one, you know, and to recognize these signs and symptoms, which is so important, to be honest, you know, I, I truly believe that this is the way to go. Like, you know, we absolutely education is key. Education is key going

Speaker 1 ([16:50](#)):

Forward. Yeah. Because it is all about awareness I and Juliet. And thank you so much for coming here today. Really appreciate having the chat. And I suppose for anyone that's interested in our complimentary education and awareness program, please contact www.breastcancerireland.com Um, we'll put you in touch with your regional coordinator who will be happy to come to talk to your school, your teachers, your organizations, or community groups in your area. Thanks, Julietta.

Speaker 2 ([17:13](#)):

Thank you so much, Aisling.

Speaker 1 ([17:15](#)):

The information in this podcast is based on the personal stories of those. We have chatted to. If you are concerned in any way, please contact your GP immediately, or you can contact us at breast cancer, ireland.com.