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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 Ash 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 enter on how breast cancer has informed their perspective on life,

Speaker 2 ([00:45](#)):

Love,

Speaker 1 ([00:46](#)):

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 Demi had a day was just 41 years of age when she was dying, diagnosed with breast cancer early last year, six months after she had first found a lump in her right breast, following four months of chemotherapy, 16 sessions of radiotherapy, and soon to be reconstructive surgery. Demi joins us today to share importa messages on the importance of good breast health and especially amongst women in the African community in Ireland. Demmy, you're very welcome here today. It's so lovely to meet you and thank you for taking the time to share your story with more than a lump podcast community. Before we go into your breast cancer story, would you mind telling our listeners a little bit about yourself?

Speaker 2 ([01:41](#)):

Um, thank you for having me. My name is Demmy and I've been living in Ireland for about 20 years. Um, I work with the homeless before my breast cancer diagnosis, and I have a son. His name is Tommy and, um, yeah, that's me

Speaker 1 ([02:12](#)):

Super take us back then to those months, during the pandemic, when you obviously noticed something was different,

Speaker 2 ([02:21](#)):

In 2020, June, 2023, I think it was the 15th of June. So I woke up in the morning, did all my chores and all that. And I always check and this day I just, I was bought because everybody's home and I checked my breast and I found a lump and I checked again, keep checking, maybe it's a mistake or something. I don't know. So I found it like twice, uh, three times and I called my GP. I said, okay, I wanna in, I found a lump. And she was like, okay, come in. So I had just rushed down within the hour and went down there, getting to my GPS place. I was there and she was just checking for like 20 minutes. She couldn't, she asked me are you sure you found it? I said, yes. And you must find it.

Speaker 2 ([03:24](#)):

And she was like, okay, after a few minutes she found one. I only found one when I checked and when she checked, she found another one. Wow. So she said, oh, okay. I'll just refer you to James Hospital, just

to put ur mind at rest. See if it's just a lump or I was like, no, don't say that yet. Let me check first. Yeah. And she was like, okay, fine. So she referred me, I was waiting for my, um, first appointment to go to James's see her for about five months. Oh yeah. For five months. And between June and November, my head was just all over the place. Could this be, could they not be pleased? Don't be, well, I went in and called breast consultant checked and yeah, it was like, ah, yeah, there's a lump, but you have to come back in for a mammogram ultrasound, an order, like, okay. So I had to wait again, November, December, and I got the appointment for the mammogram in January Then did the mammogram wait for 10 days or so for the result They found they found something and they just said, okay, you have to do ultrasound first to be very short. So I did that and I did deep biopsy mm-hmm <affirmative> then February 5th of February, 2021,

Speaker 2 ([05:13](#)):

I went in for the results and uh, he told me, oh yeah, the lump we found is cancerous. And you hve Stage 2 Breast Cancer. And I just asked him, are you sure it's me? He said, yes. Am I going to die? Said, no, it's not late. Then, I just walked out of the doctor's office andI started walking on. So it was like half way home. I'm like, oh, you're working.

Speaker 1 ([06:08](#)):

This is a long way. Yeah. <laugh>

Speaker 2 ([06:11](#)):

You're walking. I'm like, oh God. Yeah, I stopped. And I would you speak to again? I said, hello, are you sure it's me? And he said, yeah, okay, fine. I'm working on them. I just keep working. So I went straight upstairs and my room, but beforehand I told my son, he knows everything is going on with me. So he knows I'm going for the results. And he saw me go upstairs. He didn't come upstairs to me. I cried for like 20 minutes. And I called him. I said, told me, come upstairs. And I told him, the first thing he asked me is my son. He said, are you gonna die? That's what I said at the, at the doctor's. And I'm no more. I'm not. And it's just stayed to you. And he, he, he wanted to cry, but it couldn't do it in front of me. So he went outside and came back an hour later, gave me big. And that's how, that's how we found out. And from then on appointments every week to do my lump, uh, to get, uh, just started getting ready for the procedure. And that was it.

Speaker 1 ([07:48](#)):

Yeah, it's a, it's a hard diagnosis to have. And it's a hard diagnosis. When you are told your treatment plan. As I often say to people, you know, the treatment plan is different for every single person that presents because you genetically we're all very different. So some go through lumpectomy, some go through, you know, not having surgery, but just having, you know, chemo and or radiation therapy, hormonal drug therapies, you know? So how did you feel when you were told you had to have a mastectomy?

Speaker 2 ([08:17](#)):

I cried because I'm going to say this. My breast is my best possession. <laugh> yeah. That's what I like the most of my body. Yeah. Yeah. And having to have one off. Oh, I couldn't. I was like, I couldn't pick a day for the surgery on time. Like they had to like keep talking to me. Then one day I just like, okay, I'm ready. The 5th of May. 12 days to my birthday. <laugh> I picked then. But before then I had a lump, um, some

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lump taken out of my. So a month before and May 5th, I had my mastectomy. I cried going in. I cried when I wake woke, uh, when I woke up, like I just went this way. Oh God. And that was it. Then I called my friends that I didn't tell before. And they saw me on the hospital bed. Why are you in the hospital? I'm like, uh, okay. I had breast cancer. I didn't tell you because I'm not ready to tell anybody, some of you yet. And now I'm ready. And on a video call, everybody was crying. I'm like, okay, bye. I'm not crying anymore. I'm done crying for now.

Speaker 1 ([09:52](#)):

And how do you think they reacted? Obviously they were shock.

Speaker 2 ([09:56](#)):

Yeah. Everybody was crying and some didn't cry right in front of me. They had to go off the phone and few hours later they called me and we talked. Yes. Sad. Um, just sad. I think they were just sad. It's up needs to me because I asked the same question. Why did this happen to me?

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

And there was no history in your family?

Speaker 2 ([10:24](#)):

There is a history in my family. My aunt died back home. Yeah. But this is me. I'm just asking. Why did this happen to me? I'm healthy. I'm this? Why did you pick me? well, well, yeah, it picked me,

Speaker 1 ([10:45](#)):

You know, I know you're soon to go for your reconstruction, which is fantastic for you because it was very important for you to have the reconstruction. Oh yes. At what point did your team talk to you, you know, pre their surgery for your mastectomy or just after that? About the possibility of having a reconstruction?

Speaker 2 ([11:01](#)):

A pre-surgery. Okay. They told me pre-surgery because first of all, they looked at my, um, they said I'm young mm-hmm <affirmative> so, and I'm like, okay. Yeah, I have to, I can't be going around with one boob Like, so we did the, they told me before pre mastectomy, so, and, um, so they told me after mastectomy, I have I'll get the chemo done. radiotherapy then wait before my construction.

Speaker 1 ([11:37](#)):

Okay. And do you know what type of reconstruction you're gonna go went for?

Speaker 2 ([11:42](#)):

Um, I'm having the, the, uh,

Speaker 1 ([11:48](#)):

Oh, the DF lap flap one. Okay. Yeah. Where they're using your own tissue and your own muscle. Brilliant. Okay. Well, that's an exciting something more to look to look forward to, I suppose.

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Speaker 2 ([11:57](#)):

Oh yes. I'm looking forward to that.

Speaker 1 ([11:59](#)):

And tell me, how did you tell your family, like family at home? Like at what point did you tell your mom? And,

Speaker 2 ([12:07](#)):

Um, I told my younger ones as soon as got the diagnosis, but I didn't tell my mom until after radiotherapy because my mom, I know she will be very, very worried if I tell her beforehand, be like I told her from the beginning, she'll be worried every day. Probably be crying every, every day be calling me every day, which I really don't want too much calls. So I told my mom after my treatment then told my younger ones, as soon as I got the diagnosis.

Speaker 1 ([12:53](#)):

So Demmy, you wait it some time to tell your mom. I know, because you were fearful that she'd worry so much about your treatment and you, you yourself had to deal with it. But culturally, I know we've chatted about the African community and their religion playing a massive part of their lives. To the extent that science or medicine takes a backseat. Were you fearful?

Speaker 2 ([13:18](#)):

I wasn't fearful. No, because I believe in God. Yeah. And I believe in science, so all I just want is to get well, and I know science and doctors will do that, but God is just for praying, for strength to just give me strength, to be able to get well and the strength to be able to get all the treatment in me and be able to get everything, like, just ask God for guardians, the, at all I did but in the African community, the religion part is the most part and science. Do they believe in science, but they would like rather pray and give you some only water to drink, tell you, oh, you'll be fine. But science can't just take the back seat. So have heard stories of like people that got the diagnosis and they started praying at home, not going to the hospital early enough to be cured.

So, but I didn't do that because I believe more in science . I believe in God as well, but more in science. I just pray to God for guidance. Yeah. To guide me. So in the community in African community, people should come more when they have any kind of diagnosis to encourage other people. And, um, please, as, and as well, science is very, very, very, very important. All we just need to do is pray for guidance and they'll work together. When the, um, when you have diagnosis like this, it's not the end of the world. it's just to find a solution to what the problem is.

Speaker 1 ([15:35](#)):

It's just so important to understand your own body, understand and know what the symptoms are of breast cancer on a regular basis, you know, check yourself. We would often say, please check yourself monthly. Therefore, if you know what your base normal is, if you spot an abnormality down the way, you will really detect it quite quickly. Yeah. And you'll say, oh, oh, that wasn't there last month. And then you go to your GP like you did. Um, and your outcome, like you is much, much more positive, which is really important. Yeah. And I do think, you know, yes, religion is hugely important as you say, for guidance and hope and to look after you and to give you the strength to get through the journey that you had to go

through. Because I mean, at chemo and radiation therapy, this is grueling time that you did have to go through and you do need support, but science is really so advanced and research has come so such a long way.

Speaker 1 ([16:25](#)):

Yeah. You know, that people can be helped. And I suppose one of the key things for breast cancer Ireland from the start is we are set up to make sure. And to really our vision is to transform breast cancer from often being a fatal disease, because we do have about 690 deaths annually into a treatable long term illness. And I suppose when you look at the fatalities, these are cases that are caught too late. These are cases where people have either decided, look, it'll go away. I don't wanna talk about it or sure. Look, I'll wait till next month. Maybe it'll be gone. Or as you say, for religious reasons that they really think and pray to God that God will make it go away. Yeah. Um, and that's unfortunately yeah. Not the case.

Speaker 2 ([17:09](#)):

Yeah. Like you said, we know our body very well when something is going on in the body. But in my case, I just found a lump. I was, I wasn't having any symptoms. It was, I wasn't tired. There wasn't any change in my breast. There was no tenderness. There was nothing. So I just found it. But some people do have these symptoms and they just shy away from it and say, oh, I'm just tired. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and I'm just tired. Oh, I have a headache. Take a breath and I'll be fine. No, mm-hmm <affirmative> I think people should stop doing that to themselves. Because so most, well, most people just go, oh, um, I just have a line and it to go. And if it's something like, I, what I have, it could be growing and growing and you think, oh, until it's very late. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([18:15](#)):

Yeah. And I think as well, and I, I think this is, there is a common thread because I don't think it's very specific to an African community that people react like that. I think Irish people react like

Speaker 2 ([18:24](#)):

That. I think everybody, yeah.

Speaker 1 ([18:25](#)):

I think everybody does. But I think what we need to try and do is allay are fears and just tell women and indeed some men, but tell women in general that, you know, understand the eight signs and symptoms. And that's why I suppose the podcast is called more than a lump because there are other signs and symptoms. Yeah, yeah. You know, yes. Fatigue Tarus can play a part in the very early stages, but like, you know, we can have diming on the, on the breast, which is like cellulite, uh, like orange peel, you know, and that's a tumor on the inside pulling at the breast skin. You can have one breast lower than the other one breast that gets much bigger than the other. You can have a gland in your armpit. That's swollen. Yeah. You know, you can have nipple, um, a discharge or, you know, the nipple can go inverted or, or extra out outwards.

Speaker 1 ([19:11](#)):

And I suppose they're the things that you just need to know and pick a date and say, well, if I'm looking at myself today and this is what I see, and this is what I notice. Yeah. If I spot anything months down the

line, then I know that's a difference. Yeah. And that's the key. And I suppose that's something and I am delighted. You're here with us today because I think that's something that we really need to empower women everywhere, everywhere to just be breast aware, you know, take control of their bodies, um, you know, empower themselves to know what's what's right. And what's not right down the line. If something does show up as an abnormality and really, you know, be strong enough to go to the GP, don't sweep it under the carpet because, and I, we all know you detected yours quite quickly. Um, others don't and that's where things are, where things can have a, a negative impact. Yeah. You know, I'm, I'm delighted that you were checking yourself.

Speaker 2 ([20:03](#)):

I do like check myself almost like every month because of the history in the family. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([20:11](#)):

And I suppose de Tommy was there and thankfully he was like 19 when you were diagnosed. Yeah. So he must have been your real rock for you during your treatment.

Speaker 2 ([20:19](#)):

Yeah, he was, it was very, very, very, very, very good weeks. Me, there are days I have my bad days it's there and the good days is, is a very good cook. So he cooks for me. Yeah. Brilliant. He's very good cook. So he cooks for me and it once and it does, again, it comes into my room during chemo, whenever I'm back from chemo and I'm at home, it comes to my room like every hour. I don't know how it does that. Maybe has an alarm on his phone. <laugh> to come check, are you okay? Yes. And sometimes it gives me massages my feet when I have the bone pain and all that. So it was very good. Tell

Speaker 1 ([21:08](#)):

Me, you know, how did you feel? Where did you get your inner strength to be able to take this disease head on, um, cope with the treatment that was down the road for you, which was surgery. It was chemotherapy. Was radiation therapy. How did you deal with that?

Speaker 2 ([21:27](#)):

Um, first of all I am a May born, Taurus born. So we have the strength to conquer anything now. Before before my diagnosis, I'm a very, very, um, strong willed person. I'm very dependent. So when I got my diagnosis, like, I'm like, I just talk, oh my God. My life is about to take a pause for like a year. Am I going to do this? So, um, during the chemo period, I love music. So I get, sometimes I get my strength from listening to music. It takes everything of me thinking about the chemo pain or the next treatment or anything. So I listen to music and, um, I just, I don't know how I got this strength from inner me to do it, but I know music played a part and well, my son do play a part as well because I have something I'm I have something to live for my family and myself.

Speaker 2 ([22:49](#)):

Absolutely. I'm still young, so I need to do this. So I just eat it head on. I'm like, okay, I'm going to do this. I'm not dying. I'm not, I'm going to make sure I'm okay for myself, my family, friends and my son. So yeah, there are days like, no, I don't want to see anybody don't want to do this. I don't want to come out of my

bed. But most of the time, I just, when I just think of me, I'm doing this for me, then I just get open. It's the, uh, like do what I have to do.

Speaker 2 ([23:35](#)):

I get my strengths as well from, um, my, my younger one. I, especially my younger sister, she calls me and just, we talk about growing up things and just what we do then that pushes me talk to my dad. Even I talk to my mom during my chemo, but she doesn't know anything was happening. So she just go, oh God bless you. I like, Hey man, I need that. Even though I'm not, I didn't tell her anything. so she just saw her and said, oh God bless you. I'd like, Hey, my mom. So just, I think I got my strength from my family, my son, and from myself. pushing myself to do it. Yeah. Thanks to my son. I was able to go to chemo and radiotherapy.

Speaker 1 ([24:31](#)):

Super. Yeah. It's important. You were so lucky that he was old enough and not like teen, that you would have to mind him and yourself. That would've

Speaker 2 ([24:40](#)):

Been myself.

Speaker 1 ([24:40](#)):

Yeah. Much more harder. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([24:43](#)):

Uh,

Speaker 1 ([24:43](#)):

Demmy, tell me if there was a message that you would like to give to your community, to your family, to relatives, what would you say to them in relation to religion and science?

Speaker 2 ([24:58](#)):

One thing I would say is religion has its own part of their play for science play. The most part of it. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and God forbid, anybody got the diagnosis. I, anybody I know gets, it goes straight to the doctors. Science is key. Not the religion is key. It's really? John comes in after science mm-hmm <affirmative> mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah. Just make sure you go to the doctors all the time, check yourself. Don't be afraid to go to the doctors. When you find anything strange in your body, men or women, we can find anything on our body. Just <affirmative> go straight to the doctors. Mm-hmm <affirmative> do not let the religion power of it. Like stop you from going to the doctors. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([25:58](#)):

It's a positive story. It's a hopeful story. And it's one, as you say, you detected it early. That's the key, you know, and, and that, and that's the most important because now you are out come, you've had your mastectomy, you know, you've had all your treatment and you are looking forward to your

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reconstruction. Yeah. And please, God, you know, many, many years of happiness with Tommy at home and, you know, moving on with life.

Speaker 2 ([26:19](#)):

Yeah,

Speaker 1 ([26:19](#)):

Yeah. No, fantastic. 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 [breastcancer, ireland.com](mailto:breastcancer@ireland.com).