

CC-Paxman Scalp Cooling-Claire & Rich

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[intro]: Will I lose my hair? It's a question most people ask when they begin treatment for cancer. When Sue Paxman, a young mother of four, was in treatment decades ago, she was especially bothered when her hair fell out. Claire Paxman tells her brother Rich about the moment she stood in the bathroom with their late mother, holding the scissors to help her cut her long, curly hair.

Their mother's experience inspired the family's work in scalp cooling technology, a therapy that helps minimize hair loss for patients. They explain how scalp cooling works and recall their beloved mom in this episode of Your Stories.

[Claire]: She was a fun-loving, beautiful, stunning lady. She just carried everything so well, full of life.

[Rich]: Yeah. Always smiling, that's what I remember. Nothing ever got her down, which was pretty amazing to say what the lady went through. Always positive and sort of go-getter attitude. Nothing got in her way.

[Claire]: That's what inspires me every day because with what she did go through, she never, ever showed that. She had different names for all the appliances and different things in the house. A washing machine was a 'waselcrat,' the bath was a 'basilcrat.' So she'd go and say, "go and run to the 'basilcrat,' or go and take the clothes out the 'waselcrat.'"

[Rich]: A crazy lady, really. I think that might be a good description of her. What was the most standout piece of her appearance wise?

[Claire]: Definitely her beautiful, curly hair, which she loved and was a big, big part of her.

[Rich]: And it meant so much for her to try and keep it.

[Claire]: It did. It was terrifying for her, wasn't it, to lose her hair when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

[Rich]: Do you remember it being diagnosed?

[Claire]: It's one of the things that stands out in my mind a lot.

[Rich]: How old were you?

[Claire]: 14.

[Rich]: I was 10.

[Claire]: Yeah, you were 10. It was frightening, wasn't it?

[Rich]: It was frightening because we were very open in terms of potentially knowing she might only have a couple of years to live. Make no plans-- that's what she was told.

[Claire]: Can you imagine being told that?

[Rich]: Not at 36. Well, any time.

[Claire]: It doesn't even bear thinking about. She was diagnosed twice, wasn't she?

[Rich]: Yeah, a recurrence five years later. We thought we were in the clear.

[Claire]: Yeah.

[Rich]: I used to go and sit with her for chemo.

[Claire]: The second time around.

[Rich]: The second time because it was only up the road from college.

[Claire]: Yeah.

[Rich]: Not that I think she enjoyed me being there because it was probably a private moment, and she didn't want to know she was ill.

[Claire]: Yeah. One of the worst things I've ever had to do, but gives me the passion and drive for what we do now when that was stood in the bathroom with orange-handed scissors from the kitchen, cutting that beautiful, beautiful, curly hair off. 14 years old. Yeah, you shouldn't be stood in the bathroom, cutting your mom's hair off because she's having chemotherapy for cancer. I should have been shopping with her or teenage arguing with her.

[Rich]: Or going to the hairdressers with her, definitely not cutting it off.

[Claire]: Go to the hairdressers, yeah. Not cutting it off. But it was the first time she cried, wasn't it, Rich, when she started to lose her hair.

[Rich]: Well, she could hide it before that. Not hide it, but keep that positive attitude. And people didn't have to know she was sick. So that visible sign, isn't it? As soon as you cut it off, it was that clear sign she was going through chemotherapy treatment and, ultimately, that she was dying. Because she didn't like wigs, did she? She'd wear a baseball cap most of the time.

[Claire]: She did. She really suited a baseball cap. As you'd get older, it becomes more real, doesn't it?

[Rich]: It certainly does. Actually talking about it now is making it feel very real to me. But what we do every day makes it a little bit easier I think, knowing that we're helping people.

[Claire]: Absolutely.

[Rich]: We've been now scalp cooling for the last 20 years, which is quite a historic moment, really, so.

[Claire]: 20 years, Rich.

[Rich]: A long time has gone by.

[Claire]: Should we talk about scalp cooling, what it is.

[Rich]: Scalp cooling is a treatment that's been around probably since the 1980s. Older forms of scalp cooling included sort of gel caps and ice packs.

[Claire]: Bags of peas. Bags of peas, even.

[Claire]: Bags of peas.

[Rich]: But our device, very simple refrigeration device. It pumps a liquid coolant around a soft silicone cap, which can be single patient use. And what happens is we cool the scalp of the patient for about 30 minutes before the chemotherapy infusion, during the chemotherapy infusion, and, on average, 90 minutes after, depending on the type of chemotherapy that we're using.

[Rich]: So we restrict the amount of blood flow in chemotherapy that gets to the hair follicle, therefore protecting those high follicles from that toxic chemotherapy. What we also see is the drop in metabolic rate. So that metabolic rate means reduced cell division, so ultimately, less targeted effect of the chemotherapy.

[Rich]: And we do know that our hair cells are very similar to cancer cells in terms of rapidly dividing. So that slowdown really aids the protection. So we're seeing less and less hair loss. And it works in about 60% of patients. How many people do you think we've helped, though?

[Claire]: It's definitely in the hundreds of thousands.

[Rich]: Our overall goal is to make sure every single patient around the world, no matter where they are, has access to scalp cooling, whether they've got the income or not. And that's sort of key to everything that we do. And we'll continue to drive that forward.

[Claire]: All because of one incredible, special lady.

[Rich]: She was a special lady, very much so.

[Claire]: Who we miss dearly, don't we, darling?

[Rich]: We do.

[Claire]: Don't you feel proud?

[Rich]: Massively proud.

[Claire]: The fact that we're this family from a town in Yorkshire, [INAUDIBLE] it's wonderful. And that experience of cutting my mum's hair off at 14, if I can help any 14-year-old not to have to go through that, I'm sure it's the same for you.

[Rich]: It's far more than just a medical device business. It's because of mum, and it's, you know, that drive and passion to know that it might not be saving lives, but it's making a lot of people's lives a hell of a lot easier.

[Claire]: Yeah, helping them to live with cancer. And that's huge.

[Rich]: Hair loss, although it might not be a number one priority for a physician or a nurse, actually for a patient, it is one of those highest priorities. And we see that all the time. Even some patients will reject chemotherapy because hair loss. That shows how important it is for patients.

[Claire]: Yeah.

[Rich]: Everyone has their own motivations. That recent lady who didn't want to lose her hair because her daughter used to fall asleep twiddling it in her fingers.

[Claire]: We know about people who've got parents with Alzheimer's, dementia, and they don't want them to not recognize them.

[Rich]: There's tens and tens of thousands of individual reasons why people want to keep their hair. And the last one is vanity, so nothing to do with vanity.

[Claire]: People being able to go about their normal lives, have privacy.

[Rich]: Scalp cooling is now becoming an accepted treatment. So it's 3,500 scalp coolers installed around, what, 52 countries, treating new people every single day, which is phenomenal.

[Claire]: And that is Mum that's doing that.

[Rich]: Mum's legacy.

[Claire]: Definitely.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[Outro]: The Paxmans also honor their mother's legacy by supporting cancer research. You can donate in honor of someone you have lost to ensure continued improvements for patients everywhere. Learn more at conquer.org.

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