



**THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION**
An Cumann Camógaíochta

TELL THEIR STORY





About the Author

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Mary duffy: If you fall of the horse, you get straight back up

By Alanna Cunnane

Horse riding instructor Mary Duffy has always taken life by the reins, and doesn't plan on changing that anytime soon.

A Clontibret Camogie club woman, she was on the Monaghan minor Camogie team back in 2015 when she was diagnosed with cancer and given a 20% chance to live. She continues to overcome all the odds to represent herself, her family and her community day in, day out.

After a spell where she was easily bruising and waking up with persistent headaches, a trip to the doctor, and subsequently Drogheda A & E quickly found that she had acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL.

She began chemo at St. James's Hospital which she "sailed through" and pins to being so active at the

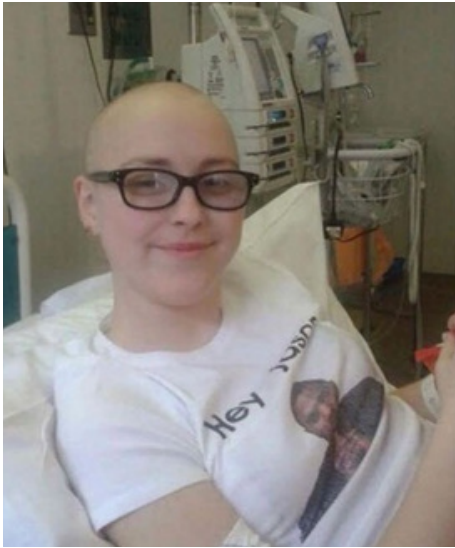
time, playing football, Camogie, basketball, horse riding and "everything or anything you could think of."

A bone marrow transplant followed, and while the procedure itself was successful, the complications saw a turbulent path for 16 year old Duffy at the time.

"My body was starting off from scratch," she explains.

"My immune system after that, and everything else just was so messed up.

"I had sepsis, I had pneumonia, I had everything. They gave you a list of all the things that could possibly happen and I got every single one of them.



“The bone marrow was fighting my body.”

Too far away to go back and forth to Dublin from Monaghan for check ins, the responsible transplant organisation provided accommodation near Kilmainham jail, which she frequented in between hospital stints.

After a long three years, she was able to move back home, although all was still not back to 100%.

“I went through a stage of vomiting all the time, so I had gone off food completely. Then I’d have anxiety eating food because anything I’d eat I’d throw it up,” Duffy says.

“I lost so much weight. I know when I look at pictures now, I remember that everyone was saying ‘oh my god, you look so well’

but how could somebody actually say that. I looked awful.”

Sitting at home with her family, Duffy had another serious and scary incident, prolonging her path to recovery once again.

“All I remember was sitting there and the next thing I know I was on the floor,” she says.

“I woke up to my dad with his fingers down my throat to hold my tongue. He’s a Guard so his instincts just clicked and that was it, he knew what to do.

“They rang an ambulance and the next thing I remember was I had wires everywhere and defib pads stuck in each place.

“The paramedics couldn’t get a vein because they had just collapsed so they had to drill into my knee. I’ll never forget the sound of the drill, it was horrible.”

Doctors then discovered that the episode was as a result of a twisted bowel, leading to Mary being fed through a tube, and in 2017 a recurring bout of sepsis and pneumonia meant she also had to have surgery on her lungs.

“It just kept getting so badly infected that I ended up having to get the lower part of my left lung taken out.

It was supposed to be a keyhole but it ended up having to be open surgery. I have a big scar then on my back, but after that I never looked back.”



Throughout that period of hardship, alongside her family, Duffy had one place she could always count on for support- her local Camogie club.

“They always involved me, they’re the only ones who never forgot about me,” she says.

“They always included me in the groupchat, and then when I was well enough I did coaching, and slowly got back to playing too.”

A familiar situation to many, she also got “roped in” at a stage to

being the chairperson for two years.

With the helping hand of the executive to assist her, she reflects that the public speaking and engagements included in that role really helped her confidence.

“It made me come out of my shell a bit,” she says.

“I literally only stepped down there last year because I started my own business, MD Equestrian, where I give horse riding lessons to kids and young adults.

I just couldn’t commit to the meetings and time that goes into it because I work late as well, so I gave that up last year, but I’m forever grateful for it.”

Losing her late teenage years to the illness, Duffy is determined to live life to the fullest now, although she’s well aware that she can’t “milk it anymore” at this stage!

Moving from once yearly checks to one every five years now, the 25 year old is well settled back into a routine at this stage.

“I was mollycoddled for so long and people were afraid of me going anywhere,” she says.

“I loved being the center of attention and at home now they don’t give me any special treatment, I’m actually normal now, so I have to get on with things.”

She’s back up on the horse, and better than ever. Who knows what she’ll tackle next.



Tell Their Story

