

Title: Investigating Major Crime with an Oxygen Tank Strapped to Her Back: RCMP Cst. Cathleen Falebrinza's Story of Resiliency

Show Summary:

Today on *Bend Don't Break*, your host Chief Neil Dubord is interviewing someone from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) – a first for the podcast! Cathleen Falebrinza is an RCMP officer who first was trained at the RCMP training academy 'Depot' in 2004. When she graduated in 2005, she was posted to Quesnel, British Columbia where she met her future husband, Stuart, who she now has been married to for 14 years and has two stepdaughters with.

In 2014 however, life as she knew it changed forever. During her time in the Chilliwack Serious Crime Unit she was diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis – a lung disease she was told could not be cured and would get progressively worse until she died from it. Cathleen didn't let this stop her, however. She continued to go to work and was fitted with an oxygen change on her back that she had to change out 3-4 times a day. She soon learned that having a double lung transplant would be the only way to continue living.

The incredible resiliency and passion Cathleen displays through her story is powerful. Her ability to come back in such a strong and dynamic way after facing such challenges and contribute in such a meaningful way to the community is second to none.

Tune in to hear about Cathleen's journey as she speaks about how she faced this incredibly challenging and life-changing health concern, how she balanced work, what helped most in her recovery – from her colleague's support to physical therapy, and where she is today with everything.

Key Takeaways:

[40] About today's episode and guest, Cathleen Falebrinza.

[1:14] Chief Neil Dubord reads a few of the emails they've received about the podcast!

[3:07] Cathleen speaks about her role as an RCMP officer and her journey to getting to that role.

[4:29] Cathleen shares what she was experiencing at the time when she was becoming sick and the ultimate deciding factor in her deciding to seek help/get diagnosed.

[7:13] Getting her diagnosis and what her life was like immediately after.

[10:08] Cathleen speaks about what this diagnosis meant for her career.

[11:17] Why did Cathleen immediately decide to go back to work after her diagnosis?

[12:13] Would Cathleen change anything now about this situation if she could?

[12:35] Cathleen speaks about showing up to work with an oxygen tank on her back.

[13:12] During this time did Cathleen go to see any counselors or psychologists?

[13:49] Did Cathleen have any days of, "Why me?" How did she get through them?

[15:22] Cathleen elaborates on the organ donation odds and process.

[15:47] After receiving her diagnosis, how long did Cathleen work for?

[16:45] How did Cathleen receive oxygen when she was asleep at home?

[17:08] How much did this all cost?

[17:50] How the organization helped reduce Cathleen's stresses related to her diagnosis.

[19:29] Does Cathleen believe everyone would receive the same treatment she did from the organization?

[20:40] How long was Cathleen at home for, waiting for a transplant?

[20:46] Cathleen tells the story of her transplant experience.

[25:14] What is Cathleen's husband's memory of the transplant experience?

[25:35] Waking up with a new pair of lungs: Cathleen shares her experience.

[28:00] Cathleen speaks about her family support at the time.

[28:58] What was her doctor at the time saying to Cathleen?

[29:11] What helped Cathleen's lungs begin to work?

[29:32] Does Cathleen know who's lungs she has?

[29:47] How does it feel to have new lungs? How does she feel toward the donor?

[30:50] 2 ½ years into receiving her new lungs, how does Cathleen feel now?

[31:47] Back at work, Cathleen speaks about the kind of work she is now doing.

[32:53] Cathleen speaks about life in general and reflects on the news of her diagnosis and learning that she needed an organ donor.

[34:24] Cathleen speaks more about the importance of becoming an organ donor.

[35:00] What Cathleen thinks helped keep her resilient and positive and be able to make it through to the other side.

[36:05] Chief Neil Dubord highlights some key parts within Cathleen's story.

[38:03] Cathleen gives a quick shout-out to the colleagues that supported her during this difficult time.

[38:48] How physical activity had a huge impact on Cathleen's health both physically and mentally.

[41:00] Chief Neil Dubord summarizes some of the key pieces in Cathleen's story that helped with her recovery and Cathleen brings up a few more key pieces.

[42:27] Chief Neil Dubord gives his many thanks to Cathleen.

[43:13] Chief Neil Dubord presents Cathleen with a commitment coin.

Mentioned in this Episode:

[Royal Canadian Mounted Police \(RCMP\)](#)

[Bend Don't Break Episode: "The Challenge of a Lifetime: Sergeant Ray Athwal's Wait for a New Heart"](#)

[Pulmonary Fibrosis](#)

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"It was important to me to keep my life as normal as possible ... and still make what was happening okay. It was part of accepting this inevitability of death, but it was doing it on *my* terms. I was not just going to go home and just die. I was going to do my death, my way." – Cathleen Falebrinza

"I really did not accept the news [initially]. It took me months to finally process: your life's never going to be the same, you have this new normal of living on oxygen, and now you have to introduce this new life to everyone around you." – Cathleen Falebrinza

"[My] whole identity changed in an instant ... that took me several weeks to process and accept." – Cathleen Falebrinza

"[We often] talk about [those moments] in combat or in high-stress situations at work [and] I finally experienced that – but it was in my bedroom." – Cathleen Falebrinza

"If I didn't have that drive from training and policing ... I don't think I would've survived to be truthful." – Cathleen Falebrinza

“You don’t expect it will happen to you but it’s pretty amazing when those decisions are made and so many lives are saved. I think it’s just kind of worth having that discussion [about organ donation].” – Cathleen Falebrinza

“The days where it just felt overwhelming, I just stopped and took a breath, and thought, ‘No, this isn’t going to beat me. I’m going to do this on my terms.’” – Cathleen Falebrinza

“It would be easy to just sit back and do nothing. It wasn’t easy to go to the gym and start this rehab program. It was painful and difficult. But, in the end, it’s what saved me.” – Cathleen Falebrinza