

(OH WOW!)





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LOVE YOUR SISTER TO CURE CANCER

Actor Samuel Johnson explains his 'no b*llshit' approach to raising awareness and funds for breast cancer research.



You may have heard about a guy, who in 2013, unicycled across Australia, which broke a Guinness Book of World Record and raised \$1.5 million dollars for cancer research. That guy was former actor Samuel Johnson. He's the one who brilliantly played Molly Meldrum in an Aussie mini series earlier this year, and has been seen as well as heard (voiceovers) by audiences for over the past two and a half decades. We say 'former' because in February 2016, Samuel announced his retirement from acting to dive hook, line and sinker into his charity *Love Your Sister*.

To make a stand against breast cancer and to support his sister Connie, Samuel has been an advocate for breast cancer and a shining light for not only Connie but for all who are touched by the disease. Samuel has vowed to stick by Connie and show as much grit and determination as his sister has shown throughout her ordeal.

His commitment to the 'village' (the term used for anyone dealing with or who has been affected by cancer) is impressive, and he has vowed not to return to acting or his 'real life' until the charity has raised \$10 million. This year the charity launched the Swear Jar campaign and Samuel's personal project *The Stick*, an online paper featuring a star-studded cast of comedians, actors, writers and illustrators that have something to say about issues beyond regular news.

Currently having raised \$2.5 million, Samuel estimates it will take another seven years for *Love Your Sister* to reach its goal. He says that he's just trying to invent ways to hit that 10 million as quickly as possible so he can get back to his life, and perhaps, back in front of the camera again.

Here's what Samuel had to say when we caught up with him recently.

What's the motivation to make *Love Your Sister* reach its target?

Initially I was beholden to my sister's dying wish, which was that I try and remind every young mother to be breast aware. It was a commitment I couldn't escape from as my sister is very bossy, and, who says 'no' to dying wishes, right? It very quickly became very important to me even though initially I didn't understand my sister's willingness to air out dirty laundry to the whole country. So it took me a while to see the bigger picture, and now I'm motivated in quite an extreme kind of way, by the many hundreds if not feasibly thousands of families that I have direct contact with now. What started off as a promise to my dying sister, quickly turned into a commitment to our 350,000-strong village, to do my part to bash cancer in the face-hole.

What differentiates the *Love Your Sister* charity from others?

We're no b*llshit and we don't f*& around. We pass 100 per cent of every dollar raised to our cause, which is research and science; there's just no fairy floss with us. We aren't peacefully trying to edge our way to a cure, we're really f%&king offended by what cancer does to our families, and we're quite militant about it. I would say what separates us is our determination to show this through the root cause as opposed to practical support like a lot of the other breast cancer organisations do. I mean I don't want to take away from any of the support groups but I'd like to see a larger piece of that pink pie going towards research to solve the problem, rather than deal with it after it's occurred.

What went through your mind when you set off to unicycle across Australia?

It was the best kind of nightmare! Ultimately any kind of pain I was feeling out there on the unicycle was short term, and I kept reminding myself that 'It ain't breast cancer'. The unicycling, in a way, was just a means of securing attention. Admittedly it was challenging, but it was also the most rewarding experience of my life. I've struggled to look back on it negatively at all – I do tend to remember the good bits rather than the pain or what not. All the way through I knew it was a bit insane.

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We sold it as impossible, but it was built to be achieved. I allowed plenty of time and I did it first and foremost as an advocate. The people we spoke to along the way were a much more important issue than the unicycling itself.

How did you come up with the Swear Jar campaign?

I issued a potty mouth retirement rant (when I publicly retired from acting). I retired from acting in a fit of exasperation of the whole cancer riddle and in doing so I dropped a bit of foul language on social media. I was sternly rebuked by my sister, who reminded me publicly that we weren't a scratch on hitting the \$10 million and we wouldn't get there if I was going to be swearing all over the place!

I bit back I suppose; I felt like I wasn't the only one in Australia who has nasty words for cancer so I put the call out to our village and asked, 'Am I the only one with limitless amounts of foul language to direct towards cancer?' Australia is the country best placed to try and swear cancer to death – it went nuts. In fact, it went so nuts that we now have 4,000 swear jars dotted around the country. We've got people everywhere trying to deliver the ultimate 'f*#k you' to cancer!

You also launched your personal project, an online newspaper called *The Stick*. How difficult was it getting others on board?

It's always difficult to secure support in charity land. We're in a charity-fatigued world, you know as consecutive governments keep dropping the support, so it's left to people like me to try and fill the gap.

It's always extremely difficult trying to be heard above the white noise. I had to hustle the old fashioned way and in the same way that everyone does; it's not like I had these people on speed dial or anything like that!

It wasn't easy. I've been pulling together this current, of what I call, 'the coalition of the thrilling', for over a year now, and it's important to me that I get the country's most interesting and notables on my side. Some of them I knew and some I was able to reach through mutual acquaintances, but many of them were cold calls and I was just relying on the strength of my letter writing mostly. This idea that I got out my Rolodex and called up my mates to get behind it [the project] is entirely inaccurate. It's taken a year of steady pushing to formulate this coalition. I'm dealing with A-listers and I'm somewhere on the B-list!

What have you gained most from running the *Love Your Sister* charity?

I now have a life that's much more fascinating. It's so much more interesting than acting because I have quite intense interpersonal relationships with many thousands of Australians, and

I feel like I have a life now.

This has rescued me from mental health and addiction issues, and without meaning to sound trite or clichéd, it's given me a new lease for life. It sounds sucky but I just feel so lucky to be a small part of this. And I'm happy. I've never been able to say that before, and it's really the collective experience of all these families that are similarly affected by cancer, that's given me that lift. When I wake up I feel like I have something important to do and that means everything to me now. I really do exist solely for this village, and I don't have anything else in my life – everything else is gone now. I've cleared my life so that I can devote myself to this. It feels good to be a part of it – and yeah – I can see sunshine now, where before I used to see rain.

In terms of future plans for the charity, Samuel says with raw honesty, that he has none. 'There's no B plan. If *The Stick* doesn't work, it's back to the drawing board. I've put all my eggs in this basket, I'm out of favours and I'm exhausted. If this doesn't work I don't know where I'll be.'

To find out more including how to donate visit www.loveyoursister.org
You can also watch Samuel's unicycle journey online at <https://youtu.be/NmqvhyuUHGM>

