I currently spend most of my time indoors, or within a car. But if I look back over my experience, I’ve been thirty-two years in forestry, and for twenty-five years of that I would have spent about 80% of my time based in the forest environment. I worked on the west coast, bracken is very prevalent and a known habitat for ticks. And my first encounter with ticks was probably in 1979.

I had extreme lethargy. I struggled to function fully at work, and when I left work I was literally having to go and rest. I was worried in that it was something more sinister. It was a tough time, I was very worried about it. My main symptoms moving on from that were cognitive. I had serious memory loss, short-term memory loss. We all joke about the scenario where people go to a cupboard, open it up and you go, “Why am I here?” I had that for a long period of time. Blinding headaches are pretty common for Lyme sufferers. Neck cramps are another thing. And I had very severe night sweats as another symptom.

“I was very ill. I actually thought at the time it was stress related, and the reason was because I had a big job. The doctors went through various tests - blood tests, the usual stuff. Crohn’s, diabetes, things like that - and all of them, amazingly, were coming back quite good in terms of my results. I was thinking, “Well theoretically, I’m a healthy guy.” That journey took from about February through to about July, and I just happened to mention to my GP that I work in a very tick-rich environment. The penny dropped immediately with him and from that point on I was referred to a consultant, and I started taking the hard-core antibiotics.”

“For me it’s a health issue all the time, so, sadly, I manage my nine-hour day, or whatever it is - and I go home and I don’t have a lot of energy left. Two years ago, I used to swim sixty lengths every day. I haven’t been in a swimming pool for two years. I don’t have the energy to get into a swimming pool.”

“It is an absolute life changer, that’s a key message for me. Be tick aware, be vigilant in checking for ticks. You don’t want to end up in a situation where you do go to a GP and you’re diagnosed with Chronic Lyme. You just don’t want that. It changes your life. Prior to 1996 / 97, we weren’t tick aware, so you didn’t take ticks seriously. Maybe that’s why I have been diagnosed with chronic Lyme today. I will never know that. But there’s no doubt about it, you can’t be blasé about it. It has a massive impact on your own life, but also others around you, so you can’t be complacent about it at all.”

Julian’s Top Tips

- Work with HR and seek an occupational health review if you are struggling with your job.
- Speak to other people with Lyme Disease to share the best ways to manage symptoms.
- Be vigilant – take heed of any advice given to you from your employers and health professionals
- Seek information if you have any questions about Lyme Disease.