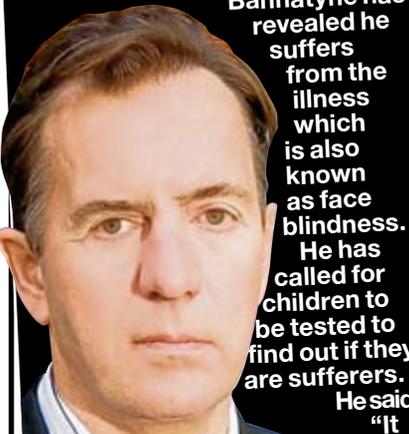


TV Dragon: It is not rudeness but illness

WE'VE all done it at some time in our lives – met someone who has started talking to us and thought, "Do I know this person?"

But for some people, it is an actual medical condition – prosopagnosia. Businessman and Dragon's Den star Duncan Bannatyne has revealed he suffers from the illness which is also known as face blindness.



He has called for children to be tested to find out if they are sufferers. He said: "It

Test plea: Bannatyne

slowly dawned on me I had a problem. I remember as a child not recognising certain people, thinking, 'Do I know that person?'

"The big incident happened while I was here about five or six years ago. We met our new auditors and spent about three hours with them.

"That night, at a black-tie do, I met one of them again and I couldn't remember him."

The businessman has had countless other incidents, when he said people assumed he was being rude. Some were angry even, at his lack of recognition.

He said: "I was walking down the road to the shop and I met this lady with a pram. I just said 'hi' to her and walked past.

"She actually lived in our cul-de-sac and told everyone I was very rude. That's the problem. The buzz gets round that you are rude and stuck-up.

"You don't realise that's happening. You might meet that person somewhere else and recognise them."

MUM REVEALS HOW RECOGNITION

I stand at the nursery gates staring at all the children.. wondering which one is mine?

Dragon's Den star Duncan Bannatyne has revealed he suffers from a rare illness which makes him forget faces. Prosopagnosia – also known as face blindness – is believed to affect one in 50 people, but there could be many more who are undiagnosed. Here, DONNA WHITE speaks to lifelong sufferer Wendy McCallum, 41, about how she copes with the illness.

I STAND at the nursery gates, gazing at the sea of little faces – wondering which child is mine.

Sometimes I can't even recognise my own four-year-old daughter among the little girls with smart uniforms and bunches in their hair.

If she's not wearing her distinctive, bright-coloured coat, I'm at a loss – until she runs up and throws her arms around me.

It might sound ridiculous. But someone with prosopagnosia will understand what it's like not to be able to spot a loved one in a crowd.

I was diagnosed about four years ago. My dad and I were watching a film and realised we both had trouble identifying the characters – they all looked the same.

I went home and looked up 'memory of faces' on the internet, and realised I had prosopagnosia – a condition later confirmed by a university carrying out research into it.

When I found out, I just burst into tears. I had grown up thinking I was a selfish, horrible person. How could I meet someone and get really friendly with them, then forget their face the very next day?

I thought I must be callous and uncaring. It's affected my life so much.

At school in Fife, I'd be doing gym and we would be put into teams for sport. If we weren't wearing different-coloured tabards, I lost track

of whose team I was on. My best friends always had distinguishing features – like bright red hair – which helped me pick them out.

Luckily, I am a happy and confident person, who has become good at bluffing. I live in Gloucestershire now with my partner and two kids but I remember years ago meeting someone in the street in Dundee who hugged me and chatted away for ages. To this day, I have no idea who it was.

Can you imagine going to a restaurant and being served by a specific waiter, then not knowing who to ask for the bill?

You learn to be more aware of what they are wearing. Or, if they're in uniform, you check to see if they've got an earring, a big nose, or spiked-up hair. It's the strangest thing to have to live with.

At work I spent many months thinking two guys were the same person. I wondered why one day this fella would be very funny and cracking jokes, and the next he was very introverted. I realised I was communicating with two different people.

The problem arises more with people who don't have a particularly defining feature. Movies are a blur of pretty men and women. I was watching *The Departed* with Matt Damon and Leonardo DiCaprio, and spent almost the whole movie thinking they were the same character.

You use little tricks, but there

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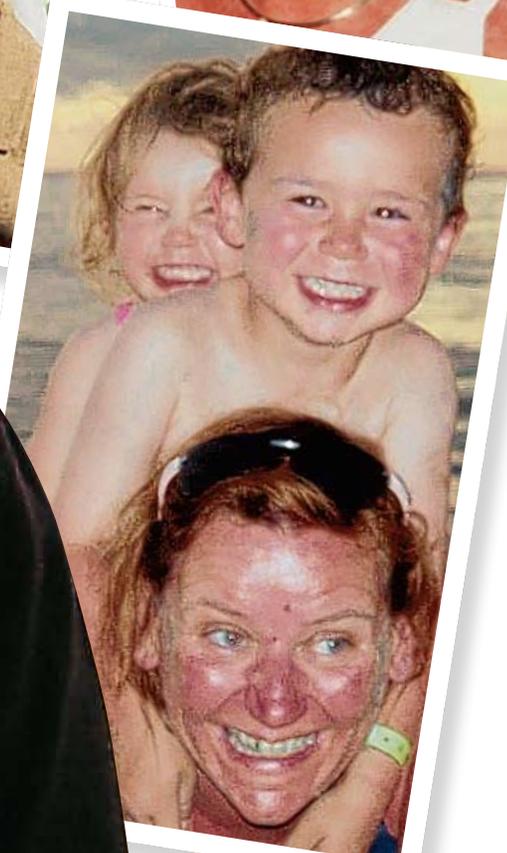
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ILLNESS MEANS SHE DOES NOT KNOW HER OWN CHILDREN



Helping victims face the future

BRAD Duchaine, the world's leading expert on prosopagnosia, has been studying the condition for more than 10 years.

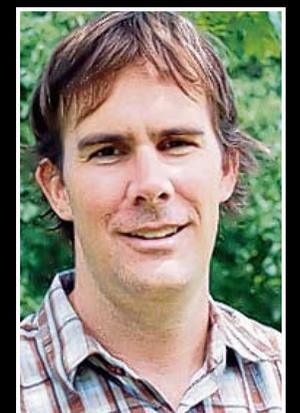
Dr Duchaine is taking part in a three-year project to develop tests which will easily identify sufferers.

And he believes around 1.2 million people in the UK have face blindness.

He said: "Everybody fails to recognise faces from time to time.

"But sufferers tend to struggle on, thinking they are stupid, or that they don't care enough about the people they've met."

In fact, brain scans on prosopagnosics uncover fewer neurons in the



Expert: Dr Brad Duchaine temporal lobe – the part which processes faces.

Dr Duchaine worked for five years at University College London, but is now based at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, in the USA.

An associate professor at the department of psychology and brain sciences, he said: "There were reports of people suffering this after World War II, as a result of head wounds and brain damage.

"If you are going to meet someone in an office – and you are shown into their office – you know it's that person you are meeting.

"But if you see them in the shops a few days later, out of context, a prosopagnosic would not know who they are.

"People with this condition get into real trouble when they are at the supermarket and someone approaches them. It really could be anybody."

Brave face: Wendy at home last week, main, and clockwise from top, in the Black Watch, in her younger days and with her son and daughter on holiday

have been times I've got mixed up and been very friendly with someone who I've never met in my life. My partner is of mixed race and looks very distinctive. A part of me wonders if that was the attraction for me. We have a son aged six, who looks like his dad and is easier to recognise. But my daughter looks more like me – and the rest of the kids at her nursery.

I was a parent-helper one day and a child got hurt. I rushed off to tell a member of staff, but then couldn't pick out which child was injured.

It seems I'm one of those people born into a family where face blindness is a common complaint. My dad has been diagnosed too. He can recall his mother talking to people in the street, then admitting she didn't know who they were.

I was in the Black Watch with the TA in Dundee for seven years until 1998 and did a six-month tour of Bosnia. I managed to bluff my way through using moustaches, uniform stripes and the way people walked to identify them.

My current work colleagues are very helpful and understanding about my condition. My partner does find it frustrating, though and hard to understand.

I think it's a condition that will eventually be widely known about and understood. If you're not a confident person, a condition like this can leave you isolated and afraid.

●For more information about the illness, go to www.faceblind.org