

## 'YOU JUST KNEW THEY HAD DIED. YOU DIDN'T TALK ABOUT WHY'

Article by Carol Burns - Leicester Mercury - 02 August 2004

Embarrassment is killing hundreds of people each year. Carol Burns explains why

It was the family legacy that Mick Mason dreaded receiving. His father had it, his auntie too. Mick even went under the knife to try and shake it off, but to no avail. The 61-year-old has bowel cancer, a disease that can run in the family, and which has flourished through a combination of embarrassment and secrecy.

It can be triggered by diet or lifestyle, but it can also steal into your life as a genetic time bomb, ushered into existence by a faulty gene named FAP, which means the disease will be certain to manifest itself if left untreated. Melton man Mick's chances of getting the disease were so high he had surgery to remove his bowel in 1999 - only to find out that the cancer had already started.

Around one per cent of the 35,000 cases of bowel cancer in the UK each year are caused by the FAP gene disorder. While the general public has a one in 50 risk of bowel cancer, if you have the gene and you aren't treated, experts say you have 100 per cent chance of getting bowel cancer.

For Mick, it was a question of luck that he found out about the gene at all. "The older generation didn't talk about cancer, certainly not bowel cancer," he says of his father, who had bowel surgery in his 70s. It was only when he died a few years later and Mick saw his father's death certificate that he discovered the truth. A chat with members of the family then uncovered his aunt had died of the disease in her 50s, and Mick soon had genetic testing which revealed he too carried the gene.

"You just knew they had died, you didn't talk about why. "Even now, there's a lot of people who never got in touch, once they knew what it was. "A lot of people don't like to talk about their backsides and things."

In May this year, the father of three marked five years since he was diagnosed and no longer has to go for regular check-ups. "I don't say I'm cured," he says, refusing to tempt fate. "I say I have got the all-clear."

Both his sister and three children have now had tests for the disease, while an older brother has decided not to have the test, but will wait and see. Now, Mick has joined the Beating Bowel Cancer campaign to get more people talking to save lives.

A survey earlier this year revealed almost one in five bowel cancer patients waited more than six months before going to doctor's. Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in Leicestershire, with more than 400 people diagnosed with it each year. An estimated 90 per cent of cases could be treated successfully if caught at an early stage - but many people, often embarrassed to discuss their symptoms, delay seeking medical advice.

Beating Bowel Cancer is a national charity working to raise awareness of symptoms, promote early diagnosis and encourage open access to treatment choice for those affected by cancer.

More information on bowel cancer is available through the charity's symptoms hotline, on 0870 24 24 870, or from the website:

[www.beatingbowelcancer.org](http://www.beatingbowelcancer.org)