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JACQUELINE BRITTON

WITN1838019

INFECTED BLOOD PUBLIC INQUIRY

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FAMILY LIFE

The News



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PAGE 24



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PAGE 27



07.08.12

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Helen Noyes-Ridley

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Living in the shadow of hep C

REAL LIFE

For almost 30 years, Jackie Britten was unaware that she'd contracted a virus that could eventually rob her of her life. She talks to **SARAH FOSTER** about being diagnosed with hepatitis C.

J Jackie Britten remembers feeling all the pain perfectly when, nearly 30 years ago, she discovered she had hepatitis C. No one would tell her she was suffering from the disease until she was diagnosed in 1999. Jackie has now learned the life-saving importance of taking the pills she has been given. She talks to Sarah Foster about how she has managed to live with hepatitis C and what she has learned since she was diagnosed.

See over the page

PLUS FAMILY MATTERS ■ YOUR MEMORIES ■ DEAR FIONA ■ YOUR HEALTH ■ LOOPY LIBRARY

MEMORIES

Each week we get inside a reader's mind to learn of their fondest childhood memories. Today it's the turn of ROSA...

MEME: The 32-year-old lives in Ocala and runs the Morrison Dance School which will take in its 10th year this winter at the Hawthorne-Morrissey Dance...

What's your earliest childhood memory?

When I was five, I was walking in the garden and I tripped on a pile of grass. I remember a deep pain and how the huge stars in my eyes reminded me to avoid that whole area.

What do you remember about your birthday?

I always had birthday kittens and parties. To my fifth I had a fancy dress parade in my front room and went to a 21 through my school friend who was the connection through.

How was school?

I was a good pupil at school, but I never liked it. The best bit was getting sweets in all the dance lessons and activities that had.

What did you get up to with your friends?

It wasn't too bad as a teenager. I used to hang out on the street corner with a group of friends, get into trouble, drink and do cheeky things.

What were you into when you were 10?

Books, always, especially the Harry Potter ones. I used to read them and get into the books and read off my head. I was a bit like a girl who reads and forgets to eat.

What did you wish on 17th August and did it come true?

I was wishing for a better life, to go to a good school, to be a doctor, to get into a good job and to be a mother.

Any clothes that stand out to you now?

At 11, I was into all the big, long, floppy dresses. I used to wear them all the time and I loved my cardigans. They were really old school.

What songs did you love?

When we were in the 80s, we had a lot of fun. I remember the songs that we danced to in the schoolyard. I remember the songs that we danced to in the schoolyard.

What was the naughtiest thing you did?

When we were in the 80s, we had a lot of fun. I remember the songs that we danced to in the schoolyard. I remember the songs that we danced to in the schoolyard.

REAL LIFE

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'My life has been

From previous page

When I was a child, I remember being with my family on a boat in the middle of the sea. I remember the feeling of being so small and so far from home.

It was a very special time for me. I remember the feeling of being so small and so far from home.

I remember the feeling of being so small and so far from home. It was a very special time for me.

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We really need GPs to be much more aware

Charles Gere

taken away'



MORE AWARENESS NEEDED

While there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, early treatment can clear the virus in around half of patients and ongoing infection can be managed.

Charles Gere, the chief executive of the Hepatitis C Trust, says we're on course for a 90 per cent cure rate in those who have been diagnosed.

But he echoes Jackie Britton's plea for anyone who suspects they might have hepatitis C to ask for a simple test. And he says GPs must get better at thinking about how it becomes too many people go undiagnosed for too long.

"We've diagnosed significantly less than half of the people who have hepatitis in this country," he explains.

"There's definitely a group out there who've got this through a blood transfusion.

"The problem comes down to symptoms. Often people don't have specific symptoms. The symptoms are very difficult to pin down. We really need GPs to be much more aware and they simply aren't."

He says the Department for Health did look for those who

might have been infected as a result of pre-1991 transfusions in 1995, but adds that problems with record keeping made it difficult.

He believes more awareness of the virus on the part of doctors and patients would see more people diagnosed earlier, giving them a better chance for a cure.

As well as transfusions, other risk factors include: **W Current/past intravenous drug use**

W Current/past cocaine sniffing (snorting) noses or snoring with a partner who is known to have hepatitis C or may have been at risk

W Blood transfusions or invasive medical or dental procedures in a developing country

W Tattoos/piercings/acupuncture in unregistered premises or with unsterile equipment or needles that were not new

W Regularly shared razors or toothbrushes with a partner who is known to have hepatitis C or may have been at risk

For more information visit hepatrust.org.uk. To contact the Hepatitis C Trust helpline call 0145 223 4424

trial, but that could be two or three years in the future. Although I've got damage done out of my liver, it keeps well.

"I was just a chap, that they hadn't thought to check up on a person who got this through no fault of their own."

He says that there has been "a lot of people who've been told they've got hepatitis C. They've got it, but they've still got their lives."

The former nurse says necessary testing is "a bit of a pain" but he says his support group has helped

what the future might hold. "I'm going to carry living like this. The reality is for the next few years, I'm feeling better. They don't expect me to live that long but I'm looking on five or six as I can."

"The lot of those people who've got the virus, is that full on full on? They didn't have the same things. It's not just the virus, it's what you do with it. I don't think that. It was just one of those things."

"The bit that bugs me is that once they've realised there was a mistake, they didn't think that for

people. There should still be a lot of people in my position who are feeling all sort of... I'm not sure it's too strange that there's something inside them that can kill them and they don't know about it."

"It seems to do some things pretty well. I'm not the only one who's got this through transfusion."

"I wish I could tell you I don't want to put down people who get it through that route. It's one of those choices. But I think it's got to be checked. It really bugs me so much I want to get the word out."

Jackie's calling on anyone who suspects that they might have hepatitis C, to get tested. He says he's had an "A1110 blood transfusion" since 1961, to ask their GP for a test.

"I know some people would rather bury their head in the sand but it won't make you find a transfusion that you've got. It's not going to get better on its own."

She adds: "I do feel that I have to say 'I've got it but it's not my fault'. It's a horrible thing. I was 60 by June but my wife's like 'I've got it' because I've got it."