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: “I was walking down the road to the shop and I met this lady with a prim. 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.”

Slowly dawned on me I had a problem, I remember as a child not recognising certain people, thinking, ‘Do I know that person?’

“If 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...
MUM REVEALS HOW RECOGNITION 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 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.”

“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

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.

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