



Face It Together

The newsletter for adult members of The Birthmark Support Group

Welcome



Welcome to the sixth edition of the Face It Together Newsletter. As I was struggling for inspiration for this newsletter I am happy to report that I have had a lot of help from other members of the group.

This newsletter is also taking a slightly different angle to previous newsletters. This year I really want the newsletters to be about the members. I will continue to write sections to update all members about what is going on in the group, but apart from that I hope all the content and direction for the group will come from the members. The reason I am trying this new idea is that the adult group has been in existence for about 3 years now and it has been under my direction for the last 2. Unfortunately, I don't appear to be able to find the "thing" that makes you, the members, want to get in touch and attend the events that are organized each year. As a lot of effort goes into organizing this group and being on the other end of the email address, it is not that I lack conviction. So I appeal to all of you to tell me what you think the group should be about.

My other appeal is that somebody volunteers to give me a hand with running the group. It usually means about 8 hours a week for me but if that work was split among more people then the amount of time spent would obviously reduce. Check out the "situations vacant" section where you can get more details about what is involved in being a member of the FiT Team and remember that making new friends is always a good experience.

FiT Outings 2008

As I said above I have limited plans for 2008 for the FiT group at the moment. I would like you to come forward with some ideas. We will hopefully be in Chigwell again on Sunday, **September 21st 2008** and if we do then we shall avail of the local pub for a quick FiT get together.

But apart from this nothing is planned and as a result no ideas will go without consideration. If you think the FiT Trips to the Pub are a good idea then please let me know and I will help arrange one in your suggested area.

Other things to consider are organized events such as meal, a trip to a museum, a tour of a UK city on an

open top bus. Maybe even the famous London Duck Tours may appeal!

An Update from Alison

Some of you will remember Alison from earlier editions of the Newsletter.

I have a large facial port wine birthmark. I had a difficult childhood accepting it and dealing with other people's attitudes, stares, whispers and sometimes blunt remarks. I did have great support from family and friends who helped me forget about having a disfigurement, by not talking about it, or making a big thing of it. So, somehow, managed it to adulthood with some confidence. I didn't start wearing coverage make up until I was 16, the time I started noticing boys and started working.

I am now 43 and just starting to talk openly about my birthmark, even having some counselling, funny I only opened up after joining the BSG and talking about my birthmark it was hard at first but I do feel good for opening up.

I now have a 5 year daughter at primary school. She is at that inquisitive age and so are her friends. So my childhood is being revisited as they are noticing my make up or something different about my face, it upset me at first but after my new confidence I can tell them about it. It did bring back those painful reminders of play time and even shopping out with my mother, but I'm calmer about it.

FacelTogether Situations Vacant!

Are you a good listener? Do you like chatting to people on email? Are you organised? Do you have a little free time each week?

FiT is looking for somebody to help Orla out with the day to day running of the group. The main work involved is supporting people on email or the phone, training will be given but obviously it helps to be the kind of person that people find it easy to talk to.

Each quarter the group produces a newsletter with a round up of all the current news and your help writing articles for this newsletter will be required. It is also important that you are willing to travel to at least 2 of the charity events held by the group throughout the year. The FiT group also aims to have a least 2 events throughout the year dedicated to the over 18s and your help will be required to organise or even host one of these events. Your help in developing the FiT group by bringing fresh ideas will be much appreciated

Birthmarks & Blemishes



Gordon Lamont has written "Living with Birthmarks and Blemishes" and this is available on Amazon but if you decide to buy this book please buy via the BSG E-shop at www.buy.at/birthmarksupportgroup. The book features the stories, wisdom and opinions of many including BSG members and aims to give the important facts that people

with any kind of mark, their parents or carers, should know. There's also important advice on confident living and celebrating difference.

The idea for this book came when Gordon was writing *The Confidence Book* (Sheldon Press 2007) and included something about his own experience of growing up with a birthmark alongside the story of BSG member Bridget Crawshaw. Gordon's editor immediately saw the potential for a book on the subject and a year or so later *Living with Birthmarks and Blemishes* is the result.

Gordon is a member of the BSG as he has his own Port Wine Stain. You can find out more about Gordon's books and buy online at www.theconfidencesite.co.uk

An extract from the Introduction

Perfect faces?

There are all kinds of ideas about what makes the perfect face. I take them all with a pinch of salt because, in the end, this is a subjective matter. Did Charlie Chaplin have the ideal face? Well, he had the ideal face for being Charlie Chaplin.

The scientific research on this subject is based on reactions and statistics – the majority of people find this or that attractive. In subjective areas such as this, however, you might choose to be the odd one out and a majority decision means nothing if the face you find most attractive ticks none of these supposedly 'ideal' boxes.

That caveat out of the way, there seems to be some consensus about the importance of symmetry, with many studies suggesting that men in particular have a preference for a symmetrical face in a life partner. It is argued that asymmetry might suggest underlying genetic problems, so we have evolved a love of symmetry. My face is somewhat asymmetrical, but I think that makes it interesting! My children are bright and able so the theory hasn't applied in my case, although my wife's genes could have something to do that!

Given that our faces are so central to our sense of self and how others interact with us, just how important are those supposedly crucial first impressions? Again, research has been carried out on this question and again I am a little sceptical about the results.

In the worlds of training and business, the 'seven second' theory is often mentioned. For example, business guru Roger Aisles says 'seven seconds is all

that people need to start making up their minds about you' and Lydia Ramsay, a business etiquette speaker and trainer, says, 'Seven seconds is the average length of time you have to make a first impression.' Search the Internet and books and you'll find endless references to this magic figure of seven seconds, but I've not been able to verify that the claims for it have been proven conclusively. In fact, I am not sure how you could and why you would want to.

This said, it is generally agreed that first impressions count and our facial features are an important factor in that. What is less clear is how important those early impressions are overall and to what extent they form a barrier to revised opinions.

Our actions and reactions

Facial identity is a complicated area, but our sense of self, related to our ideas of what we look like, can be strongly tied to our emotional reactions. Even though this relationship between face, our internal image of ourselves, our emotions and our confidence is undoubtedly complex, I am clear on one thing: we can learn to take responsibility for not just our actions but also our reactions. How others respond to us is their affair; how we respond should be our concern. Indeed, that is the essential reason for writing this book.

If you are concerned in any way about facial marks – either your own, a loved one's or even your reaction to the marks of others – that concern can lead to action. That might be in the form of medical intervention, wearing camouflage cream or changing your hairstyle, but could also be to gain perspective on your situation by listening to the stories of others and understanding what you're thinking and feeling. This can lead to changes in our views regarding ourselves and others.

My hope is that this book will offer you some options for change and, through it, you will move forward to face the world in a more positive way.

Reader's Review:

Gordon's book is not a weighty medical review of birthmarks and, therefore, should not be taken as such. It is a very down to earth round up of various blemishes and more importantly tactics for dealing with your thoughts and questions from others. For those of you with CMNs this book does not specifically deal with this type of mark. The book does discuss camouflage make-up, laser treatment and acne. There are lots of personal stories. It is a very easy read. There is some homework which effectively challenges you to think about your mark and how you feel about it. An element of Cognitive Mood Therapy (CMT) also creeps into this book but I have to stress that it is the most digestible CMT I have ever read or seen, it is almost like the "idiots guide to CMT". This book encourages positive thought as deflection for the confrontation people face within themselves and in dealing with others. The book has a very useful index and lists lots of useful websites to explore.