



A scan of Barry's head showing a tumour pushing on to his left eye

People stare – but my beautiful boy's a work of art

Barry Cheeseman is one of the bravest boys in Britain. The 13-year-old from Kent has cancer on his face and has endured 14 operations. Now he's the star of a new exhibition – and here his proud mum Helen tells us his story

and throat specialist, who looked up his nose and said, "I don't like what I can see." Barry had to go to hospital for a biopsy. He had no idea what was going on – he thought he was going in for his nosebleeds. I just couldn't look at my son and tell him it might be cancer.

The tests found that Barry had osteosarcoma – an aggressive form of bone cancer that mostly affects young people between the ages of 10 and 20. Barry was 10 – and apparently more likely to get it than other children because he'd previously suffered from retinoblastoma. It felt like our lives had been torn apart, and the worst part was breaking the news to Barry. He didn't really say much as he was too young to fully understand, but he's always had a marvellous attitude to life. He just gets on with anything that's thrown at him – he's an inspiration to everyone.

Barry was put on a very strong course of chemotherapy for six months, which made him extremely ill. He had numerous blood transfusions, he felt sick and tired all the time and his hair fell out. Then, just after his 11th birthday, in December 1999, he had his first operation – consisting of head and face surgery, to remove the fast-growing tumour on the left-hand side of his face. The surgeon was Mr Iain Hutchison at the Royal London Hospital.

It was a massive operation. He had his head cut open from ear to ear and down the side of his nose. His eye-socket bone was removed, along with most of the left-hand side of his face. Mr

Hutchison made a hammock for Barry's left eye to sit on, using muscle from the side of his face. He took tissue from Barry's abdomen to help build up his face. Barry was left with stitches right across his head, and looked very beaten-up. It took over two months to heal.

At this time Barry was asked if he'd like his portrait done for an exhibition – and he was keen on the idea. So the artist, Mark Gilbert, painted him as he recovered. The picture shows Barry sitting on the floor, playing with his PlayStation, in his favourite Southampton football kit. Barry loves football, but sadly he'll never be able to play football again – or any contact sport – because if he gets a smack to the face it could cause horrendous damage to its structure.

In November 2000, Barry had another relapse. Doctors discovered a marble-shaped lump in the palate of his mouth – and it was malignant. Mr Hutchison had to remove the whole palate, so now there's no roof to Barry's mouth. Instead, he's got a false plate that clips around his teeth like a brace – and, thanks to this, he can talk normally. Mr Hutchison deserves a medal – the things he's done for Barry are wonderful.

Barry needed six more months of chemo. It was gruelling and he lost his hair again, but he took it in his stride – he's such a remarkable boy. He just wants the cancer out of his body, but the disease is like a tree – it keeps growing and spreading.

In September 2001, Barry had his nasal bone removed, and this was followed by more chemo. Then in January this year, the doctors found a tumour towards the back of his nose, up near the brain. We're now waiting for another operation

and so we can't plan anything. Every birthday and Christmas is very special. We just take every day as it comes. Of course, we're disappointed as new tumours appear, but we just get on with it. It's dreadful seeing your child suffer, but Barry is so positive that he keeps us going.

Mr Hutchison and his team have done an incredible job, but Barry will need reconstructive surgery later in life. His left eye doesn't move quite as quickly as the right one, his nose is slightly unusual-looking, and there are dents on the side of his face caused by the radiotherapy stunting his bone growth, when he was a baby. People tend to stare at him, but we think he's gorgeous. He doesn't look quite the same, but it's still Barry underneath.

His portrait was first put on display at the National Portrait Museum in London, and now it's going on tour. We went to the opening of the exhibition and Barry was so proud! It's something positive for him and makes him feel a bit important. It's a chance for him to show people what he's been through and it feels as though something good has come out of all that's happened.

Barry says I "think my portrait's absolutely fantastic! It captures the things I love – football and my PlayStation. I bet all my friends would love to have one done!"



Top: Barry as a toddler with his dad Andy. Above: Mark Gilbert painting of Barry

● **Saving Faces: Portraits by Mark Gilbert** will be at Leeds City Art Gallery in July and August, then at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter from September. For more information, visit www.savingfaces.co.uk

● **The Facial Surgery Research Foundation** – *Saving Faces* raises funds for research to improve treatment for patients with diseases and injuries affecting the face. A national research centre will open later this year. To make a donation, tel: 020-7601 7582.

Can you imagine being hit with a sledgehammer? Well, that's how it felt when I discovered that my baby had cancer. The first we knew about it was when he was six weeks old. We'd gone to the hospital as my husband had to have a routine checkup – he'd had cancer as a boy and lost his left eye. My husband mentioned that he had a baby son, and the consultant told us, "Bring him in immediately, I need to see him!"

When the consultant examined Barry, he realised straightaway that he might have cancer, too. Then, after tests, he just came out with it – Barry had retinoblastoma, the same cancer as my husband, and he could detect tumours in both

eyes. We were just devastated – it was such a shock. Barry started immediately on a course of radiotherapy, which he had every day for six weeks. That was horrible for him, and caused the skin on his face to become very red and sore. Then, 11 months later he relapsed. This time he was treated with cryotherapy – where the malignant tissue was frozen. Thankfully, it was a success and Barry went on to enjoy a healthy childhood, doing normal things like playing football with his friends and riding his bike.

But then at the age of nine, he started to get nosebleeds every day. After about seven months, his left eye became swollen and uncomfortable. In June 1999 Barry was referred to an ear nose

best medical news update

Killer coats!

Anoraks or any coat with a hood are potentially dangerous, according to a study by eye experts at Birmingham City Hospital. When the hood is up, your field of vision is slashed by 50 per cent. So you're risking your life crossing the road – unless you keep the hood down!



Cut it out

Considering cosmetic surgery? Well, before you let a scalpel anywhere near you, bear in mind that it may not make you as happy as you think. According to Dr Eileen Bradbury, a consultant psychologist based in Cheshire, people who opt for popular procedures such as face-lifts and liposuction get "pre-surgery euphoria, but afterwards their life is just the same and they become disappointed."

'Toxic tea' syndrome

Drinking excessive amounts of Iari Grey or other highly flavoured black teas can cause muscle cramps, blurred vision, and pins and needles. According to a report in medical journal *The Lancet*, the ingredient responsible is bergamot oil – which gives the tea its distinctive scent. However, you would have to drink at least 21 cups a day to notice the effects!



Did you know?

There are 250,000 sweat glands in your feet