

## **Ian Meek**

In 1995, while working as a brewer for John Smiths in Bristol, I had a seizure and was diagnosed with a grade I benign brain tumour. I have found that each person reacts differently. For me there were no real symptoms I could put my finger on at the time, but with hindsight I do remember a feeling of dizziness sometimes, which I dismissed as my imagination.

I worked in the brewing industry and exercise had never taken a high priority in my lifestyle, although I used to cycle to work when I lived in Bristol. However, since the diagnosis I found that I increased my fitness, partly because of the fundraising events I have taken part in, but partly because I wanted to be strong enough to fight this cancer and be there for my family. I think having a positive attitude has helped me stay well with so few symptoms throughout this time. In Bristol I did a half marathon to raise funds for the charity Brain Tumour UK and I have run for a charity called Willow, which provides special days out for young adults with serious illnesses.

Over the last fifteen years I have had a total of three operations to remove the tumour, first in Bristol and latterly at St.Mary's in Yorkshire. Throughout this time my doctors have been fantastic, both Mr Phillips, my neuro-surgeon and Dr.Carmel Loughrey who is consultant neuro oncologist at St.James and a trustee for the charity Andrea's Gift, for which I have been fundraising.

Last year things changed. The tumour had become cancerous and was re-classified to a grade III. Surgeons operated for the third and probably last time. I was really grateful to be able to attend the first of many support group meetings organised by Andrea's Gift at St Mary's Hospital.

My own parents, who still live in Bristol, are also involved with the group Hammer Out and have gained real support meeting with other people affected by brain tumours.

Recently, my wife Sally, who has run her own business for many years, decided to sell it so that she could be more available – she has been a fantastic support and encourages me to have my independence despite not being able to drive. Of course she had to be the one who ferries the children around to all their activities although her mum, who is local, has also been a great help to us all.

The two oldest children lost their granddad last year and had quite a rough time of it, so I hope that seeing me getting out and about and remaining optimistic has helped them. I can't deny that I do feel a bit down sometimes but it never lasts for long, I just pull myself together and keep going.

Last week I had to finish work at John Smiths on the grounds of ill health – I had worked there for 17 years as a brewer, so I thought it would be difficult. However, I have a real focus at present, first the Yorkshire three peaks walk in April, which is really a training session for the National three peaks challenge, which I am doing on the 19<sup>th</sup> June. You would not believe it but even William Hill, the bookies, have donated a £100 bet on my finishing the challenge.

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When Carol Robertson, fundraiser and development manager for Bradford based brain tumour charity, Andrea's Gift, first suggested it last year at a support group meeting, I said 'I don't see why not as long as my health is up to it. That day I rang and texted some friends and by the next day there were over thirty of my family and friends who were up to the challenge, not least my wife Sally and two of our children.' Since then, another thirty have come on board. Our aim is to raise at least £25,000 for a brain tumour research centre at the internationally-renowned Leeds Institute of Molecular Medicine. As well as raising money for the lab I hope to raise awareness about brain tumours, which are often seen as the 'forgotten cancer.'

I don't want people in the future to be in the position me and my family are in. There are all these different cancers and you just want to get rid of them all

When I first e-mailed Carol back about the challenge I signed off 'Ian, three peak Meek', since then it has just stuck, so now it's appropriately named 'Meek's 3 Peaks'!

Recently my doctors recommended I had a course of chemotherapy, which is part of the reason for finishing work. I have been really lucky; I have had very few symptoms apart from a little sickness and have managed to continue training throughout it all. As I said before I can't drive because of my medications but apart from that my life is full and I remain active.

Ian 'Three Peaks' Meek – March 2010