



NEW DOCUMENTARY ON

'I broke down dementia



CAMPAIGN: Martin's family tale is part of dementia series

MARTIN King will never forget the day he was told his mother Christina was diagnosed with dementia.

"It was a very sad moment. I cried when she told me. She wouldn't have known that I was crying," he said. Martin was driving across the country to Co Mayo to accompany his wife, celebrity wedding photographer, Jenny McCarthy, on one of her jobs. The weekend away was supposed to be a fun-filled adventure for the pair - but Martin's world was turned upside down when his mother called him.

Tests

In 2011, the Virgin Media star's beloved mother Christina was diagnosed with dementia after years of tests.

And she was unaware that she had been diagnosed with the illness as she relayed her test results to Martin.

He said: "She rang me to say that everything was fine, all the tests were good and that I need to keep an eye on my cholesterol, and, oh, I got water on the brain. I knew that was code for dementia."

"My sister had spoken to the doctor and said if something like that if it comes back (as dementia), to tell her something else. I think it was one of the things he had said to her."

As the family gathered to figure out her care plans for the future, Martin looked back on the early signs.

"The first sign that we got was in Florida on a holiday in 2006. My mam was a beautiful soul, she was very caring and loving and a peacemaker. She would literally give you her last penny."

"But all of a sudden on holiday in Florida, she became completely erratic. It was over something really silly. I wasn't there when it happened, she was with my sister and my sister's husband and she got really stroppy and started shouting. It came from nowhere."

"We thought it was the heat in July in Florida. We thought she was getting dehydrated and irritated by the heat. She was 71. We put it down to that. We didn't think there was something wrong with her mind."

"We just thought it the elements, it's where we are, she could be jet lagged. There was a whole catalogue of reasons. But they were the first signs."

Martin said his mother tried to hide her early signs and it took one of his sisters to eventually book her in for a full health check.

"It took a while. When she was noticing changes in herself, she tried to hide it. Eventually my sister convinced her to go and get a full MOT. She agreed to that. But it was then that they started

■ Sandra MALLON
 Showbiz Reporter

doing the tests to see what was going on because there were things that were starting to happen."

Her mother-in-law (Martin's grandmother) had dementia and his mother nursed her all through it.

"Because she had looked after my grandmother, she would've known some of the signals and some of the signs, but she would've been in denial."

"She was incredibly scared of coming down with something like this, so she was reluctant to get tested."

"She had quite a tough life, but my grandmother knew something wasn't right. My dad's dad died when he was 11 and him and his mother, he was the only one in the house, all the others were gone, most went to England, she lived in a tenement building with some of her family in Dorset Street and carried on living with her sister even when the tenement came down."

"My grandmother knew something wasn't right (with her) and she arrived at our front door with pots and pans and said she had to move in. She lived with us for a good couple of years. She had dementia. I didn't know it. I was very young at the time. I didn't realise why she would hit me, why she thought I was trying to rob from her house."

"She thought she was back in the tenement building in Dorset Street and if I went anywhere near her or near her room, she thought I was some kid off the street trying to see what I could grab."

"I didn't understand what was going on, but my sister Bernie understood more what was going on and she became my nanny's friend."

"It took until I was an adult to realise what was going on - I had no idea."

Spiral

Martin, his brother Paul, his father Martin and his sisters, Claire, Eithne, Bernie and Christina all made the decision not to tell their mother about her diagnosis.

The TV star said: "We decided not to tell her because we thought that could send her into a spiral and she could get depressed."

But he said she enjoyed holidays for one or two more years with her family and extended family before the illness started to get the better of her.

"But then things started to spiral. It took hold of her then."

In 2019, Martin's mother passed away.

Martin Snr, died a month before his wife. She had no idea about his death.

"My dad died four weeks before my mam. He said to my sister that it really hurt him when his own mother forgot

'We are trying to take away the stigma'

ILLNESS AIRING SOON

at Mum's diagnosis

ILLNESS:
Martin's mother
Christina



STORY OF BRAVE MARTIN'S FAMILY STRUGGLE

who he was. She stopped recognising him. He hoped that mam didn't forget him. And she did.

"When it got to that point, it was tough. I was there for one of those moments when they were in their room in the nursing home, and we were chatting and she said, 'get him out of this room' and I said 'who?' and she said 'I don't know him'.

Eyes

"I said, 'that's dad' and she said, 'he's an auld fella, that's not my husband, I'm not married to him'. I was trying to fix that because I could see the upset in him. I could see his eyes glassing over."

Throughout the hardship, Martin praises his wonderful sisters and brother, but in particular Claire, who looked after his mother the most before they had to make the heart-breaking decision to admit his parents into a nursing home.

He wants to highlight dementia and has embarked on a solo documentary, *We Need To Talk About Dementia*, that will air on Virgin Media One next Sunday, March 28 at 8pm, to educate people on the illness.



EXPERT IN FIELD:
Prof Brian Lawlor

His documentary is a part of a host of shows lined up by Virgin Media who have partnered with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland to launch a fund-raising week from March 22 to March 28. Donate for Dementia will help raise awareness and vital funds to support people with all forms of dementia including Alzheimer's which affects half a million Irish families.

"The care I gave to my mam was miniscule to the care she got from my sisters, Claire, Bernie, Eithne and Christina and my brother Paul as well.

"Claire by circumstance, rather than design, she became the caregiver, and, in this documentary, I speak to her. It is one of the things we talk about is people come in and give respite, like my sisters and my brother and me but still for the bulk of the week and the bulk of the nights, she would be awake because my mam might get up. She might try to leave the house. She might try to start a fire or cook something, and Claire knew she wasn't going to get a proper sleep.

"And for people like that who don't have professional training from caregiving but because they are

the daughter or the son of someone with dementia, they become forgotten and they're the ones who are dealing with it and they reach a breaking point.

"God love my sister, Claire. She took care of her for as long as she could until we were given the advice that mam needed professional care and we made that move then. For those who are in that position, it tears the heart out of them to make the decision and then for the day to come when you move your parents into a care home, it tears you apart."

Martin talks to people in the community about lifting the stigma associated with dementia.

Hope

"We're speaking to Professor Brian Lawlor. He's been working in this field for nearly 40 years and he's a beacon of hope and he tries to promote hope. He believes the first thing we need to do is talk about stigma, so we talk about that and ways to change your lifestyle to lessen your chances of getting dementia.

"Education is huge. The more time you put into education, it lessens your chances of getting dementia. It's all about an active mind. We talk about that. Men and women who are pushing

towards 70 and 80 because of circumstance, some would've left school because their parents wouldn't have had the money, so their education stops.

"We are speaking to a man who is trying to take away the stigma. He has Alzheimer's. As Professor Lawlor said to me, 'we hear about dementia and we write people off.'

"It is one of the things I am asking in this documentary - 'Is this my future?' Will my children be in a position I was in? And the position that my brothers and sisters were in? We ask 'Is dementia hereditary?'"

The special week will conclude with the broadcast *Finding Jack Charlton on Virgin Media One at 9pm on March 28. Commissioned by VMTV and the BBC and supported The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, this emotive and compelling documentary looks at this Irish sporting legend and his undocumented life with dementia.*

It features contributions from Jack's family for the first time, including his wife Pat and son John. They are supported by major figures in football, music, film and politics. The documentary also features unseen archive footage, capturing behind the scenes with Jack and the Ireland team during Italia 90 and USA 94.