BERNARD'S ARTHRITIS STORY.

I have suffered with the pain and swelling of arthritis in my arms, hands, neck back legs and feet for almost half of my adult life. At times my condition was so bad that I was only able to walk about 50 metres without a rest. The constant pain I suffered was unbearable.

In 1962 at age 25, I came to Wollongong as Resident Technical Officer of 2WN Transmitter at Windangg, NSW. During the next two or three years I had the nasal antrums of both sides of my head scraped out in an effort to cure a chronic sinus problem caused by polyps.

For 18 months (around age 28), I suffered on and off with what I thought was 'stitches in the side' (pain); these got more & more common; especially when walking around on house roofs! The stitches 'converted' themselves into acute appendicitis, a 'just in time' job for the surgeon!

In 1967 (age 30) while we were moving our furniture to our new residence at Gwynneville I banged my head on the timbers under the floor. This small injury was the beginning of psoriasis on my scalp. From there the psoriasis went wherever it wanted and ignored any treatment applied to it.

Two years later at 32 years, I thought I had injured my back while bending down to the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet. I got severe lower back pain that was with me for many years. Sometimes it would ease up a little for a week or more, and rarely, for a few months. (I had forgotten injuries heal in a week or three at the most!).

With the back Pain, came stiffness and sciatic pain right down to the left ankle. The strange thing was, that digging drainage trenches & building a double garage including hand mixing the concrete made it better not worse!

For a long time the pain on awakening in the mornings was so bad I used to start the day by getting up 2 hrs early, to get dressed & eat breakfast. I would begin by rolling of the bed onto the floor and then dragging myself up the door to grab the handle to pull myself to a standing position. It took a long time to dress myself. All this time I also had severe swelling and pain in the knees, ankles, arms, wrists and shoulders.

It was now 1994 and I was 57 yrs old. The idea of trying to get employment to supplement my low commonwealth pension, after being made redundant, was quickly receding; so I applied for a disability pension.

As part of the medical investigation required for the pension, I had to get a consulting rheumatologist's report. This doctor gave me a thorough examination and did blood and X-ray investigations. The result of the tests was a diagnosis of 'Psoriatic Arthropathy'.

I was told that my psoriatic arthritis was genetic, that it showed in the 'T' lymphocytes of the blood, and like many other forms of arthritis, was incurable and there was no known cause. All that could be done was to use Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID) to control the pain and inflammation.

To quote the rheumatologist:

"........, I feel it is unlikely that Mr. Trudgett will ever be capable of returning to his usual occupation." (My occupation was a staff supervisor ... not much physical work ... just as well or I would have been in trouble long ago !)

He told me that without the help of drugs I could expect only about 4-5 years of 'active life'.

I didn't find it difficult to agree with him!

I was refused the pension because the Commonwealth Medical Officer couldn't decide whether the condition was permanent or not or if I would be 'crippled' for the required minimum of two years! My future looked very bleak indeed!

As I said, this suffering had gone on for many years. The pain and inflammation moving from my back to a foot then to the other foot, neck, knee then the other knee, hand, then back to my back and so on. Sometimes I got a remission for six months or a year but each flare-up became worse and lasted longer. When an inflamed area started to get better I knew the pain was going to start somewhere else. It was as though whatever was causing the pain and inflammation could only effect a certain volume of tissue at a time. (I was seeing the effects of the size of the dose of whatever it was that was in what I was eating).

I could not believe that I had a permanent condition such as psoriatic arthritis, as my condition varied from time to time, sometimes from one part of the year to the next. I could only accept that the symptoms were genetic. I could not see how this could be so unless the symptoms were the result of some external agent attacking me. As far as I was concerned I didn't have psoriatic arthritis and it didn't exist because it was simply a term to describe a series of symptoms my genetic and/or personal make-up produced when my system was assaulted. It seemed reasonable that stress etc could aggravate the system's response to this assault.

Like many people, I was convinced that food had something to do with it.

My idea was: If I could find what foods were assaulting my body, then I need not suffer all these problems.

At that stage, I had had no success in making any headway towards finding out what foods were the problem. The task was to solve something that had baffled experts.

I was getting desperate. I either gave up and used the drugs that could destroy what was left of me, or I could solve the impossible. I had prayed for help for years, with the thought that what I learned would help someone else, so I just kept searching. (Little did I know how close I was!).

By that time my legs, arms, & shoulders were stiff and swollen, and pained continuously.

Sometimes, when I ate something unusual, the arthritis seemed to flare up shortly afterwards, but I could make no sense of it, as at other times it would not flare up at all. (I wasn't aware of it could take up to a week or more for symptoms to be noticed!)

The skin itch, which was over most of my back and sides, and was invisible, made it difficult to concentrate, it used to nearly drive me mad, and I was constantly scratching my back on door posts.

A draft from sitting near a photocopier, car air vents, or fan blowing on the skin, would become quite painful; the skin nerves seemed to be supersensitive.

Tinnitus, the constant noise in my ears and particularly in the left ear, with accompanying loss of hearing around the top of the voice range, occasionally got so loud it was annoying and made it difficult to go to sleep.

The psoriasis which had started on my forehead 28 years ago, had moved across my scalp was slowly spreading, especially around the ears and elbows. My toenails, particularly of the big toes, had become thick (about 2.0mm), yellow and spongy; the smaller nails had become shorter and brittle. All the nails were turned up.

Fungus infection of the feet was very difficult to control, and I had to go bare footed at least 12 hrs. in each day.

When I went to bed at night my feet and legs would quickly go cold, and I often awoke with cramps during the night.

General Body condition seemed to be one of overall puffiness; with weight (fluid?) changing up and down very easily - especially up if I got into the chocolate!

Food seemed to rot rather than digest. Any wind I passed was putrid.

Motions were often began hard and painful, driven by gas and had a runny and putrid aftermath; sometimes, undigested food was visible.

Soft gassy motions were then followed again by hard stools (Irritable Bowel) The result was an inflamed anus, a sore bottom, and haemorrhoid bleeding a recurrent condition.

Constant tiredness was always with me. If I could 'get going' I would be ok, but I could easily sleep 12-15 hours in a day. A couple of days like this, and I seemed to be able to catch up with my 'tiredness', only to go under again as I became more active. I was not so much sleepy as feeling like I was drugged or poisoned.

In 1995 I was told by a friend, who had been involved with Royal Prince Alfred Hospital many years ago, that it might be something to do with salicylates in food -- what ever they were.

The feeling that the cause was food related became stronger and stronger as time went on, so I compiled a list of everything I thought might be a clue. This list, which included a brief life history, I put on the kitchen fridge. As things occurred to me I added them to the list, desperately searching for a pattern.

The story I listed was something like this:

* Infantile eczema as a baby, caused by being fed orange juice. (I was encased in plaster to prevent scratching).

* As a child I had been allergic to eggs. This disappeared at about 6 years of age.

* All my life I have had nasal problems; a runny and blocked nose.

* Always seems to be getting head colds.

* At around age 27 I began to suffer with haemorrhoids. These were assumed to be caused by driving on rough roads to and from my employment. I was told to use an air cushion. (This certainly helped my comfort when driving)

* By 33 years of age I was suffering pain under the base of the right big toe, which I thought was caused by a stone injury. This injury was subsequently diagnosed as gout. However, blood tests did not indicate gout.

* About 36 years of age I had an emergency operation for appendicitis.

* At About 38 I injured my scalp and psoriasis started up.

* I occasionally had unexplained headaches. Sometimes 2 hrs. after drinking a cup of tea.

* I suffered cramps at night; taking magnesium tablets prevented them.

* If I had a cup of tea at night before retiring, my feet went cold when I laid down to sleep.

* I suffered body spasms (sudden jerking) while lying down.

* At about 35 to 37, I suffered my 'filing cabinet back injury'.

What clues did I have -apart from the above list?

* The friend who mentioned 'salicylates'.

* An 85 year old friend who told me that if he ate Vegemite(r) then four days later he suffered stiffness and soreness in his fingers and knuckles.

* Many stories, from older friends, who have found they had peculiar reactions to some things they ate.

* A lot of stories you hear about food causing problems such as cramps etc. ('old wives tales').

One day while awaiting a prescription in a pharmacy, I looked through a Nutratech(r) Health Information Kiosk. I looked up all the disease symptoms I could remember. This information was well put together and easy to understand. I noticed that often Salicylates, Tartrazine, and Metabisulphite, were suggested, especially in combination, as a possible cause of the different complaints I had experienced over the years.

I then researched these three chemicals in the Wollongong Reference Library. I was amazed to find that these chemicals, when in drugs, had the side-effects symptoms that were similar to those I was suffering. If I was not taking drugs all the time then the chemicals must be in the things I was eating.

All this was too much to ignore and I became convinced I had stronger reasons to suspect food.

I did not believe in diets and neither did my rheumatologist. However, I was sure I was on the right track. The next step was to go and see a Wollongong Hospital Dietitian and see if I could prove I was right; and that it was some foods that were effecting me.

On the 15th August 1995 the doctor accepted that food might be a problem so he gave me the required referral to the dietitian at Wollongong Hospital.

You must have a referral letter from your Doctor to visit the Dietician, which I did through the Outpatient Department at the Hospital. I could have used a private dietitian, who would use the

RPAH Elimination diet for 'Food Intolerance Testing', but fortunately the friend, who told me about salicylates, recommended the hospital. She said they would have access to information from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Allergy Consulting Clinic.

On the 16 Aug 95, I met with Wollongong Hospital's Dietitian.

I was advised to purchase the book 'Friendly Food' (Murdoch Books) about $12 (inc GST),at most booksellers.

The dietician also gave me a copy of each of two Royal Prince Alfred Hospitals 'in house' elimination diet books.

The Dietician monitored my health & weight gain/loss at each stage of the testing, and reported back to my doctor.

I was given instructions to:

1. Read the elimination diet booklet thoroughly.

2. Ring if I had any questions.

3. Prepare for the diet as outlined.

4. Make an appointment when diet was established.

5. Eat only those items, recommended in the two books, as safe.

It was four weeks before I could say I was on the diet, I thought I was already improving but I wasn't sure. By the 7th week I had settled down somewhat and it was now time to revisit the dietician.

It was now 27th September 1995 and I was told that as I did not seem to be improving any more, I should ignore the ups and downs of the symptoms and if nothing changed to start the challenge testing.

I was able to detect the effects of eating natural salicylates or added Tartrazine Azo dye colouring. Some of the results seemed to be doubtful so the dietitian arranged for some double blind testing. This was done by using secret prescriptions made up by the hospital pharmacy. Neither the dietician nor I knew what was in them.

When I did the salicylates test it took about 8 days to give a full-scale reaction. I didn't know what I was looking for, but when I got very severe inflammation and pain everywhere I had a 'weak spot'; it was without a doubt a reaction. The reaction was an overall stiffness, joint swelling, nausea, headache, flaring psoriasis which was itchy & peeling, itchy skin (particularly on the back and sides), a crawling feeling on the legs, (I kept thinking ants were crawling up my legs!), Tinnitus became loud, there were spells of vertigo and I had a dull throbbing headache.

In the case of the Tartrazine colouring test, I got a substantial increase in pain but it did not seem to affect the inflammation.

Blind tests were used for Sodium Metabisulphite and MSG. The tests were taken in the morning.

The metabisulphite reaction was of indigestion and stomach pain; which came about four hours after eating the next main meal in the evening; apparently due to indigestion after eating. Stomach rumbling, abdominal pains, severe flatulence, bowel trouble and haemorrhoids due to the diarrhoea followed the stomach pain. It took me some six weeks to recover from this test.

I had no reaction to MSG, nor did the blind test effect my arthritis in any way.

I had achieved the impossible in only twelve weeks! The pain and inflammation were leaving me!

Although I am now virtually free of the symptoms of the arthritis. I do get stiff and sore if I don't watch what I eat or if I get really tired and am not sufficiently active. The acute & chronic pain and inflammation, however, are gone.

The skin-itch along with the pain from the air drafts is no longer noticeable. I no longer feel the cold.

The noise in my ears has settled, together with the ever-present psoriasis that shows signs of healing over a long period.

At this time (5 years later) the thick spongy toenails have re-grown, giving me healthy nails that, with the feet, are no longer fungus prone. I have also lost any sign of body odour and my clothes no longer smell.

The size of my body has shrunk although I have put on approx. 3 Kg. (6 Lbs) in weight. This may be because I am much more active, so causing conversion of fatty tissue to muscle. A general increase of strength indicates this. The loss may also be due to a loss of fluid. Feeling bright and wide-awake encourages activity and the use of more energy.

It is wonderful to feel invigorated after a meal instead of feeling dopey, and to have an effective digestion, regular bowel habits and no piles.

It is obvious food is now being properly digested. And I am now getting the nutrition I need from much simpler foods. The improvement in my sense of taste and smell more than compensates for not eating rich tasting foods.

When I was examined by the rheumatologist I was diagnosed to have bone damage. 12 months later, in Aug.'96, comparative X-Rays were taken, to see if the damage had stabilised and it appeared that it had. I was told that the increase in strength I was experiencing could indicate the possibility of bone rebuilding.

My wife and I now both eat low chemical foods. We have been able to have ultrasonic bone density testing done each year. At the end off the year 2000, my wife's bones have strengthened and my bones have not deteriorated when measured on an age corrected basis.

The fourth & fifth fingers on the right hand appear to have a permanent stricture of about 35 degrees.

Small errors such as a cup of ordinary coffee, cough lozenges with 'colour' give an observable reaction.

No more 'Chronic Fatigue': One thing I am very pleased with is the loss of what I used to think of as tiredness, but was in fact lethargy, what I would imagine it to be like if one was drugged. It was like I was being fed a constant very mild dose of anaesthetic.

My senses of taste and smell have greatly improved. Bland foods are much more enjoyable.

Eating no longer makes me drowsy, and in fact I now only need 6-8 hours sleep for complete rest, half the time I used to need; and Even when tired I do not feel dull of mind. This is a new experience.

A great increase in my strength has occurred without any effort to build it up. I was recently able without difficulty, to use a concrete tennis court roller weighting approx 300 Kg. (480 lbs) rolling up and down a water soaked buffalo lawn with a slope of one in ten.

When I had the pain and inflammation etc. I could walk only about 100 metres (110 Yds). After 6 to 12 months, I could already walk briskly for up to one and a half Km, then with a short rest repeat the walk. I have walked four kilometres (2.5 miles), each way, to the supermarket then carried two full bags of goods home again.

Pain in the right arm used to limit me to typing on the computer to about 20-30 mins. per day. I have since typed for 8 - 10 hrs per day for more than two weeks (400 times the typing) on a project, with no discomfort whatever. And that was inside the first year eating bland food! (What?... no 'Repetitive strain injury'?).

It is now easy to see how one's personality would alter with these changes, and why I now feel so alert, confident in my abilities, and positive in my outlook.

It is like taking the lid off a boiler and letting the steam.

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From Bernard's website: http://members.ozemail.com.au/~btrudget/index.htm

Email: btrudget@ozemail.com.au

PO Box 211, Keiraville, NSW, Australia, 2500

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