



My fight against Tuberculosis

by Terry McKenzie

There must be some mistake! It can't possibly be! When, where and how? These thoughts rapidly raced through my mind as I lay in hospital, with the daunting prospect of how I was going to try and get through what felt like a death sentence.

Tuberculosis! (TB) is a disease that mainly affects the lungs, but can be found in any other body organ. It is caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

The germs are present in the sputum coughed up by those who have TB of the lungs. The germs usually destroy the soft tissue of the lungs, and this causes cavities (holes) in the lungs, resulting in difficulty with breathing, and blood can be coughed up. If untreated, TB can cause death.

Here is my testimony :

The only flicker of light and hope were the words I continually heard over the radio from Archbishop Desmond Tutu; "TB is a curable disease." I knew that treatment was for a period of 6 months and if you took your medication and stuck to it, you would be fine. What ignorance on my part! It all seemed so simple. I made many new discoveries as I faced one of the greatest challenges in my life!

Ten years ago, I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis and Rheumatoid Arthritis. These two diseases are horribly debilitating and my doctors decided to try a relatively new "miracle" drug. One-day hospitalization was required as they infused the drug intravenously, with careful monitoring for possible side effects. After 3 initial treatments, a maintenance course would be considered. However, that was not to be.

Christmas 2005 was a time of great joy! Amidst all the festivity, and having just completed my treatment, I did not feel

well. Constant headaches, 'flu-like symptoms, aching joints and continual sighing were some of the symptoms I began experiencing. Little menial tasks seemed mammoth, I was so tired - it felt like a blanket of fatigue enveloping me.

I reacted negatively to the infusions, my immune system crashed

My symptoms worsened rapidly! On boxing day, I went to my Doctor, who immediately sent me to hospital placing me under the care of a Physician Specialist. Over a period of days, I endured lumbar punctures, X-rays, C.T. scans and numerous blood tests. One alarming result was that my white blood cell count was non-existent and with that, no immunity to fight any infection. Eventually it was revealed that I had pneumonia, and was not responding to anything being administered. My symptoms worsened even further with spiking fevers, chills, abdominal pain, continual sweating, chest pain, nausea, diarrhea, headaches, aching joints, light-sensitivity, dizziness, absolute fatigue and the loss of 8kg.

It was an effort even to breathe

Eventually, diagnosis was made on the 10th Jan 2006 that I had pulmonary and miliary Tuberculosis. I didn't know that TB could be found in other parts of the body. Treatment for TB was initiated, and within 48 hours the fever finally broke. Hospitalization was still necessary as the doctors wanted to monitor me closely.



I was finally released on the 16th January, and YES, I say released because it felt as though I was going to serve my sentence for this dreaded illness. Arriving home was glorious! I had made it! The fighting spirit I have within me had not let me down.

Many challenges faced me daily - my troubles were far from over. I had already realised during my hospital stay, the terrible stigma attached to someone with TB. I had started with the "intensive phase" of treatment – and it was just that – INTENSE! The medication was extremely strong, wiping out what little strength I had. During this time I was oblivious to life around me.

Taking my TB medications became a daily ritual in our household, with my husband being my DOTS supporter. This is someone who will Directly Observe Treatment Short-Course and tick off your TB card showing that medication had been taken. Mondays to Fridays medication was taken, weekends you were free, giving your body time to recoup and then on Monday the cycle would start again. Rashes, itching, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headaches, chills, tremors, shortness of breath, wheezing and unbelievable bone pain were experienced daily. Pink urine and tears were evident and rather alarming to witness.

I started taking Florafood before every meal, as I knew I had to start building up good bacteria in my digestive system, so that what little was being eaten, was hopefully going to be digested and absorbed and bring healing to my system. I took comfort in knowing that Florafood was also building up my immune system, and helping with the inflammation I was experiencing. I would open up the capsule and place the contents under my tongue, to dissolve more quickly, passing into the bloodstream.

Much will-power is needed, with the focus on your goal

During my treatment and regular visits to the TB clinic, I developed an intense admiration for people who were taking medication daily with little or no support structure. The mere fact that they were even taking their medication was admirable, because the meds themselves make you feel so weak and physically ill. I could now understand why people stop taking their medicine, and don't see it through. Much

will-power is needed, with the focus on your goal - to be truly rid of this illness, to talk, sing, laugh and feel whole.

My long walk to recovery took 11 months of medication. I am truly grateful to my family and friends and for their belief in me. Their continual prayers, love and support were amazing! I am also eternally grateful to the Lord for His comfort, care and understanding. Thank you for always being there for me - YOU never ever left me.

Do I speak about my TB? Absolutely. There are many people out there who need to hear success stories, to give them hope! TB knows no boundaries, irrespective of who you are or where you come from. I realized that and learnt a great deal too, I was very ignorant about TB!

To enjoy life and live it to the fullest is truly a gift, one not to be taken for granted.

If health is good, the immune system and defences of the body are strong, then the organism will be contained. Optimum nutrition is important; the better the nutritional status, the better the body's systems function.

Why Florafood ?

- Helps maintain digestive and intestinal health.
- Maintains healthy cholesterol levels
- Stimulates/enhances the immune system
- Inhibits some bacterial and viral infection

