

# The bite of the mor

Smiles, congratulations and high-fives from my amazing 'Team C' support team members.

The six-month post treatment PCR result returned no virus detected. A supporting ultrasound checking elevated gall level and occasional abdominal pain gave the all clear with a healthy "smooth" liver. Hugs and accolades of "well done" burst forth from family and friends. Thirty-plus years of living with hep C was over.

*I'd taken the cure and had just gotten through ...*  
Bob Dylan (1975).

The hep C I had been dragging around was genotype 1 and my prescribed course of treatment was the combination treatment for 48 weeks. My team at the clinic emphasised commitment to the program with the goal of eradicating the virus.

How to endure 48 weeks with the forecast ups and downs, side effects, possible side effects etc, was the first issue for me. The supporting psychologist had informed me that I "would not tolerate fools" by month five of the treatment. A vivid recollection of a period of incarceration many years past gave me the cue.

The task was to develop a strategy enabling me to navigate my way through a 48-week sentence. My strategy was to focus on the weekly injection as my time marker. A pack of four syringes in the fridge plus two more packs and I was at week 12. Amazingly the 48 weeks instantly looked and felt smaller. No virus was detectable at week 12. It was smiles and thumbs up from the team to carry on.

Adopting a survivalist attitude, doing what it took to deal with the situation at hand, allowed me to cope with the mild confusion, moments of intolerance and physical tiredness.

When mind and body felt good, I focussed on going surfing; or tackling a task at home, or for a neighbour; or attending a social event.

I had a "get-ready-and-go" attitude. Too much deliberating and fitting in with other people instantly raised the stress level.

I likened what I called the "riba-anxiety" to the survival anxiety one experiences when incarcerated. Living with "the safety catch off" 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week, and yes the psychologist's words "you won't tolerate fools by month five" were indeed true.

My partner and I live in an alternative community situated within a national park. I withdrew from the community management team as my tolerance for deliberation and associated politics became nil. For me, issues appeared to be clear cut and I became intolerant of the politics and "fluff".

My partner worried about me and my relationship with other people in the community. This concern led to her occasional phone conversation with the clinic's psychologist. I understood her worry – but could not see the need for her to do so. I felt I was in touch and dealing with things adequately.

My monthly "weigh-in" at the clinic also included a chat with the psychologist; something I placed great value in as it allowed the team and me to be intimately aware of how I was travelling. A moment of checks and balances on my hours of reflection and meditation that I embraced throughout the treatment. I did not work a regular job as such throughout the 48 weeks.

Self-soothing came by way of playing music from early morning through to the evening. The music was moderately loud, especially when I had the need to don the gloves and flail the punching bag for 15 minutes or so.

# Monkey – Floyd's story

My physical body still demanded some maintenance for my well-being. Part of my comfort wrap was my spirituality. Music and prayer and the lighting of a prayer candle given to me by a friend became a significant ritual throughout my treatment.

During treatment I travelled to Bali with family for our son's wedding. Surfing together he caught waves as I just paddled around. I was wasted just getting across the reef and that was before paddling out through the line-up. While in Bali I was bitten on the arm by a monkey. The irony of it didn't escape me – on treatment dealing with the ramifications from the "bite of the monkey" thirty years previously!

With treatment over and no virus detected, my reclaimed daily energy and endurance allow me to perform all day, following up one task after another, hallelujah!

I no longer experience the energy and motivation loss which would flatten me for several days at a time. Pursuing creative interests that I had previously neglected over the years is now a big personal focus.

The *Hep Connect* and other support activities especially in my local area are something I am looking to engage with in the coming months. I am hoping to be part of encouraging others as they seek to take the cure.

## **Floyd, NSW.**

*NB: For information about the Hep C Council's Hep Connect service, see page 46.*

