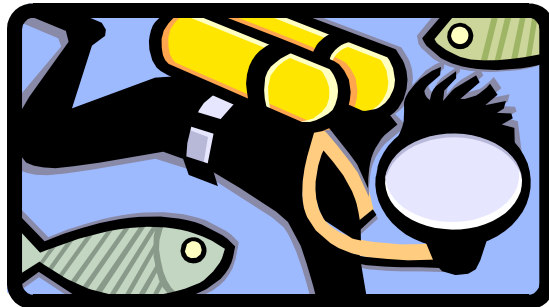


From NZAN Newsletter No 14, Nov01

KATHRYN'S STORY:

I am 60 yrs old and have been married to Glen for 39 yrs. We have one daughter Evette and a grandson Lee. Glen, Evette and I have a small timber yard so that helps keep me busy both manually and mentally with all the paper work involved.



I have led an active life – hockey, cricket, surfing, tramping/walking and diving. I still go tramping/walking and diving and enjoy wood-turning. I have had Hypothyroidism since 1993. That was picked up by my GP and once I was stabilized on thyroxine, it hasn't interfered with my life at all.

One Friday morning in mid May 2000 I went back to bed feeling dizzy and all I wanted to do was sleep. In the past when I'd been sick, which luckily wasn't very often, my family would leave me alone as all I want to do is sleep. So nobody knew how bad I was. By Monday morning I knew something was very wrong so got Evette to take me to my GP. He said "You've got the flu and there is nothing I can give you". I didn't have the strength to argue. He also said "If you don't feel any better in a couple of days, get a blood test". I did have a blood test and it came back with sodium levels down. However the nurse phoned to say everything was normal.

Friday morning my friend Julie, who had been in and out all week trying to make me eat and drink, took me back to the doctor (my GP's partner this time). I couldn't stand and couldn't sit without my head being supported. The doctor told Julie to take me for a blood test. She said "No I'm not taking her anywhere, as she can't even walk" and made him do it. Spoke to the doctor about 5pm and he said "I want you to go to the hospital now".

Glen picked up a letter from the doctor and thought I was only going for tests and then coming home. I wasn't much help by then as I didn't even know which way was up. In fact I remember very little of that whole week. Woke up next morning in ICU on a sodium drip. The first four days were pretty vague. On the fifth day

they took the drip out but then I was only allowed 800mls of fluids per day as the sodium was being washed out of my body.

On the seventh day in the afternoon the doctor gave me hydrocortisone. I didn't sleep very well that night BUT woke up next morning feeling alive again. I was up and showered and ready for action by 6.30am. (Prior to that the nurses had to hassle me into getting out of bed). Went home three days later knowing I had Addison's and would be on medication for the rest of my life, but not a lot else. I had spent 11 days in hospital, two in ICU.

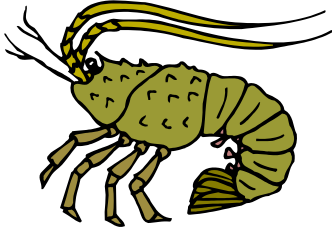
I was taking 20mg hydrocortisone in the morning and 10mg at night, and 0.1mg fludrocortisone in the morning. I went walking every day, for a bit longer each day. The weather was cold and windy but fine and it was great to feel the wind blowing through my hair. Plus a mountain of paper work kept me busy. But after four weeks things still weren't right. I was on an emotional roller coaster, bursting into tears for no reason, couldn't stand loud noises, wasn't that keen on driving during the day and couldn't drive at night as my long sight was all fuzzy.

I went to my GP and he spoke to an endocrinologist and then he put me on 15mg hydrocortisone in the morning 5mg at midday and 5mg late afternoon. That sorted the problem out. My GP also arranged to have my first endocrinology appointment, which was still a few months away, bought forward to the following week. I went back to work after six weeks, but still didn't drive at night for another three weeks.

In August went to Australia to stay with friends whose wedding I'd missed when I was in hospital. The thing that gave me a boost was seeing a documentary on Eugene Shoemaker. I didn't feel quite so alone with my Addison's, as at that stage I didn't know a lot about it. Having Addison's prevented him from going to the Moon, but he was chief scientist and organized the geological activities planned for the Lunar landing in 1969. His ashes were in a capsule aboard Lunar Prospector (launched Jan 1998), which orbited the moon for approximately 18 months, then was deliberately crashed onto the moon. So Eugene Shoemaker finally did make it to the moon.

In October my endocrinologist reassured me Addison's was not life shortening. But there was still a lot I needed to learn. He gave me Jeanette's fax number, so I faxed her and got sent the NZAN Starter Pack. I read and reread all the information in it.

I got back into Tramping in October. It took a bit longer to get back into diving - I kept putting it off BUT then in December the mother-in-law said we need some crayfish for Christmas. The only problem was the wetsuit as I had put on 10 kgs. I have since put on another 5kgs, so guess it is time to go and buy another wetsuit.



In March 2001 I met up with Andrea, Karen and Lyn with the view to organizing a Northern Regional Meeting. Just meeting up with Andrea, Karen and Lyn and talking to Jeanette by phone was amazing. We all got so much out of it. And we did organize The Meeting. It was a huge success - however that is another story.

In June I had an opportunity to spend a week in a Tuscan Villa with six New Zealand ladies, so I thought I would take three weeks and go to Rome, Florence and Pisa at the same time. But could not get anyone to go with me at such short notice. I was not happy about traveling alone, but after talking to Lyn and Jeanette about traveling with Addison's, they both said do it, so I did and I had a wonderful time and met some great people.

I didn't get jet lag as I followed Jeanette's strategy for the flight, of taking a 5mg maintenance dose of hydrocortisone about every 5 hours once I left Auckland and then the morning dose local time on arrival at the final destination. I slept well on the Sydney/Bangkok and Bangkok/Rome sectors. I had my normal morning dose of pills including 15mg hydrocortisone at 5.30am Rome time and was at my hotel at 7.30am.

I couldn't check into my room until midday so left my luggage and went sightseeing. Booked into the hotel at midday, then continued sightseeing. There were so many things to see and do - the Colosseum, Trajan's Market, the Forum, Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Pantheon just to name a few. What a wonderful feeling to be in a city like Rome, so much history, so old and so beautiful.

I took three sets of pills (one in my suitcase, one in my day backpack and one in my small bag), Solu-cortef injection, a letter from my GP, and a letter with emergency Addison's instructions in Italian (from NZAN) and I wore a Medic Alert Bracelet. I only had one day when I did not feel 100% so took 20mg extra and was fine the next day.

I am going tramping in Wairarapa for 2 weeks in November with three of my sisters, and then Glen and I are going to the Marlborough Sounds for three weeks over the Christmas break to do some diving, and catch a couple of crayfish and some Blue Cod.

Having Addison's has not changed my life a lot. I do get tired but manage to work around that as I have too many things that I want to do.