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GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES

By: *Ron Green*

Ron Green lived in Sydney as a social outcast before he Googled "body odour" and discovered what his doctors had failed to diagnose.

I knew there was something wrong with me from a very young age, but no one knew what it was. I remember being a six-year-old at school and my teacher sending me home and telling my mother to bathe me because the other students shouldn't have to put up with the smell. My mother didn't seem aware of it or understand what they were talking about.

My life was an absolute disaster. I was treated as a pariah and no one would tell me what was wrong; they just avoided me. I was always made to feel that I was not welcome and it was very embarrassing. People made comments like: "What died?"

I couldn't detect the scent on my skin, but I could smell it on my clothes after I had worn them or if I opened a suitcase after I had been away. I went to doctor after doctor and had tests but they couldn't find anything wrong. They even suggested it was psychological. It used to make me so angry because I knew there was something wrong. I started to doubt my sanity.

As a young man I had a lot of problems trying to make my way in the world. I was always on the outside and I was the one who was never involved. I resorted to activities I could do alone, like fishing, and I had my dogs. I think I did okay despite the problem. I did a university degree and became a teacher. But the kids and the other teachers would complain.

When the internet came out I did a search. I just typed in "body odour" and the word "trimethylaminuria" came up. Also known as Fish Odour Syndrome, it is a genetic disorder that prevents the body from breaking down the compound trimethylamine. There are between 600 and

700 people diagnosed with the condition around the world. There is no cure but there are ways to reduce the odour.

As I read about it and the symptoms I thought, "That's me - that's it." I went back to my GP and after two referrals I found a geneticist who had heard of the condition. He tested me for the disorder and it came back positive. Finally I had validation - I wasn't mad. All these years I had known there was something wrong and it was just my internal strength that had stopped me from going crazy.

It was a great relief knowing there was something I could do about it. I was advised to go on a low-choline diet, which means no organ meats, fish or seafood, egg yolk, nuts, beans, peas or pulses. I also take probiotics and supplements and drink lots of water to flush out my system. I found the diet worked for me. What I am angry about is that it took the best part of 50 years to find out what was wrong with me. It was so unfair.

Since taking steps to alleviate the problem, my life has turned around. I've nearly finished a law degree and I'm in the process of doing a graduate diploma. I am hoping to be a criminal lawyer, and I hope to be arguing cases in court before long. I'm confident it will happen. Even though it's difficult for me, if you do what you're afraid of you won't be afraid any more. I've spent the past four years in stuffy theatres and other places and I've not had a negative comment. My life is nothing like it used to be. People don't want to jump out of planes and leave cinemas when I'm around any more.

But I am the person I am because of the condition - I'm very much a loner and will probably always be that way. I don't go out a lot, and even though I don't get any negative comments about it anymore I am still afraid people are going to reject me. It's a constant battle to be with people because of the fear that developed over 50 years of shame. I don't have a partner and I don't think I ever will - I am happy as I am now.

Ron Green is a pseudonym.

For information, email the Trimethylaminuria Foundation: theTFnetwk@aol.com