



The Seventy Fourth issue of a sort-of letter substitute, kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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Helicobacter Pylori and Me

I'm starting to get to know this little bacterium rather well now – and that is not supposed to happen. Discovered relatively late, 1982, by two Australian doctors it is now reckoned that around 30 – 40% of us have this bacteria in our system, and around 10% of those will develop some form of upper stomach complaint because of it. This is where I come in, as you may have guessed.

Let me take you back, to late October 2003; I'd been feeling poorly for a few weeks. Great expression that, 'poorly.' I recently heard it used in the context of a grandmother who was feeling 'poorly;' turned out she was in a hospice with terminal cancer and only lasted a few weeks after this statement was made. 'Poorly,' indeed. However I digress.

I was just in poor health: headaches, aches and pains and what have you. So I took some aspirin and went to bed. Over the next few weeks this continued and became the 'norm', not feeling too hot, a bit down but nothing you could really put your finger on. So I took a few days off work, lay in bed for a while read some books, took some pain killers and drank a lot of fluids. As you do.

Back to work on Thursday not feeling a whole lot better, but not sick enough to justify more time off work – I thought I'd take a few aspirin and I'd be right as rain. This is where it starts to get interesting. I'd phoned work and told them all about it – they said to take the rest of the week and come back refreshed on Monday. I'd stuff to do though and was feeling guilty because, really, there was nothing wrong with me. I told my boss:

"It's just a bug that is going around..." How right I was and wrong it would be.

After lunch on Thursday I felt the first pain in my chest I thought the worst and said as much to my boss, and fucked off home. Let me stop here and explain a few medical terms, sans TommyWorld. Now to me my stomach was always that bit around the belly button and your waist band – you know: 'you've got a bit of a stomach there...' etc. I've

since learned this is your intestines, your belly as such, and it amazes me that I'd gone through thirty odd years of not really knowing this. You got bones there, it is your chest; you don't got bones, it is your stomach. Simple, no? No, wrong.

So I'm back in bed feeling a bit nauseous and generally flu-like. Leslie comes home around tea-time and I tell her what happened – yeah, definitely a flu bug. I was getting a temperature, having aches and pains in my body and really starting to feel a lot worse than I had before. Finally, I think, I can get sick and be done with it. I lay back in bed, popped a couple of pills and hoped for the best. A couple of hours I was in the toilet and, there is no easy way of putting this, everything I'd eaten in the past few days was coming out of every orifice. I'm not only talking vomiting and diarrhoea, but out my nose as well. All in all, not very pleasant. I was white as a sheet, nearly passed out and if it wasn't for Leslie things could have gone downhill **VERY** quickly.

Afterwards I felt a lot better –as you do when you evacuate your bowels... You know what I mean: good puke and then back on the dance floor and a couple more of those shooters please. I also felt better because my bug was obviously some sort of food poisoning of which vomiting/diarrhoea is a classic symptom. Christ knows what was in those Boots sandwiches I had for lunch, but at least I could now put all this behind me and start getting better. It always helps when, as the Joker found out in the first Batman movie: "I have a name for my pain, and it is..." Food poisoning. So lots of fluid, soup to eat and a couple of Aspirin to take the temperature down and lots of rest. You've all heard this before too – it cures most ills.

Not mine though. The weekend wasn't a great success. I was unwell, eating lots, but unwell. By Sunday night Leslie was worried enough that I promised her if it wasn't okay I'd go the hospital on Monday. I felt things were passing, she didn't. As it happened on that score she was right – from diarrhoea to constipation – I thought someone up there was having a laugh at my expense. By Monday the constipation and pains in my chest – which I now know to be my stomach, were really quite sore. Macho bullshit for: I'm in agony but don't want to admit it.

So straight after work on Monday ("You went to work? You idiot, what did I tell you..." etc, etc.) I went to the emergency room, feeling a right prat and fully expecting to be sent home with a bucket of pills and told not to be wasting valuable health service resources. Four hours later I got seen by a junior doctor, who took my vitals and told me to wait in what was obviously one of the ER's Operating Theatres – it was a busy night. An hour after that a consultant walks in looking for something sees me and flips. What was I doing here, how long had I been here and what the hell was wrong with me anyway? I explained all over again and she left to find the idiot who had left me high and dry.

Turns out he had left for the day, totally forgot about me and was probably waxing his Porsche for the second time already. So the consultant came back, took some bloods, some soundings and poked and prodded me. I felt increasingly nervous – what the hell was going on? To cut a long story short I had the bacteria mentioned above, probably had it for weeks, and it weakened the lining of my stomach and made it inflamed. All those pills I was popping, hoping my temperature would go down and I would feel better? Aspirin is like acid in your stomach, of the four beautiful ulcers I had developed (I saw a photo from the endoscope,) two had perforated and I had been bleeding into my stomach and Intestines for, we guess, a week or so. I was admitted, given three units of blood over a couple of days, and finally, three days later, was let home with a stern warning about Aspirin-like painkillers. Paracetamol for me then, boss!

My GP put me on a range of antibiotics to cure the bacteria and a bunch of antacid tablets to ease the pain and inflammation. Now this range of treatment is highly effective: our young Australian doctors in their studies reckoned 95% of patients would not be re-infected over the next twelve months. And I did feel better. Until a couple of weeks ago, six months after my first treatment. This time experience got me to the doctor a lot quicker and bang! Back on the drugs, with more endoscopes if they don't work. And to cap it all off, this little gem:

"You're not losing weight, are you Mr. Ferguson?"

"No, quite the opposite really. My wife is a baker... er. Why do you want to know?"

"Now this is very rare, and don't get worried, but it could be stomach cancer... Highly unlikely and this treatment should cure you right up..."

Don't worry! Right! I'll just not do that then...

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This was written a good while ago and the stomach is, apparently, never going to be right again. I've basically got an on-going problem for the rest of my life. I'll maybe write about this more later. And no this is not a New Year's resolution to publish more, though I would like to. Turns out that I'm not likely to get the TommyWorld.net domain anytime soon, so have claimed the .info and .org domains until such time as I do. With my exams over I've had a bit of free time, not much, to have a look at the site again, and this is what happens... As it happens getting into the smallish garden we have, and doing something with it, is my New Year's resolution. Maybe more on that later. Tommy