

The Destruction of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Single mum, Sonia St. Claire knows pain. Diagnosed in 1994 with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) she spent 18 months bedridden in the darkness of chronic pain, crying out for help when there was none. Her two children could not show her affection without causing agonising moments of pain. **by Maggie Wilde**

Today Sonia is a picture of health. She has astounded doctors as she took control and reversed the irreversible! Her book - *Freedom From Rheumatoid Arthritis* includes details of her heart wrenching story growing up in the welfare system and a detailed menu plan based on her journey back to health!

According to Sonia's website www.ffra.com there are over three million Australians suffering some form of arthritis and more who deal with the symptoms of lupus and other autoimmune diseases every year. This book could change lives.

MW: Can you describe how the disease took hold?

SSC: The onset was slow, maybe almost a year. I was nearly 44 at the time. It took three lots of blood tests to eventually find RA. As time went on my children couldn't even hold my hand or touch me anywhere without agonising moments of pain. Eventually my whole flesh became too painful to touch.

MW: That must have been hard for your children to understand?

SSC: Yes it was. My children couldn't give me any spontaneous affection. I would brace myself on the chair and they could kiss my cheek. But I had to know they were coming. Eventually I became bedridden. Olivia was 7 and Ben was 8. They used to bring me tea and toast for breakfast, spaghetti sandwiches for lunch and cereal for dinner. I couldn't get out of bed to help them. I wouldn't let them use the stove in case they set fire to themselves or the house. They were allowed to use the toaster and the kettle. That went on for about a year and a half.

MW: You didn't have support?

SSC: No. My blood tests were so severe I was told that I should have been in hospital. But I didn't call anyone because I had grown up in the welfare system and I was frightened if welfare came and saw I was incapacitated they would take my children away. I had no family to help protect them and I didn't want them put in the system. On my worst days they didn't go to school. On my better days (double the dose of pain killers) I would drive them. Just touching the wheel of the car was horrific. I would cry all the way there and back.

MW: How did you cope at home?

SSC: I couldn't get out of bed by myself.

My right knee was huge, my flesh, hands and both shoulders were affected as were the back of my neck and right elbow. To get me out of bed my son would move around behind me and push me up as I braced myself against the pain. Then he'd go round to the side of the bed and grab my ankles to pull me to the side of the bed. I could then sit with my feet on the floor. Then the two of them would

take me to the toilet, put me on and take me off. They would put me in the shower too. There were lots of tears, emotion & depression at the time. Many times I questioned 'Why me, why my children?'

MW: How were the kids coping?

SSC: At 7 and 8 they seemed to cope better than a teenager would. At that age the sun and the moon sets in the eyes of the parent. They are so innocent and their love was so unconditional. I was their mum and they did everything without question.

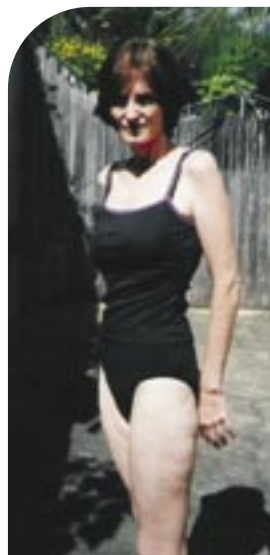
MW: Have you been able to talk through this with them since getting well?

SSC: They remember I was bedridden and they remember the mess in the kitchen with packets and cans. They don't remember specific details though. They've never read my book and I certainly don't want them to for a long time. Children that young are so resilient they will do anything to survive with the mother.

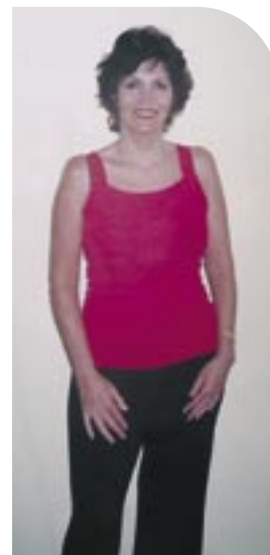
MW: Do you think your experience of the welfare system had an impact on how you dealt with this?

SSC: Yes, I was in five different orphanages for the first 14 years of my life. In the holidays I would go to foster care. At 14 I became very ill with acute appendicitis. The nuns wouldn't take me to the hospital or call a doctor. Three days later my twin sister swore at them and took me on foot to the hospital herself. On the way my appendix burst. Suddenly the pain had gone and I was at peace. Like there was a white cloud around me. I knew that I was dying. It felt fabulous, like it was all coming to an end. When we got to the hospital I only had a short while to live. They rang the police to get permission to operate.

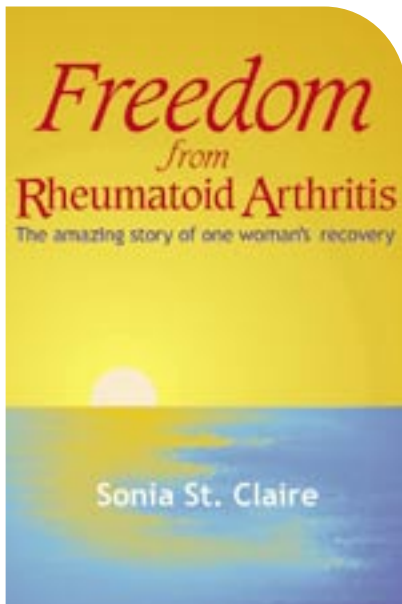
MW: So what helped you reach this picture of health?



Sonia struggled with pain and muscle atrophy



Today Sonia is radiant with health!



SSC: After a year and a half in bed I simply thought 'Sonia you either live like this or you do something about yourself.' I had no idea what I could do. RA is said to be an incurable disease. I thought 'There's got to be more than this.' I started reading health books and changing my diet. I went off western processed foods. I didn't know what I was doing at first. I had no idea if it would work. People asked me 'How did you know you could even fix it?'

It was a survival instinct

at first. In welfare my emotional, physical and mental needs were never met. There was a lot of violence, physical and sexual abuse and abandonment. So for me to be sick like this meant I would probably end up in a nursing home at the mercy of others again... and damned if I was going to let that happen to me or my children. So I fought.

MW: Does that superhuman strength come from whatever your 'God' is to you?

SSC: I believe there is something more powerful out there, call it what you like. The power of the universe... energy... I don't know what to call it. I do know when I was dying how powerful and peaceful that was. I had never known such peace; it was the first time I had not been in pain of some sort, whether physical, or emotional. It was my survival instinct. My faith in the energy of the universe supported that but it was up to me to put my thoughts into action and keep going.

MW: So tell me a little about how the diet came about and how you started to improve?

SSC: I began experimenting with all natural foods & eliminating anything processed. I've got the blood pressure of an athlete now and I'm 55 years old. The diet consists of lots of fruits and vegetables, no western diet at all. In the book I have outlined the simple steps to managing and changing your life and your pain.

MW: Is organic food part of it?

SSC: No. I was on the pension and couldn't afford it. If you can get your fruit and vegetables from the local growers and markets on weekends you know it's fresh. It may not be 100% organic but it is less than 36 hours old. A lot of fruit & vegetables in our supermarkets comes from overseas and can be stored for up to 9-12 months.

But I have NO packet or canned food. It took me 7 years to research, test and write the book. I started writing before I got well and continued as I got stronger. I always believed that I would get well.

MW: Do you think that attitude helped the process?

SSC: I always stated even on my worst day 'I am in perfect health; I have an abundance of energy'. Initially I didn't know what I was doing. Some things I thought were making me healthy were actually making me worse.

But I just kept eliminating & testing until I was well.

MW: So how long was the journey to recovery?

SSC: According to the doctors I have been in remission since July 1999, but I was pain free long before then. By 1999 my blood tests were 'normal' or 'perfect'.

MW: How did it feel to be given the medical all clear?

SSC: I jumped for joy. When I used to go for injections of cortisone in my joints I'd say to the doctor 'You know I'm going to cure this don't you?' He would say 'There's one thing about you Sonia, you've got a positive attitude.' Then when I finally did cure myself he said 'You are amazing.'

MW: Had he seen anyone do it before?

SSC: No. I asked him once about drug induced results. I was on drugs in the beginning. They nearly killed me. I was on chemotherapy, heavy rheumatic drugs, Nsaids, anti-inflammatory drugs, injections,

pain killers, you name it. I asked him about drug induced remission and he said 'It lasts about a year because the disease finds its way out through another joint.' For me it's been officially 7 years, but pain free, much longer than that. He couldn't work it out and I kept telling him 'It's the diet, the juices.' But doctors & scientists are skeptics.

MW: Do you think you are in remission or cured?

SSC: Definitely cured.

MW: What inspired you to write this book?

SSC: I don't believe people should suffer when there's a way out of this. People should be made aware of their options. There is an alternative to drugs and an untimely death and I feel I'm destined to help people. Having known a lot of suffering in my life, I have a lot of compassion. The last chapter of the book is very positive and very motivating.

I am reaching out to people with RA. Acknowledging there is hope. I want to reach people to give them strength to believe in themselves. That's why I've written about my childhood too. Many people with autoimmune diseases often have a lot in their childhood that is unresolved. I want to reach people on an emotional level to know that they can turn their life around. I want to reach people and say 'I did this, you can too!'

Going to the doctors every week for more pain killers, or lying on your back in pain unable to move - that's not living. Every moment is a new moment to make yourself strong.

I think we are here to reach out to others, to be kind and help where we can. I've done the work to develop a menu and lifestyle plan to attain a pain free life. I've worked through the hard years to pull this together and I am living proof that it can be done. If I can help another person see the possibilities then I am doing what I came here to do.

For details of Sonia's book & menu plan
or to contact Sonia direct,
go to www.ffra.com