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Hepatitis C: Plague of the baby

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boomers



(by Anne Miles) Local author Elizabeth Rains, who lives in Langdale, doesn't know for sure how she got hep C—there are several possibilities. She does know she's part of the demographic most likely to be infected: the post-World War II baby boom generation. It is estimated that 75 to 80 per cent of people living with hep C are boomers. Experts in the U.S. recommend that anyone born between 1945 and 1965 get tested.

This disease, fatal if left untreated, is contagious only via blood. It cannot be caught from breathing the same air or using the same toilet as a sufferer. Nor is it sexually transmitted unless "rough sex" causes blood to mingle. A common cause is intravenous drug use. Transfusions done in the era before blood screening are

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also suspect. It can take decades for symptoms to show. In Rains’s case, it took 40 years.

Treatment? For a long time Interferon— which has such nasty side effects that some people have preferred to endure the disease—was the only possibility. Since then, the “miracle cure” referred to in the sub-title has been found. Until recently, the new cure has been too costly for many (over \$100,000 for the full treatment)—not covered by Pharmacare. The good news is that Fair Pharmacare has now begun to cover the cost in Canada.

The text is enlivened by Rains’s flashbacks to the sometimes hair-raising incidents in her youth that put her at risk for hep C. Between accounts of treatment and diagnosis, plus interviews with hep C sufferers, Rains revisits her past to try to pin-point the cause of her disease. She even goes back to being four years old, when she accidentally cut herself with her sickly father’s razor while pretending to shave. Did her dad have hep C? It’s possible, though a blood transfusion would seem to be the more likely culprit. A last-minute bit of fact-checking reveals a new piece of information that may—or



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may not—explain how she contracted the disease. This makes for a dramatic ending to the final chapter of this important account.

*Demon in My Blood, My Fight with Hep C—
and a Miracle Cure* by Elizabeth Rains

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