

ALLEN'S TB STORY: A PHYSICAL & MENTAL TOLL

“When I began suffering from a sore throat and a mild chest infection, I thought it was just a case of ‘man-flu’.

I worked maintenance for a golf course, and often caught colds from customers in the club house. But when my symptoms didn't go away I knew it was more serious.

After several trips to the doctors, I was diagnosed with pneumonia. This made sense, as I worked long days in all weathers. I was put on treatment immediately, but my condition worsened. I lost an alarming amount of weight. Initially, I didn't notice. It was winter and I was wearing baggy, thick jumpers. I went back to the doctor when I realised I was losing a lot of weight without any effort.

They found it difficult to diagnose me as my symptoms were vague. After numerous tests, I was put in for a biopsy, and diagnosed with TB within hours. I was surprised and so was my doctor!

No trace

I may have picked it up from a pub I used to visit in Grantham. They tried to trace it back there, but nothing official was ever proven.

I was put on a course of TB medication for 18 months. During that time, I had to stop working and became a recluse, pretty much stuck on my sofa. The only time I'd leave the house was for my medication at the hospital. I also became really nervous and paranoid about my appearance. I chose to wear a scarf around my mouth, and since I only weighed eight and a half stone, I looked like a prisoner of war.



“I looked like a prisoner of war”

The psychological effects were particularly hard. I felt stigmatized and so isolated. Some people didn't want to come near me. The mental effects last even today. I also struggled with money during my illness, I was given statutory sick pay for a year, but things got very tight. Luckily, my younger sister moved in with me to support me. I was so fortunate and happy that she was willing and able to help. Still, I felt like the hospital could have offered more advice and support for my physical and mental home care, as well as my finances.

It was a huge relief to finish my medication and be officially cleared of TB after almost two years. However, I continued to experience severe chest infections. The TB left scar tissue and I will likely suffer from chest problems for the rest of my life.

Despite all of this, I remain relatively upbeat about my experience my future. I've learned to live with it, it's not the end of the world. I'm moving on, and I'm going to come out of this in a positive way.