

Reflections on the Road:

We are now in Maine, eating lobster and scallops, which definitely aren't kosher and probably not good for you if you have hep, but what the heck. Put it down to moral weakness, gluttony, or a desire to prop up the local economy, Joan and I have been helping both the local fisheries and the dairies to stay in business.

But that's not what I want to talk about. What I want to talk about is that in our journey to discover Joan's roots, we wound up meeting lots of people in small towns in Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

What usually happened was this: after all the genealogical research was done, people would get to chat a bit, and we'd get a little more personal. People would ask where we were from and what we did, and then I'd tell them about hepatitis C and how it changed my life—how I used to do lots of sports and teach, and how I collapsed, and now how Joan and I are trying to help find a cure and educate people.

The surprising part is that rather than being shocked or uncomfortable, on the contrary, many of the people with whom we spoke would tell us that a friend or a relative of theirs also had hepatitis C.

The people with whom we spoke were usually middle-aged or older and they lived in small towns. It did not appear that alternative lifestyles figured in their lives. And yet, at least 75% of all those with whom we spoke had been touched by hepatitis C in one form or another.

The problem? They didn't really know that much about it—except for those in the nursing professions. And this I find encouraging. A few years ago, many nurses, in my opinion, were definitely not well-informed about HCV, but I think this has changed.

The other thing I found encouraging was the general willingness to help. Many wanted to know more, and were supportive of our efforts.

Out of the shadows? I hope so. For if the public takes an interest in hepatitis C then it can only be for everyone's good.

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