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Lyme disease film reaches Strait area

by Adam Cooke
The Reporter

PORT HASTINGS- Strait area residents dealing with Lyme disease are hoping the screening of a documentary about their condition will alert their neighbours about the difficulties they face on a daily basis.

Under Our Skin, which was presented to the U.S. Congress in September and was also recently screened at New York City's Tribeca Film Festival, will receive a Sunday afternoon showing at the *Maritime Inn Port Hawkesbury*, courtesy of the Nova Scotia Lyme Disease Association (NSLDA) and the Canadian Lyme Disease Foundation (CanLyme).

The film's findings include the concept that many cases of Lyme disease are often misdiagnosed as other conditions - a notion all too familiar to Port Hastings resident Stephen England, who first showed the symptoms of Lyme disease in 1980 but didn't realize he might have the condition until nearly a quarter-century later.

"I was sick, and I didn't know why, and I've been sick ever since," England told *The Reporter*.

"I've been to [several] different clinics and I've spent thousands and thousands of dollars on trying to find out what's wrong with me. I've been diagnosed with chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, chemical sensitivities - everything I've tried, I never get better. I feel like I have the flu all the time, joint pain and all this stuff, and I feel lethargic and tired all the time - I can sleep all night and then wake up in the morning and it's like I didn't sleep."

A former employee of the *NewPage* paper mill in Point Tupper, England was forced to leave his position a decade ago when his symptoms intensified.

"I was making 30 bucks an hour at the mill, and I worked there for 16 years, and

every day I'd have to get up and lay down and take a break, and at the end of it, I just couldn't do it anymore," he reflected. "I got so sick and I felt so awful."

Today, the ravages of Lyme disease have limited England's ability to live a normal life with his 13-year-old son and his 11-year-old daughter.

"My little fellow plays football, and I love football, and I tried to go out and coach him, but it's such an effort - I had played football for a couple of years as a quarterback, and I knew all these plays, but when I tried to get out there and think of the plays, I couldn't think of them - I just felt so crappy," England recalled.

"I want to do a lot more with [my children] - I've even tried to take my little fellow out fishing, or go out and throw the ball around or take them out for a hike - but when you're not feeling good, you're not feeling good, so I can't do it as long as I'd like to."

In addition to the existing myths about the disease, CanLyme and NSLDA officials are sceptical of the concept that there are 100,000 cases of Lyme disease diagnosed annually in the United States and another 85,000 cases in Europe, with only 50 cases documented each year in Canada.

"If there's 100,000 cases across the States and there's 50 in Canada, is Lyme disease stopping at the border, like it doesn't have a passport to come across?" England challenged.

"I've heard that Lyme disease has been reported in the 1800s in Europe, so I just think it's being misdiagnosed or that most doctors don't know enough about it... I just hope that people start getting educated about it."

Under Our Skin will be screened at 2 p.m. Sunday, November 16 at the *Maritime Inn Port Hawkesbury*. There is no admission fee.

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