

Georgetown family test positive for Lyme Disease

By BERNADETTE WARD

For going on twenty years, Keith Poullos has been running the health-care gamut, searching for an answer to the riddle that has come close to destroying his physical and mental wellbeing.

"I was an outdoorsy guy, always fishing and camping. This has destroyed everything that I ever did," he says.

He has seen at least fifteen different doctors and has been diagnosed with problems such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and irritable bowel syndrome although none of the treatments for those disorders took.

"There's a bazillion things that I've been diagnosed with - it just keeps piling up," he says.

After a suggestion from a local veterinarian, Poullos was tested for and is now successfully being treated by a Toronto physician for a disease described as rare in Canada.

Poullos has Lyme disease, an infection caused by the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria often carried by birds, mice and other animals and transmitted to ticks as they feed and in turn, infect humans.

According to information from the Centre for Disease Control, Lyme disease comes with a host of symptoms including an initial rash that gradually expands over a period of time and results in a bulls-eye like appearance although many people either do not get the rash or they don't notice it. The rash may be accompanied by fever, chills, head, muscle and joint aches and swollen lymph nodes.

The disease is treated with antibiotics and for optimal outcome, the sooner, the better.

As the disease progresses without treatment, symptoms such as loss of mus-

cle tone on the face (Bell's palsy), severe headaches, neck stiffness and heart palpitations may set in. Over the course of months and years, problems with memory, neurological complaints and arthritis can occur.

Many of these symptoms have affected Poullos. It has also become a family affair, with his sons Bryon, 21, Thomas, 18 and his brother John also infected.

More distressing and infuriating to Poullos though, has been the difficulty in getting to the point of treatment.

It has been a long road with much confusion and disbelief, says Poullos of his experience with the disease and the medical community.

"People tell you you're just lazy or getting old. Without a diagnosis, you feel like you have to agree with them," he says.

John Scott, a parasite researcher and President of the Lyme Disease Association of Ontario, echoes his concerns.

"We have physicians who don't think this disease is in Ontario or even in North America. That's preposterous," he said.

His organization has published nine scientific papers on the issue including one in the 2005 Journal of Parasitology.

"That clearly shows that one does not have to go to an endemic area," he says.

According to Halton's health department, it's not so much a matter of the disease not existing, but rather its frequency.

"It is quite rare in Halton and in fact we're really not had any confirmed cases in Halton that were actually exposed in Halton Region," says Dave Stronach, Senior Advisor with Halton's health protection services.

According to numbers from the Region, there have been only ten con-

firmed cases in Halton since 1981 and according to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety there were 228 cases in Ontario from 1984 through 1995.

Stronach acknowledges however, that the bugs have been found within Halton and where the ticks are, so, potentially, is the disease.

Poullos is not convinced however, that the numbers are correct. Discussions with his physician have led him to believe that the disease may be far more prevalent.

Calls to the Lyme Disease Association of Ontario, says Scott, consist primarily of people who are having trouble with a diagnosis and are looking for a physician.

Part of the problem says Scott, is that physicians are not schooled in Lyme dis-

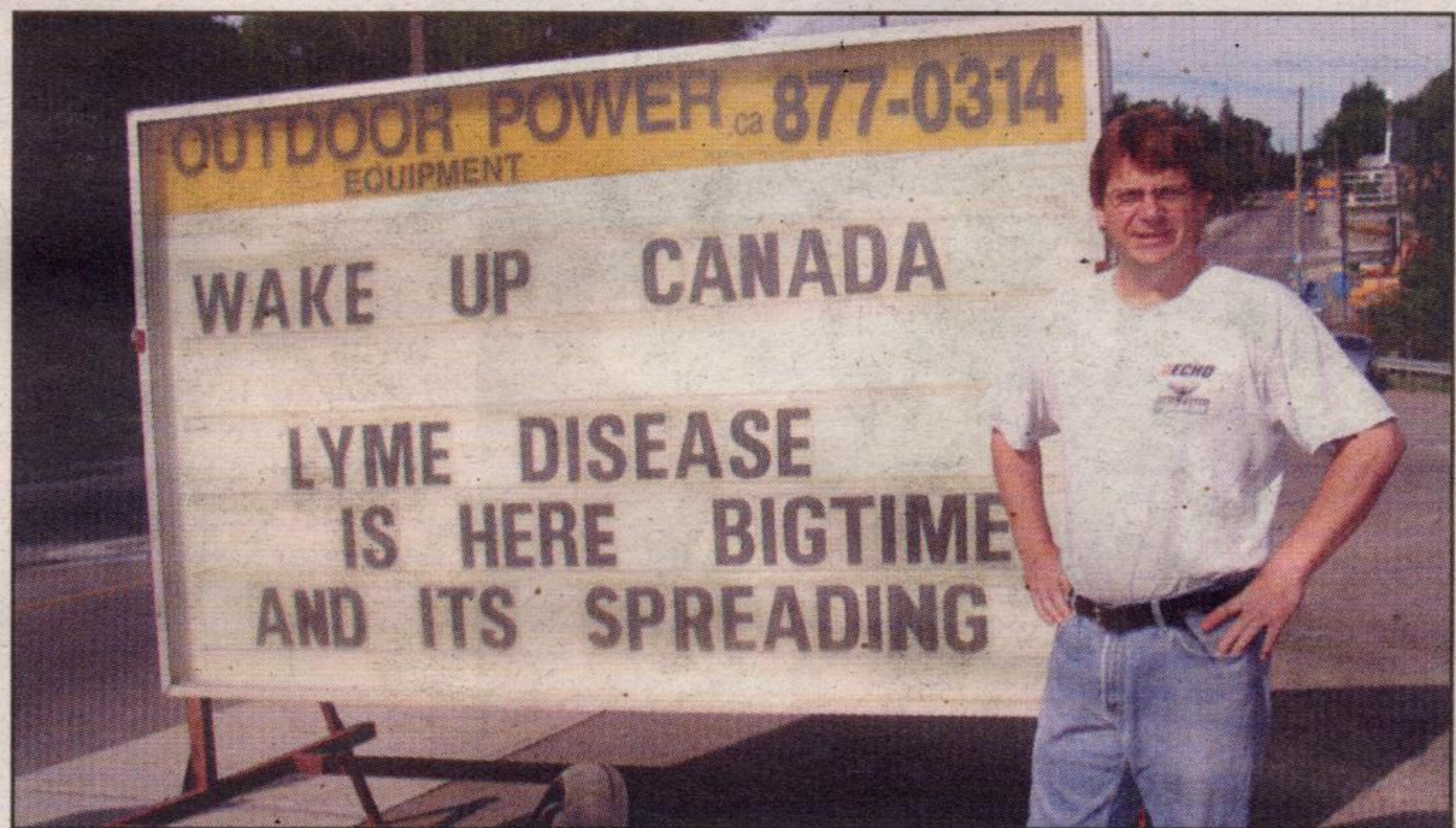
ease. Poullos himself believes that the blood tests used here in Canada are not as accurate and also that many people are having the testing done in the U.S. which then may skew our medical statistics.

"The real, true numbers we don't know," agrees Scott.

Stronach confirms that the tests are not 100 percent accurate, however, they are improving. He also notes that there is some controversy on how the disease is diagnosed with some people feeling the diagnostic criteria is too strict.

For Poullos, it's simply a relief to have a name and finally, some respite from the symptoms that have left him unable to manage any extra activity.

After a days work, I'm done. I can't do anything," he says.



Keith Poullos outside his store in Georgetown.

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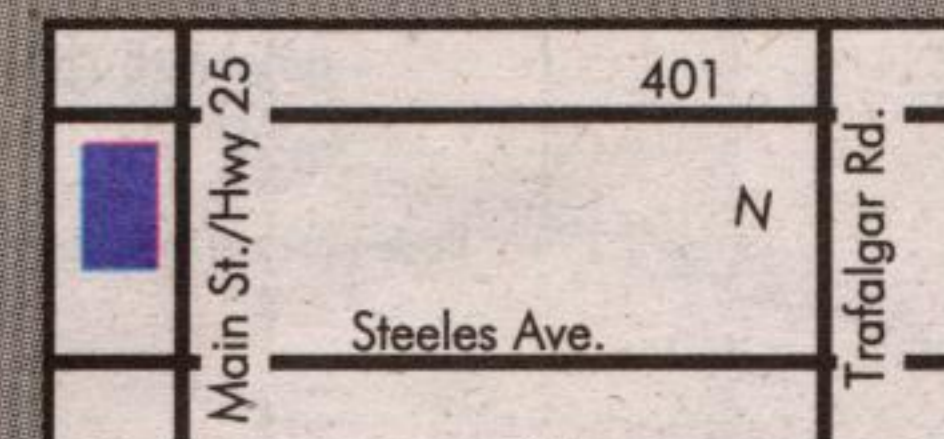
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