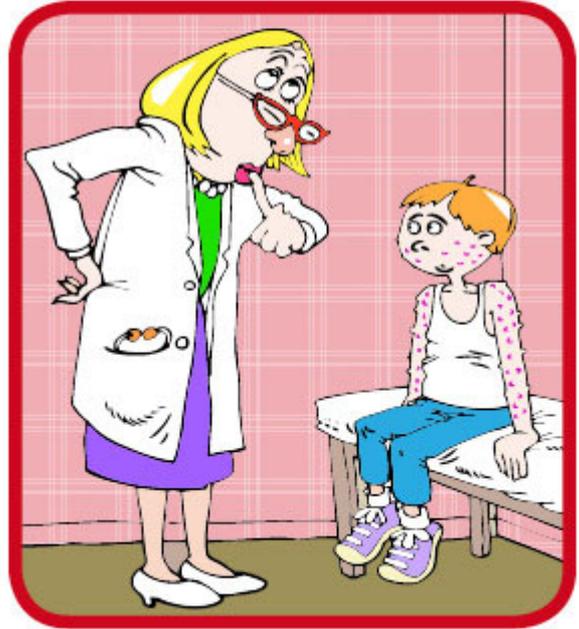


Change in climate

I'd waited for over an hour with Mum and Dad to see the specialist. On previous visits I'd read all the comics, and I didn't believe all that stuff about goldfish being soothing and relaxing to watch. Today, I was really frightened.

'Well Stuart, I'm afraid I can't help you any more.'

Perhaps I was going to die or be sentenced to life in my room, bedridden with my own special incurable disease. My face and arms used to break out in heaps of tiny, itchy blisters. I couldn't stop scratching my red and lumpy skin. Scratching made the problem worse; the blisters became infected sores.



'None of the medicines or creams appear to be working,' said the specialist, her bifocals stuck on the end of her bulbous nose. 'Whatever chemical it is, is in the smog and gives Stuart a very nasty allergy indeed. The only thing I can now recommend is a change in climate.'

Outside, Dad muttered something about witchdoctors wasting his money.

So my chemical engineer dad, my schoolteacher mum, my big brother (he's got a disease too, Dad says it is puberty) and me, and the pink tizz (they're my two little sisters) moved to the country. Since there aren't many jobs for chemical engineers in country towns, Dad became the local 'Mr Fixit': changing tap washers for the elderly, mowing lawns, pruning roses and clearing sparrows' nests from under roofs and out of gutters.

We swapped our unit overlooking the harbour for a flaky weatherboard farmhouse overlooking a dry creek bed. The leaky gutters were overflowing with peppercorn leaves. The water tanks were filled with smelly green algae, mice lived in the walls, a possum lived in the ceiling, and the fruit trees guarding the house hadn't been pruned for yonks. The house was a picture of tangled neglect.

'Lots to do here!' said my excited father, yearning to unpack his tools and put things right.

from *Dad Nil: Pelican Four* in *Through the Web and Other Stories* by Paul Williams

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