

I've got my asthma licked

Na Jill Player

Because of his asthma Dean Lee was at home more than he was at school between the ages of ten and fifteen, and he can't even remember how many times he was in hospital he was there so often.

Lots of things could trigger his asthma attacks — people smoking nearby, food smells, perfume, pollen, sudden weather changes, colds, playing sport.

When Dean did manage to go to school, being there wasn't always much fun. "Kids made fun of me because of my asthma and I was left out a lot. I was always frightened of playing sport in case I had an attack. It was embarrassing. Some teachers weren't too bad — but I can remember one forcing me to go on a run when I shouldn't have just because everybody else was going.

You never knew whether a teacher would be on your side or not."

What changed things for Dean? Getting the right doctor, for a start. Dean was referred to a chest specialist when he was thirteen. Once he started going for regular check ups and understood how his medications worked he began to get better.

"Before then I didn't use my medication properly. I didn't understand the difference between using one kind for relief from feeling wheezy, or having an attack, and using another kind all the time to prevent attacks. It's like painting a house. You keep painting it so it won't get rotten."

Dean also learned how to use breath-



ing exercises to help him relax if an attack was imminent. This helped make the attacks much less severe and some times even seemed to prevent them entirely. But Dean still used Becotide and Ventolin from Rotocaps every day. He's been able to cut down from four of each daily to only 2 doses of Ventolin and 4 of Becotide.

Dean says that learning how to man-

age and understand his asthma gave him the confidence to keep doing the right thing. He even began to fill out and grow a few inches. Now tall, good looking, and 18, Dean plays rugby regularly and is a technician trainee with the Post Office. He is very proud of his attendance record at work, in fourteen months he hasn't missed a single day. "Everybody else has missed at least one, and none of them have any health problems like asthma."

He says that everybody at work knows and understands about his asthma, but because he's got it under control it's not a problem. "But they're good about not smoking around me, and things like that."

Dean says that asthmatics should stick together and try and become more aware of their disease.

"Too many of them don't know enough about it and don't understand how or why their medicines work, and so don't use them properly."

Compared to what he used to be like Dean is living a new life. "I never dreamed it would turn out like this. I never dreamed that I would go to bed and make it through the night without having an attack. Not even people smoking near me bothers me anymore. I've got my asthma licked."

Asthma Awareness Week ran this year from March 30 to April 5.

And if you or someone you know needs help or advice about asthma, contact your local society or the Asthma Foundation of New Zealand.

sufferers' viewpoint

nephew. My cousin was good at doing what she was told and she died.

My friends laugh at me if I have to use my inhaler. They call me an "up town sniffer". I feel shame all the time.

At school sometimes the teacher gets mad at me too. Mum helps me.

I am sorry I am a bad patient. I know you work hard. I will try and be better.

Love from Ruby

Joseph 14

Sure I got Asthma — It's no sweat. — Just take the dope and it's cool — Just a pill and a puff that's about all.

I'm going to make a rep side next year no sweat.

Doctors say Asthma can knock you out but not me man, not me.

Sally 12

Sometimes I try real hard to do all the doctor says — real hard and at home it's easy. The nurse told me everything and I know a lot about it like it's not just Maoris who get it and you can stop it getting bad and you can help yourself a lot. At school though, they lock the classroom at playtime and lunch time so I can't get my puffer so I can't play in case I get puffed. If I've got pockets it would be better.