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## Allergy sufferer now greets spring

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Spring was always as welcome a season to Jerry Amernic as it is to the rest of Toronto's winter-weary residents — until 1980, the year he moved to a house on a ravine in Scarborough.

That's when the misery of seasonal allergies first hit him hard.

"From the first year I was here, I got hay fever from all the trees and pollen around," says Amernic, 52. The writer tried over-the-counter remedies but never found one that worked for him. Last year, he says, was especially tough.

"I had headaches, itchy eyes, a scratchy throat and my nose was stuffed up and runny. Some days my hay fever was so bad that I couldn't even work. The doctor told me that what I should do was move away from all the trees."

At the time he was doing media relations work for a traditional Chinese medicine doctor, Robert Helmer, who trained in China and has a pediatric practice in Hamilton.

"Dr. Helmer told me a TCM expert was coming to Toronto, and said maybe he could help me with my hay fever," says Amernic. "I saw this guy and gave him the basic information, and he gave me a TCM prescription for herbs, plants and roots. I had it filled at a TCM clinic on Davenport Rd."

There were about 10 ingredients, including magnolia flower, licorice root and bark of peony root. One ingredient — cicada shell — gave Amernic serious pause. But he says he was so desperate that he was ready to try anything.

As instructed, he made a tea out of the ingredients, strained it and drank it. "It smelled like toilet water and tasted even worse," he says. "It was just dreadful. My wife wouldn't even let me make the second batch inside the house.

"I was supposed to take it twice a day through the hay fever season, but I could only manage once a day, at 6:30 in the morning — before breakfast so I wouldn't be sick — for one week.

"My hay fever totally disappeared for the whole season. I was amazed. I was awestruck."

Amernic took up recreational running two years ago, but was foiled by a childhood injury to his right foot. His doctor said it was arthritis and a bone scan confirmed that it was a severe case. A shot of cortisone kept the pain at bay for three months; then it came back in force. A surgeon told Amernic he didn't recommend surgery.

Helmer recommended that he see Tony Chuvalo, a traditional Chinese medicine doctor in Whitby. "I've been getting acupuncture treatments from him since September and the pain has subsided by 50 per cent," says Amernic.

He planned to take the anti-allergy tea again this hay fever season, but Chuvalo has given him similar ingredients in pill form, to Amernic's relief.

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