Never stoops the soaring vulture
On his quarry in the desert,
On the sick or wounded bison,
But another vulture, watching

From his high aerial look-out,

Sees the downward plunge, and follows;

And a third pursues the second,

Coming from the invisible ether,

First a speck, and then a vulture,

Till the air is dark with pinions.

So disasters come not singly;

But as if they watched and waited,

Scanning one another's motions,

When the first descends, the others

Follow, follow, gathering flock-wise

Round their victim, sick and wounded,

First a shadow, then a sorrow,

Till the air is dark with anguish.

Longfellow's Poem, The Song of Hiawatha, Part XIX, The Ghosts

I'm sure there are many of us who can relate to this extract. There are times when our lives seem blighted by arachnoiditis and the attendant difficulties it inflicts upon us; it can feel as though anything good or positive is trampled underfoot and that the whole of our lives are drained of colour, of joy, of hope.

Put another way,

"If it wasn't for bad luck,
I'd have no luck at all."

(Albert King, Born Under a Bad Sign)

Many of you may have read previous articles of mine in which I have touched upon the psychological aspects of arachnoiditis.

In particular, **STEPS** aimed to encourage people to move from ***sufferer*** **to** ***survivor,*** and from ***isolation***
to
socialisation
.

Before we recap on the strategies I outlined, I feel we need to explore in considerably greater depth, the numerous ways in which the web of arachnoiditis ensnares us.

Neville Shone, himself a sufferer from chronic illness, wrote a book called "Coping Successfully with Pain" ([1]). He advocated an approach he claimed to have adopted from the TV programme, "Some Mothers Do ?Ave ?Em": to whit:

"Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better."

This seems a ridiculous and fatuous statement when we consider the incurable nature of arachnoiditis. However, Neville Shone has a point. He is not simply referring to our physical state, but to an overall well being, which IS an achievable goal.

One of the first steps we need to take is to acknowledge the role of psychological difficulties in our daily lives.

We have become so accustomed to routinely and heatedly denying that there is any psychological aspect, when confronted by medical professionals (who may have exhibited a thinly-veiled scepticism as to the physicality of our illness), that we may have successfully convinced ourselves that we are free of any such a problem.

The reality is, of course, somewhat different. It is an inescapable fact that arachnoiditis eats into our emotional as well as our physical lives.

It may put as much of a stranglehold on our minds as it does on our nerve roots.

It may tether our ability to cope with daily life by impairing our mental function every bit as severely (and sometimes more so) as it limits our physical function.

The emotional turbulence may well be insidious in much the same way as the physical symptoms; and, like them, may suddenly be revealed as a maelstrom, which can threaten to overwhelm us. It is therefore imperative to be aware of the dangers: know the enemy in all its forms.

[1] Sheldon Press 1995