



Volcano Arenal, an active volcano in Costa Rica. Photo by Leonora Enking, Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 2.0.

# How Ms. X Gave Up Her Knee Brace

## My encounter with an enthusiastic user of homeopathy in Costa Rica

by VATSALA SPERLING, MS, PhD, PDHom, CCH, RSHom(NA)

**I had not expected to hear a stranger sitting next to me on a bus in Costa Rica drop a homeopathic remedy name.**



In August 2017 while visiting Costa Rica, I was standing in a queue awaiting a bus that would take me to the capital city of San Jose. Behind me, I noticed Ms. X, a middle-aged, slightly heavy-around-the-middle but otherwise fit-looking woman, who was wearing a knee brace. When the bus arrived, I stepped aside and let her get on board before me, unaware that this random act of civility would present me with a string of surprises. On entering the bus, I found that Ms. X had saved a seat for me right next to her. I was surprised but accepted the offer.

The bus moved along. Out of curiosity, I asked her about the knee brace. She answered in Spanish: “Way back in April, I had hiked for two hours on a dirt road. I returned home drenched in sweat. That evening, I could not bend my left knee, it hurt so much. If I got up and moved a little, I felt better, but my knee pain was so bad, I had to sit down again. It did not look red or swollen. It was painful on the inner lateral side. Since I had exerted myself and perspired on a cloudy day, I took *Rhus tox* 30c a few doses for a week.”

I had not expected to hear a stranger sitting next to me on a bus in Costa Rica drop a homeopathic remedy name ... *Rhus tox* is not Tylenol®, aspirin, or ibuprofen!

She continued: “When *Rhus tox* did

not help, I thought, maybe muscles are hurt. I took *Arnica* 30c for one week. My hair-loss reduced somewhat and I slept better. My knee continued to hurt. I had to stop doing long walks and yoga. Just then, I developed bursitis on top of my shinbone, right below the left knee cap, and another bursitis on my left elbow, on top of the ulna [forearm bone]. It was so painful that I could not touch these spots. It almost felt like shooting nerve pain. So, I took *Hypericum* 6c for a week and also applied Hypercal [*Hypericum* and *Calendula*] ointment. The pain continued. I stopped both. I took *Symphytum* 30c thinking maybe there was a hairline fracture of knee bones? I soaked my knee in hot baths with Epsom salt... that helped me relax my leg a little, but soon the pain would return. Cold compresses did not help either. Since wearing a strong and secure knee brace was helping a bit, I took *Bryonia*. Nothing worked.

“Time was flying. In pain, unhappy, and despondent, I just moped around the house. I Googled and read a lot about remedies. Once I was in a macro-biotica store.<sup>1</sup> A massage therapist I met there did muscle testing for me and said I could benefit from *Bellis perennis*. I did not believe her. The internet says *Bellis* is suited for soft tissue injuries, so I did not take *Bellis*. When I saw my doctor, he said he could write me a painkiller prescription, but he knew I would not take it. I have been remedy hopping, and nothing is helping me.”

“You select homeopathic remedies by



Lake Arenal, Costa Rica.

Googling?” I asked. Ms. X said, “I ask my friends abroad to send me remedies. But I love the internet, it tells me everything. I ask the macro-biotica store staff too. In the last 20 years, I have not used anything else except homeopathy. I have always decided what I will take. I have never met any homeopath.”

### What to do?

Here was a homeopathy enthusiast of two decades, a total stranger whom I had just met. She had been in pain for over five months. She openly shared with me all the remedies she had taken so far, though none of them had helped her. She did not know me and did not care what I would think regarding her dabbling in homeopathy. I could have been a skeptic who would sneer and shrug at the mention of homeopathy and declare it total nonsense. The question I asked myself was—should I reveal my identity as a homeopath and offer her help? Or should I just say, “Thanks for sharing” and look out the bus window at the rustic Costa Rican landscape passing by?

At that moment, page 77 of the book, *Homeopathy for Musculoskeletal Healing* by Asa Hershoff, flashed in front of my eyes.<sup>2</sup> (See illustration from book at right.) It mentions *Ruta graveolens* for cartilage and tendon injuries. I chose to speak to Ms. X, saying, “I appreciate your commitment to homeopathy for the past 20 years. Your knee pain has continued despite using various remedies, but you are not discouraged. I am a homeopath. May I make a recommendation?”

Now, it was Ms. X’s turn to be surprised. “Really, are you a homeopath? How in the world did this happen? I have been using homeopathy for the past 20 years but have never met a homeopath. Now I am sitting next to one. A coincidence, an accident, a chance...what is it?” she asked.

“Since your knee pain is taking months to improve, I suspect that your tendons, ligaments, and cartilage might be involved. These tissues take a long time to heal when injured. *Ruta graveolens* includes tendons, ligaments, and cartilage in its sphere of action.” While looking through my homeopathic travel kit, I added, “I do

have a vial of *Ruta 6c* ... if you would like, I can give this to you. In fact, in homeopathy, if one remedy does not work, you can always try another more suited to the symptom picture.” Ms. X enthusiastically took the Boiron blue vial from my hand, looked it over, pronounced the name, and then said, “The vial says expiration date is 1991. It is 2017 now. Will it work?”

“You will know by trying. If remedies are stored well, they remain well ... irrespective of expiration date. This is my personal experience.” I said.

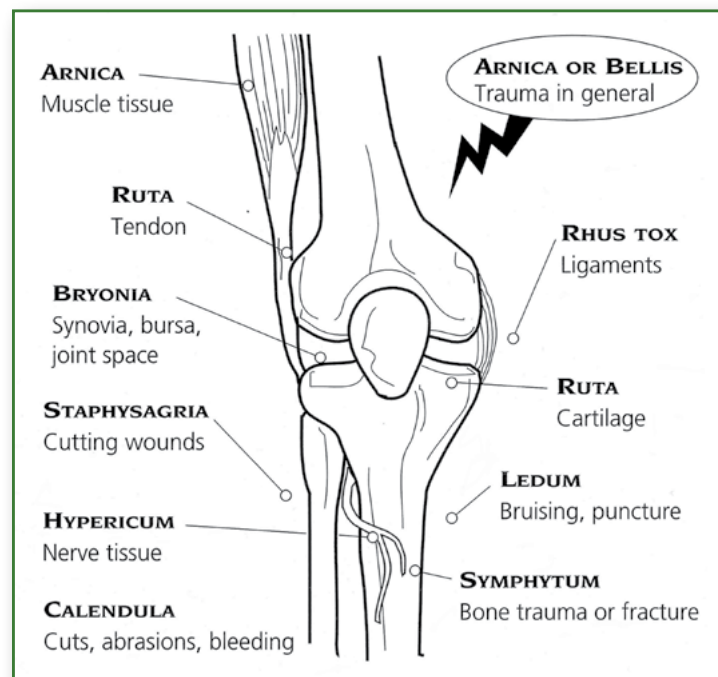
Ms. X wanted to pay. I had forgotten the price of a vial I had purchased more than a quarter of a century ago. “It is a gift,” I said. The rest of our trip passed in amiable conversation.

Over the next few weeks, I got busy with my life and did not think about Ms. X. But one day she called. “I asked around in your town and found your number,” she said. “Do you want to know what happened? After one dose, I gave up the knee brace. Within the next six doses taken once a day, the knee became better than new. Now, I am one hundred percent pain free and have one hundred percent mobility in my knee. I am walking again for miles. I am



Author Vatsala Sperling with her neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Vin Palo and Duvelia Sibaja in Arenal, Costa Rica.

**Out of curiosity, I asked her about the knee brace.**



This illustration is by Asa Hershoff, DC, ND, and appears on page 77 of his book, *Homeopathy for Musculoskeletal Healing*, first edition, 1996, published by North Atlantic Books and Homeopathic Educational Services, Berkeley, CA. It is reprinted with permission of the publisher.



Horses graze in the countryside near Arenal, Costa Rica.



## Or should I just say, “Thanks for sharing” and look out the bus window at the rustic Costa Rican landscape ...?

doing all of my yoga poses. I suffered from daily pain for five months, and a few doses of *Ruta* well past its expiration date have made my pain go away completely. Before taking *Ruta*, my eyes were feeling a bit sore. I wondered if my eyeglass power was changing, but that problem has gone away too. Being inactive, I was spending a lot of time on my screens. Now I am active. My eyes are better.”

### Reaching out, speaking up

This encounter with an enthusiastic user of homeopathy was a proof for me that it is okay to inquire after a fellow traveler if I see him or her in any discomfort. When someone is receptive to homeopathy, there is no harm in making a recommendation either. Most homeopathic remedies are available over-the-counter. People have access to these remedies. Individuals interested in alternative healing modalities are becoming well-informed and sophisticated. Thanks to a wide range of homeopathy information available on the internet, people are able to educate themselves, self-diagnose, and self-prescribe the remedies. For over 200 years, homeopathic remedies are known to be safe, without side-effects, non-invasive, non-addictive, and reasonably priced. It is a win-win situation for the users. The outcome of this situation is reflected in the growth of homeopathy market share.<sup>3,4</sup> Though this growth is just one drop in the healthcare industry, let us

remember, when enough drops aggregate, an ocean can be formed.

As professional homeopaths, our community outreach efforts include all that we can do to help homeopathy grow. If this involves making a remedy recommendation to an enthusiastic user of homeopathy during a bus ride, by all means I am going to do it. Should you find yourself in a similar situation one day, I urge you to go ahead and speak up for homeopathy with courage and conviction, and do your part in helping it grow.

- 1 “Macro-biotica”—These are stores devoted to wholefoods and alternative health products that are found throughout Costa Rica.
- 2 *Homeopathy for Musculoskeletal Healing*, by Asa Hershoff, North Atlantic Books, USA, 1996.
- 3 “U.S. Sales of Homeopathic & Herbal Remedies Reach \$6.4 Billion,” *Nutraceuticals World*, July 1, 2013. [www.nutraceuticalsworld.com/issues/2013-07/view\\_industry-news/us-sales-of-homeopathic-herbal-remedies-reach-64-billion/](http://www.nutraceuticalsworld.com/issues/2013-07/view_industry-news/us-sales-of-homeopathic-herbal-remedies-reach-64-billion/)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Vatsala Spering, MS, PhD, PDHom, CCH, RSHom(NA), was Chief of Clinical Microbiology at a children’s hospital in Chennai, India, where she conducted research with the World Health Organization and published extensively. On moving to the USA, she studied at Misha

Norland’s School of Homeopathy. She is author of nine books ([www.InnerTraditions.com](http://www.InnerTraditions.com)) and many articles on homeopathy, health, and spirituality. She practices classical homeopathy in Vermont, volunteers on the case review committee of the CHC, and has served on the board of directors of NASH. She and her family frequently visit Costa Rica to manage a reforestation program ([www.HaciendaRioCote.com](http://www.HaciendaRioCote.com)). [www.rochesterhomeopathy.com](http://www.rochesterhomeopathy.com).

**“I am walking again for miles. I am doing all of my yoga poses.”**

## Ease Joint Pain 7 remedies for relief

In the accompanying story, Ms. X used or considered numerous homeopathic remedies in pursuit of joint pain relief. Here is a list of the remedies mentioned, along with the musculoskeletal symptoms that each remedy is known to help.

**Rhus toxicodendron:** This remedy can help painful strains, sprains, and other joint conditions. Stiffness is very characteristic. Restlessness is also common; the pain is worse from initial motion (e.g., rising from a seat) but better from continued motion (e.g., stretching, limbering up, changing position). Complaints are worse after rest, from cold, and from weather changes, especially a change to cold, damp weather. Complaints are better from heat.

**Arnica:** This is the major first-aid remedy, the one to consider after any injury, blow, or bruising. It can also help sore, sprained, strained, overused muscles. The person often says, "I'm fine," and/or asks to be left alone when they are clearly not well and need emergency medical attention after an injury or accident; they are probably in a state of shock from the injury, and this remedy can help in such cases. The affected area feels worse from touch, pressure, or motion.

**Bryonia:** Joint pains are severe, sharp, stitching, or tearing. The pain is worse from the slightest motion, so the person wants to keep perfectly still; they feel better from rest, pressure, lying on the painful side, tight bandaging or bracing, and warmth on the affected area. The person is often irritable, preferring to be left alone.

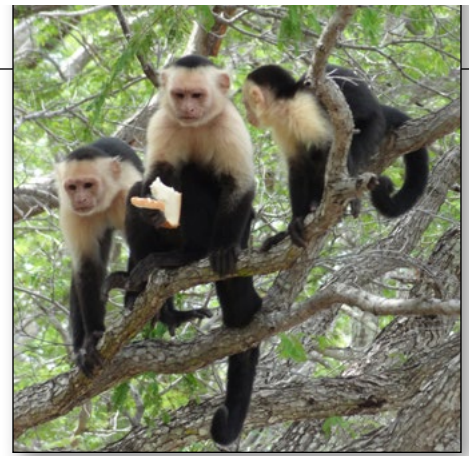
**Hypericum:** This is often the first choice for injuries to nerve-rich areas such as the fingers, toes, and spine. Pains are sharp and tend to shoot upward along the spine or from the site of the injury. The pain may seem out of proportion to the severity of the injury. This remedy can also be useful for puncture wounds, animal bites, and burns.

**Symphytum:** This is useful for trauma to bony areas; it is known to help broken

bones to knit and heal. Some people use it routinely for fractures, but only after a bone is set. It can also be useful for pain that remains at the site of older fractures or other injuries to hard tissues.

**Bellis perennis:** This can be indicated for sprains and traumas with much soreness, especially when there is bruising, similar to the way *Arnica* is used. However, injuries calling for *Bellis* may be in deeper tissues and may exhibit more swelling. The injured area feels worse from touch and warmth but better from motion and rubbing. *Bellis* can also be helpful for old back strains and repetitive strains (e.g., in gardeners, manual laborers). It is especially indicated for injuries or surgeries of the breast, abdomen, or pelvis.

**Ruta graveolens:** This remedy has an affinity for action on tendons, ligaments, and cartilage. That's why sprains are a common injury helped by *Ruta*, especially of the ankle, wrist, knee, or spine. A "lame" feeling in the joint is typical, with stiffness and a feeling of bruised soreness. The area is better from heat, wrapping, and gentle motion; worse from cold and exertion. Those needing *Ruta* may be restless and frequently change their position (similar to *Rhus tox*). *Ruta* can help inflammation of tendons from overuse/repetitive use, sprains that fail to heal, and bone bruises (i.e., injuries to the periosteum, which is the thin membrane that covers bones).



White-faced monkeys inhabit many parts of the Costa Rican countryside.

**"A coincidence, an accident, a chance ... what is it?"**



Author Vatsala Sperling and her son Mahar ride horses in Costa Rica with friends Ashley, Jorge, and young Franco.