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EXHIBIT

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HOPE IN THE DUST

Cancer-causing asbestos fibres are killing a mining town's second generation • by Clare Nixon and Larry Writer

IT WAS TOO LATE FOR VICETIES. "You have nine months," doctors at WA's Fremantle Hospital told Brent Taylor last May when his cancer was diagnosed. "There's no treatment and no real hope. We'll make you as comfy as we can."

But Taylor, the 32-year-old father of three young children, has refused

to let mesothelioma—the cancerous cancer eat away when blue asbestos fibres are inhaled and appear the lung lining—snatch him away. Fact is, he plans to be around a while yet—long enough to watch his children grow, plant trees, play cricket and secure his family's future by winning a sizeable compensation payout from those

he blames for exposing him to a disease that will eventually kill him.

Taylor has already rejected a \$50,000 settlement from CSR Limited, the industrial giant which runs the asbestos mine in Wittenoom, WA, where he claims he got the disease as a youngster. In a landmark Supreme Court test case—the date of which

Photographs by Evan Collis/Westpics

been razed and the businesses have long since disappeared. But John Gordon, of solicitors Slater and Gordon representing Brent Taylor, says that of the 6,500 mine- and millworkers, one in three has developed or will develop asbestos-related cancer. And among the 13,500 non-mineworking residents at least one in 20 has or will get mesothelioma. The Perth-based Asbestos Diseases Society estimates that at least 2,000 miners and residents have died to date.

Following more than a decade of bitter, headline-making legal battles, CSR in 1988 admitted liability for asbestos-caused cancer developed by mine- and millworkers and set aside more than \$20 million to settle the claims of the 200 miners then seeking compensation. Since that time, claims have continued to be filed and a further 150 people have received a total of \$22.5 million, averaging \$150,000 each. But the company admits no liability for the cancer sufferers like Taylor who lived in the town but were not mineworkers. "There is so much unresolved in this matter," explains John Mengler of CSR's solicitors, Jackson McDonald. "It is still unknown whether there is a liability

to residents, and if there is, where that liability rests. Residents are in a different group to those actually employed in the mine. It's still to be determined what effect this level of exposure had."

Notwithstanding this denial of responsibility, CSR's policy is to offer such victims \$50,000 compensation. So far three former Wittenoom residents have taken the money, but many mesothelioma sufferers are waiting for the result of Brent Taylor's claim. If his bid for a larger payout succeeds, the precedent could help other ailing ex-residents win sums of six figures.

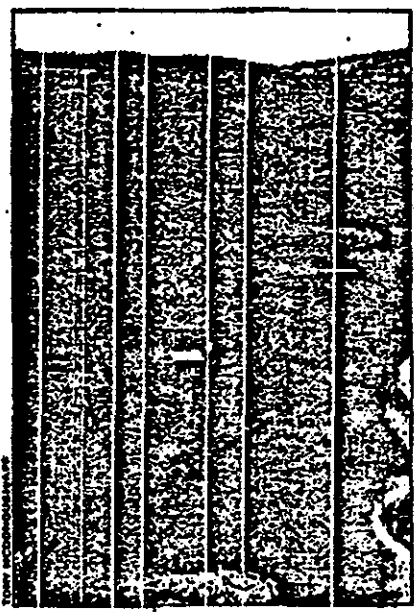
Reclining on a black leather lounge in his modern brick-and-tile home in Yangebup, south of Perth, Taylor calmly discusses the turn his life has taken. The former health and safety officer, buoyed by newfound faith and positive-thinking courses, clings to the love of wife Debbie, 28, twins Brendan and Lauren, 2, and baby Brent, 7 months. Though weaker by the day, his still-powerful sportsman's frame easily accommodates the twins, who clamber aboard their dad and snuggle hard. Soon the children, snowy-headed inheritors of Brent's startling bright blue eyes, doze peacefully, lulled to sleep by his gentle voice as he speaks of horrors that they will only later understand.

"My whole family could be destroyed by this disease," he says, recalling how for five years beginning in 1961, he, his miner dad Butch, mum Dot and two sisters were exposed to blue asbestos fibres after the family settled in the outback mining town 1,600km north of Perth. Though Brent is the first to fall victim to asbestos-related cancer, the others fear that it may be only a matter of time before they experience the breathlessness and sharp pains in the chest, back or shoulder that signal the illness.

Taylor recalls a boyhood spent splashing in crystal-clear rock pools and playing in the rich-red Wittenoom dirt—dirt laced with asbestos dust and fibres that would float out of the mine and settle on every surface in the town. Like the flies and the 40-degree-plus heat, the tiny blue fibres that caught in hair and clothes and swirled into the eyes and down the throat when the westerly winds blew

◀ Brent Taylor finds strength in faith. "I believe in eternal life and it's a great feeling of reassurance."

▼ Wittenoom's asbestos mine is shut now; only a score of squatters still live in the abandoned town.



will be set on Oct. 8—Taylor will seek at least half a million dollars from CSR, the WA Works Minister, the Commissioner for Main Roads, the Housing Commission, the State of WA and the Shire of Ashburton. "I am going to die prematurely," he says, "and the people who must look after my family are those who are responsible for my death."

Taylor is one of more than 20,000 people who lived or worked at Wittenoom from 1943 until 1966 when the asbestos mine was closed down. Today the houses in Wittenoom have



were just something the people of Wittenoom learned to put up with.

Says Dot Taylor, 52: "It seemed a great place to live. We never knew anything about the dangers of asbestos. The kids used to play in the sand pits, mix the dust with water and throw it around." She adds bitterly "What has happened to my son is heartbreaking. I still look at Brent and can't believe it. I'm very proud of the way he's handling it. He's made up his mind he's going to live."

Other former residents share Brent's fight. Coleen Coulthard, 46, lost her father, miner Ted Dodd, to asbestos-related cancer. Now she herself is a victim of mesothelioma and a prime mover in the Asbestos Diseases Society. Strong and jolly, she spends her days bucking up fellow victims such as Taylor and raising funds for mesothelioma research being done by associate professor Bruce Robinson at Perth's Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. She recalls how the Wittenoom air was always thick with asbestos dust. "We had flywire on our windows.

When the blue fibres caught in the wire and grew so thick you couldn't see out any more, you'd give the screen a good hit with the broom."

The whack would send them billowing into the air. Doctors say just one inhaled fibre is enough to kill.

According to Robinson, 42, mesothelioma is the most resistant of all known cancers to the three standard forms of treatment: It can't be removed surgically and it shrugs off radiation and chemotherapy. That leaves immunology—stimulation of the body's anti-cancer cells—and that is where Robinson is directing his energy. And where Brent Taylor's hopes of living longer lie. "Mesothelioma is a cancer not of the lung itself, but of the pleura, the sac the lung sits in," Robinson says. "You inhale the fibre and it penetrates the lung like a spear. It makes its way through the lung and penetrates the pleura. Over the years it stimulates the cells of the pleura and in 10 to 15 years you get damage that produces the cancer—an uncontrollable growth

> Professor Bruce Robinson, here with an X-ray showing a damaged lung, aims to prolong the lives of mesothelioma victims. "We haven't struck oil, but we're on the right track."



of cells. The tumour grows inside the lung until it collapses the lung and invades surrounding tissues. After up to 30 years, pain and breathlessness send the sufferer to a doctor. But by then it's too late.

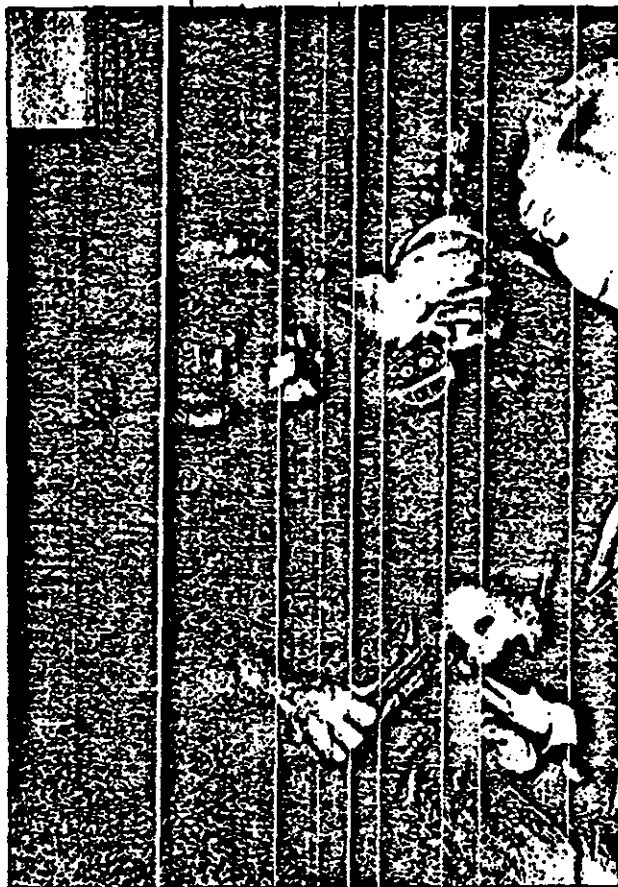
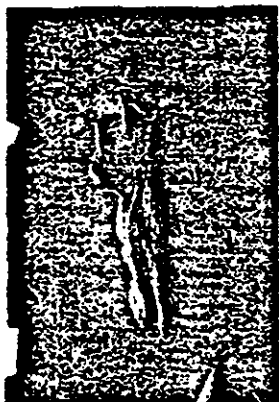
As it was for Brent Taylor. After experiencing breathing difficulties while umpiring a football game, he was diagnosed as terminally ill. "It was a bit like a funeral. But the person everyone was mourning was still alive. It was an avalanche of emo-



< Vojakovic addresses Wittenoom victims at Serpentine, WA, early this month. "I'm grateful Brent is taking this action, not only for himself and his family but for other sufferers."

< Mesothelioma victim Colleen Coulthard (right), with mum Magda Dodd, says, "Nobody knew the danger we were in."

> Taylor makes every minute count with Lauren, Brendon and Brent. "My illness has made us a close, strong family unit."



tion." The doomed man cried. "It wasn't so much that I was going to die—the thing that worried me most was that I wasn't going to see my kids grow up."

Then he met Colleen Coulthard. "She was a source of great strength for us," says Taylor, who later found solace in religion, joined a positive-thinking class and resolved to fight to guarantee his young family's welfare.

For help with his legal and medical affairs, Taylor turned to Robert Voj-

akovic, 52, president of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia. Vojakovic's link with the residents of the town goes back to 1961, when he was a broke young Croatian migrant packing asbestos in the Wittenoom mill. Then on Christmas Day he won £400 in a poker game and bought his ticket out of town. But he never forgot his workmates.

Today the former accountant is dedicated to helping those who remained behind. "We have not yet es-

tablished liability in respect of the cancer-stricken residents of Wittenoom," he says. "CSR is prepared to make an ex gratia payment—\$50,000...but that is not good enough. The company is trying to avoid responsibility. It should be paying complete compensation."

Counters CSR solicitor John Mengler: "If a former resident comes along with one of these diseases, we're prepared to make this offer [\$50,000]. Take it or leave it. In the past it's been taken by a number of people." And what of Brent Taylor? "His claim is potentially a large one. He's got a family and is a young man," says Mengler. "It's up to him to convince the court that his mesothelioma was caused by exposure [to blue asbestos fibres]."

Taylor intends to do just that. "It's my right as a father to kick a ball around the park with my kids," he says. "Because of this disease, I may not be able to do that, and I blame CSR and the government."

Today, as he fights for his life, Taylor surrounds himself with living things—his family, their friends who come and go, his bounding 4-month-old blue heeler, Jack. Even the lush tropical palms and native shrubs in his garden thrive. "My aim is to do a TAFE course in horticulture and work part-time in a nursery," he says. "A goal like that is important. It helps with my positive thinking. I get angry when people throw in the towel. My destiny is in my own hands, and I'll be grabbing hold of everything to stay alive—diets, acupuncture, herbal remedies, anything. This is one of the main reasons I am running with the church. I'm not sitting back and accepting what doctors say is gospel."

Once his family's financial future is secure, Taylor plans to make quality time of however many months or years he has left: being with Deb and the kids, landscaping his backyard, playing sport. The one-time keen sportsman can only play the odd game of golf these days—"I suffer from constant back pain and pain in my chest when I draw deep breaths"—and the cancer has reduced his lung capacity by a third. But he is determined to play his beloved cricket again. "Even if it means hitting sixes all the time so I don't have to move off the crease."