

## What Does MCS Look Like on the Ground?

Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, I was looking forward to my first day of having little on the calendar since having taken the dive into our working on the Light Brown Apple Moth pesticides program, since the very beginning of the year when we had started getting many requests for information about it. Since that time, I have spent any hours I could find to gather facts, write on aspects of the program to help people understand its links to the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter program, clarify the many toxic methods part of the program, etc. But that day with my children all out, I was going to have over 5 uninterrupted hours to do anything, and planned NOT to work on this issue.

But that's not how that day, or the more than a week following, panned out. Instead, our neighbor, who recently started parking his car right in front of his house with the exhaust pipe pointed our direction, turned on the engine and while I was running to close the windows and doors, I realized he had the hood up and the engine was continuing to run. I ran to get the lousy air purifier we now have and got it running in the kitchen (front of the house) but it was too late; exhaust was all over. I had closed what I could up front while throwing open what I could in back. In desperation I opened up the front door and yelled at him to please turn off the engine, that our home was being flooded with exhaust, and that it had made me sick, and closed the door and ran to the back of the house. He did turn it off pretty soon, but that wasn't soon enough. Damage done.

The result: I had to sleep most of that day, had to bow out of a rehearsal with a group with which I sing, and that night had to sleep another 13 hours. The next day I was able to get us out the door to do the things on the kids' agenda, but during my son's rehearsal I had to lay back my seat and rest while my other kids played on a playground.

That night I only slept 10-1/2 hours, partially because my blood sugar had spiked with the exhaust and when it's up high, my sleep is fitful. I really needed more sleep. But I felt lousy so got up after that fitful sleep, got the new tires needed for our car (with no other parent at home, I don't have anyone on whom I can fall back for all such daily tasks of life), and while I knew hanging out in that setting isn't great (though of course I have carefully selected a tire place related to the waiting room having reasonable air flow), I got hit by drifting laundry products from a laundromat when I went to a café nearby to wait. I actually would have been better off staying at the tire place.

During my kids' Aikido class I once more lay my car seat down and had to nap for an hour. That night I had to sleep another 12 hours. The next day I had to nap part of the time during my sons' rehearsals, robbing my teenaged daughter and me of some of the special time we need for talking. That night I slept about 10 hours, only having to get up early to get my little fellow to his bug group.

This next night was another 9+ hour night and another day of dragging around, unable to be the productive person I wish I could be at all times. Another 10-hour night and then an 8-hour night due to a Sunday morning job and then an exhausted day as a result. A draggy evening and another 10-hour night which brought me up to Monday, which I got through as I have to for my kids' sake, and finally Tuesday with a draggy day, but starting to come up to speed.

That night, 9-1/2 days later, was the first time I felt like my brain was more fully up to speed, with my being able to go beyond taking care of daily needs at least adequately, to being able to do anything productive beyond.

I can always tell when I am going through these sicker times because I end up doing a lot of cooking ahead, of soups and such which I can freeze. I get way stocked up on prepared meals as at least I can feel productive in doing something else important for the kids, even if our normally incredibly rich conversations go more like: Chemical companies suck, than: Let's work through all the layers of how chemical companies have been able to take over people's lives, the kind of free-wheeling discussion which can easily go on for 2 hours, which is central to my kids' homeschooling lives which center around developing critical thinking skills. Homeschooling, by the way, is crucial to my being able to keep the kids from being in pesticide-laden rooms surrounded by people wearing clothes laundered in toxics, doused in toxic hair and body products. I expect that over time more people will choose to homeschool if only for safety reasons.

I was able to do some reading aloud for the kids that week, though my eyes hurt and were too tired to do much over that 9 days, but we played games, and the older ones did their reading and writing and helped the younger one with his math and reading, and that was enjoyable, so all was not lost. Of course, these incidents always lead to important discussions of biology and science in real life, as we live it, talking synergism between chemicals, sensitization, proprietary laws allowing chemical companies to deny us ingredient information and such. But the point is that I felt sick and depleted, exhausted and so angry that once again, it was like control over my life, and our family life, is more in the hands of chemical companies than me.

Skip ahead from that Tuesday night when finally I felt back to relative normal, to 2 nights later, the evening of our very powerful event, Who's Afraid of the Light Brown Apple Moth, at which, in addition to a botanist and an invasion biologist, and a person from the Environmental Health Network, we had three Caltrans roadside spray crew workers there who were sickened by pesticides and refused proper medical care by the state, with a Monsanto representative stationed at the office when one of them was coming in with a doctor's letter again, once more trying to get help (and was told by the Monsanto guy that, he'd drunk Roundup before and it's perfectly safe). They were so courageous to speak out about their being sickened and the hardship it's brought to them and their families.

The event was so good and so inspiring as to have people continuing to connect until after 11 p.m. We drove around the corner to pick up my young son who was at his dad's house for the evening. When I pulled into the apartment parking lot, we were immediately overcome with laundry fumes. The laundry fumes is always an issue if someone's doing laundry when I drop by, but if I haven't had any significant toxic exposure recently prior, I can normally run upstairs, jump in the door to pick up my son, and we run back down and get out of there. While I'm always sickened by it, it's usually that annoying mild nausea and low-grade headache that people like us learn to live with as a fairly constant experience. But it was so bad that the moment I had pulled into the driveway I pulled right back out and onto the street and my son was brought down to us. I had the familiar arrow-through-the-the head throbbing headache, dizziness and fullblown nausea once we were about a block away. As it was only a couple blocks to a café open half the night, I decided I had to stop and we would have to sit it out. We were there until nearly 1:30 a.m., until I knew I was safe to drive again.

Yes, outside of the sickness we had very good conversation, and as my young fellow is always the sleep hold-out in our family anyway, we got through it, and this morning the kids slept in until after noon since they are not bound by school hours, but how wrong is this? Half of today was taken from our lives. But the heartbreaking realization we came to there was that these courageous men who had not been directly using pesticides for awhile still were exuding remnants out of their bodies. Their bodies, working so valiantly at getting out the toxics were familiar to me. The father of my older kids still takes them into the cancer cluster out of which I moved them, in the Carneros, the Southern Sonoma Valley, right near the Napa border. When they return, the

residues and the remnants which their bodies are trying to get out hit me and I spend those evenings and usually the next day hit maybe as hard as they are with the results. This without my setting foot in toxic Sonoma. It is the ever-present nausea, the massive headache, sometimes blood sugar up, temperature down, blood pressure up, and what should be on every medical person's radar is the feelings of aggression which are common with exposure to carbamate and organophosphate insecticides, but also seen when you mess with people's hormones, which happens also with all the hormone-altering, endocrine-disruptor herbicides used. And the various gases used in Wine Country? Oh, yeah, they'll set your blood to boiling.

Welcome to Wine Country, California.

For those not yet obviously sick with MCS, though no one is immune from the possibility, think of what it's like if you drive and your car dies by the side of the road in the middle of nowhere and suddenly your plans for the day (or week) go down the drain. Imagine facing daily life knowing that in spite of tremendous precautions, sometimes you might not have considered one angle, such as that a person near you might be literally offgassing toxic chemicals and you might be sickened by it.

People like us spend extraordinary amounts of time planning and making sure that we avoid so many of the landmines for us or for our families, especially we parents who have to look at balancing kids' needs to feel "normal" maybe more so than many adults have such a need. We have to look at any possible exposures, and plan life accordingly, thinking in terms of "toxic loads" knowing what the kids and we might face in relationship to exposures we can expect or predict. While overall we build life to avoid unnecessary exposures, we also work to help our kids have great lives, and enjoyable lives in every way they, and we, can.

A tall order in a toxic world.

Daily life for people like us is extraordinarily tiring, even for those who don't specifically have CFIDS, Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (also known as CFS, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome).

And for all our work, doctors and the general population want to label us hypochondriacs. Yes, my ex-husband suggested in court proceedings recently in a bid to get custody changed, in order to try to get out of paying child support, that he thinks I should be getting psychiatric care, that MCS isn't real, all the old ugly tricks of those who don't have concern for our health or wellbeing but have some axe to grind and they are willing to grind us to dust to get what they want.

This kind of outrageous charge has been used to get custody changed away from loving, capable parents who take extraordinary care of their children specifically to allow them to have the best lives possible with the least chance of being sickened needlessly. People like us have a rotten disability already affecting our families in too many ways and often judges slide right into the hands of parents who in too many cases have no history of either trying to protect their children from toxins, whether by moving from a particularly toxic neighborhood, or by protecting them in myriad other ways possible, if taking some thought and care, and allow them to directly cause needless harm to their kids.

Not protecting our children IS causing harm. Anyone trying to plead passively has to be confronted. We live in a world which for some might be confusing but I would say is quite straightforward; there are people working for chemical companies and agriculture and related state and federal agencies who make careers out of poisoning people. And there are parents and other people who choose not to protect children.

Let's call an ace and ace.

Who do we trust? Really, the answers are not complicated at all. Following the money is usually a good first step, but sometimes it's not only, or even at all, directly about money. So the next step is to follow the power trail.

Capitalism demands a passive society, creates it by necessity to function as this kind of society. It demands leaders and there can only be leaders where there are followers. People make either conscious or subconscious choices. Not to make an active, obvious choice is still to make a choice but in our perverted society, people placate any sense of necessity to take action themselves with the idea that they are not responsible for something bad going on in society if they didn't "vote" for it.

Couldn't be farther from the truth. Not being straight-up, honest, forthright and clearly and openly supporting that with which one agrees, and clearly and openly opposing that with which one disagrees, puts one in the court of complete responsibility for what is happening around us.

While too many may want to plead "victim" too often in life, we all have personal responsibility, whether healthy or sick, to safeguard everyone around us. Doesn't matter if it's from governmental actions, corporate chemical actions, or the actions of unethical neighbors or even friends or family.

We understand the reality of the dangers of pesticides and other toxics in our lives, and the reality that people will happily poison us, while others will happily refuse to protect us. If we don't take an uncompromising stand against toxics and a toxics industry, why would we possibly imagine anything would fundamentally change in this country?

Do we think government will protect us?

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