

# Pariah People

*Personal stories of healing from chronic injury and illness.*

## Melva

I may have been Chemically Sensitive since birth, however the first reaction I ever had was to the childhood immunizations back in the 60's. I would seizure each time I had one, and was unable to be fully immunized because of this. Growing up on a farm, it was not uncommon to be exposed to pesticides from the fields. I can recall making a game out of running and jumping over rows of potato plants that were often covered in a yellow powder. My face and ears would become red and hot, and my vision distorted. I once recall asking why the cat's head looked so much smaller than it's body.

Pesticides also found their way inside our home in large doses. My father once sprayed the inside wall for termites with a mixture he made. I recall feeling a strange sensation as I would lay on the couch and look up at the streaked walls, and often giggled out of control, although there wasn't anything funny. Months later, the cat lost weight, and died.

**Growing up on a farm, it was not uncommon to be exposed to pesticides from the fields.**

Going to school presented another problem. I would forget where my room was, and get lost. I once sat through an entire class without realizing I was surrounded by different classmates. This caused problems with the teachers who didn't understand what was happening. Riding the bus often made me sick from the exhaust, and very likely the only thing that kept me going at the time was detoxing outside on the farm on days chemical products were not sprayed.

**Time and time again I was sent back to work as the doctor's did not know what was wrong with me.**

We moved into a new home in the mid 1970's, leaving the country life for the banks of the Ohio River. Once again my father mixed up a pesticide combination, and this time sprayed the inside structure of the building prior to the walls being finished. I became chronically fatigued, and developed flu like symptoms that would not go away.

This caused a lot of difficulty while going to college and trying to work. In addition to the new appliances and furniture out gassing in the home, many of the

buildings at the University of Louisville were new and out gassing as well. They would make me sick and spacey shortly after entering them. My hands and feet would turn ice cold, and I'd feel faint. Although it broke my heart to give up a career in Communications, I became so ill that I quit college in the early 1980's to take a job in a building that had a new addition added to it. The position was also over what was then an unvented woodworking shop where they often painted and varnished wood that was used in both enhancing the beauty of the building, as well as in an exhibit gallery that was ever changing. My health began to decline rapidly. Working security, I was often stationed alone, and recall having to crawl the length of the building to call for help, because I became so I'll I could no longer stand.

I would get sicker with each new exhibit, and shortly after working there I fainted and they could not get a blood pressure reading on me. Time and time again I was sent back to work as the doctor's did not know what was wrong with me. And each time I would get sicker and sicker, now unable to be around scented or cleaning products without experiencing a severe heavy brain fog, limbs that turned ice cold, dizziness and fatigue. At the time, they smoked in the break room, and this only added more to my misery as smoke is filled with chemicals. I had also been a Ballroom Dancer during times I wasn't sick in bed. However, I began to dance to a different tune when my reaction to the perfumes became so strong that it tried to close my throat off and give me such severe brain fog that I could not concentrate on the steps. I could do nothing but watch this wonderful sport that had given me so much peace and happiness, slowly slip away with everything else. I was devastated.

I eventually moved on to other jobs, only to find that I could not tolerate the inside of buildings long enough to work there. In fact my own living environment was making me ill. Unknown to me at the time, I had become what is known as a Universal Reactor, and there was not a "safe" place to put me where I would not react.

In 1992 I was finally diagnosed with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. By this time, I was reacting to everything including lawn spray, synthetic clothing and dyes, even soaps and personal care products on other people. I became legally disabled in 1998. In 2007 I gave my car away because I can no longer drive up the street in my condition. I can relate to how senior citizens must feel when they give up their independence. Now severely asthmatic, I am on oxygen. Oddly enough, my health may be broken, but my spirit certainly is not.

**I could do nothing but watch this wonderful sport that had given me so much peace and happiness, slowly slip away with everything else.**

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity totally changed my plans for life. It took away my career goals, and robbed me of all simple pleasures. Once in a while I try to get

out and do something just to feel like I am part of the living. I always pick out something that is the least toxic and will take less time to recover from. However there is always a price to pay. Often that price is several days in bed, or more, added to the already existing brain fog and fatigue. I believe that having some sort of enjoyment in life is important. The earthly love of my life was Ballroom Dancing, and while I could only stumble through some steps, I hope one day to see people with MCS, Asthma, and Allergy unite to form a scent-free social where they can at least uplift each other emotionally in this Dance we call Life.

See you on the dance floor,

*Melva*

Melva is a founding member of the [EI/MCS Support Group of Louisville](#).