

# Unintentional Spook House

*By Jackie Colson*

Being pretty far off the street and unknown to everyone in the neighborhood except our next door neighbors, we didn't expect any trick-or-treaters and none came yesterday. Our house would look scary to suburban children, even Alaskan ones accustomed to something other than golf course-style lawns. In front we have boxes, electronics, cables, shoes, mail, books and other things that must be aired out before they can come inside. One set of wires goes to the new speakers Gary gave me for my birthday. They still smell like kerosene after several weeks outside, and after being washed in baking soda, detergent, and Everclear. The speakers themselves smell like plastic and glue, but they are airing out in the garage because they do not smell as strongly as the other items.

The above scenario is just one of many protective measures that make up my life as a chemically poisoned person. I don't mind it. Doing these things necessary to live my life comfortably are second nature to me. What bothers me far more is the fact that one of my doctors is being investigated by the Texas medical licensing board.

The investigation is based on an anonymous "ghost" complaint which seems likely to have been filed, not by aggrieved patients, but by an insurance company trying to avoid paying for treatment for five people injured by chemical exposures in the 9/11 attacks. Horror compounded by horrific injustice. And what further enrages me is the ghoulish predictability of the press accorded to chemical injuries and the manufactured doubt that such toxic injury exists.

**Our house would look scary to suburban children, even Alaskan ones accustomed to something other than golf course-style lawns.**

The latest example is from Kim Horner of [the Dallas Morning News](#). I sent her an e-mail:

I am writing about your October 30 article concerning [Dr. William Rea](#). I am a formerly productive lawyer now disabled by chemical exposures for the last eleven years. I was not stressed; I was chemically poisoned, as were many others. If we lose our doctor to this political ploy, what are we supposed to do?

**Doubt is being created by public relations experts funded by the exact same industries that would go deep-six economically if the truth came out.**

Where has Dr. Kahn been that he could make this statement? "We don't have evidence that people are allergic or hypersensitive to chemicals," said Dr. David A. Khan, an associate professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern who heads the asthma clinic at Parkland Memorial Hospital. According to studies by the New Mexico and

California departments of health, among several others, at least 3% of the population has serious problems with chemicals in small amounts. We do have evidence, but these head-in-the-sand types (usually funded by the chemical industry) just won't hear it. Doubt is being created by public relations experts funded by the exact same industries that would go deep-six economically if the truth came out. If the public can be mollified by making the injured community out to be a bunch of hypochondriacs using "tobacco-style" tactics, who benefits?

[Dr. Stephen Barrett](#) is certainly no great expert on chemical sensitivity—he's a psychiatrist. Why quote him?

Here is some legitimate information on the relationship between chemicals and health:

[Chemical Exposures: Low Levels and High Stakes](#) by Nicholas A. Ashford, Claudia S. Miller

[When Smoke Ran Like Water and The Secret History of the War on Cancer](#) by Devra Davis, PhD, MPH

The chemical industry relies on the media to do just what you have done, create doubt where there should be none. I'm sure others will fill you in on the scientific evidence. I just want to say you should be looking at the big picture. This is not about one doctor and a bunch of whiners.

Just as a matter of common sense, why is it any surprise that there would be health impacts from the chemical fog in which we live our lives? Many of the pesticides in use were developed as chemical warfare agents during World War II to kill people. Why is it so shocking that they would cause harm? Out of 100,000 chemicals in use, most have never been studied for their health impacts. Never. Three out of every four of the top 3000 chemicals in use have no toxicity data. Is this smart?

As a post-WWII child I don't remember washing clothes with lye soap, but I do remember a time when all detergents were fragrance free. They were not labeled as such, it just hadn't occurred to people at that time that "clean" had a smell. Clothes were hung outdoors to dry. Most homes had hardwood floors, and windows were open all summer. The generation after me can't imagine a home without dryer sheets and plug-in air "fresheners." To the extent they consider it at all, I hear that some are trusting their blood brain barrier to keep out the neurotoxins, not realizing it's being shot to hell by the benzene and toluene in their carpets and cleaning products. Those are the real spook houses.

Jacqueline became fascinated by chemistry when she heard that blood and sea water have the same salinity. It was a conversion experience: one hand clapping, kaleidoscope eyes, the road to Damascus. Later, she fell under the spell of a Union Carbide advertisement: a fluffy live chick placed inside a container and dropped into boiling water. After boiling, the container was removed from the water, opened up and the chick popped out, alive and well. Many years later when the spell broke, she finally thought to ask, "Was it the same chick?"