

MCS Story - Mariann Martin

I was teaching theater at Hesston College when toxic mold took over the basement where the theater was housed. After the long term exposure, and increasingly sensitive "allergies," I became disabled in 2002.

After a few months, and consultations with many doctors, it became apparent that I was dealing with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), a debilitating chronic disorder in which the body's detoxification protection system becomes unable to deal with even minute levels of toxins. One spritz of perfume can make me sick for days. I can no longer be near paint, glue, makeup, hair spray, or anything the least bit musty, like many costumes and props. The fatigue and central nervous system damage that plague me means I can't deal with much stress anymore. My theater and teaching careers are over. I loved my work and I miss it very much.

Unfortunately, I did not receive anything from Hesston College's disability insurance, which had a clause stating it would not cover anything chronic. Nor did I receive any Worker's Compensation. After three years of wading through the slow legal process, the judge decided against my appeal on the recommendation of the insurance company's three "experts" who claimed that there is no such thing as MCS. I could only afford one expert to bolster my case. Sadly, this injustice is not an isolated case. Many with toxic mold injury or chemical injury resulting in MCS tell the same cruel story.

The government recognizes MCS as a disability, and I finally received some help from Social Security Disability after three years in their process of denials and appeals. Before that though, I had to humble myself to get food stamps and Medicaid because I could not work and all my savings had gone to doctors and lawyers.

Imagine going from college professor to welfare recipient, from world traveler to housebound, from independent to dependent on family, from energetic to sleeping 18-20 hours a day! I thought life was over. Indeed, I had to mourn the life I lost.

Thank God, I had a support system of family, church and friends. Most helpfully, I found good support groups online where I could learn from others living the same horrendous experience.

Never willing to give up on all of life, I have found a powered respirator that allows me to become more active. I wear it whenever I leave the house. I also found a good doctor who specializes in MCS. My energy is much better; I only need 12 hours of sleep each day now. I'm picking up my writing skills and spending lots of time with family. It is far from the life I had envisioned for myself, but it is a life and not merely pure misery as it seemed it would be at first. Life has many chapters and God is faithful in all of them.



How can ADNet or the church help?

- Raise awareness. I had never heard of MCS before I got it. If I had known my worsening "allergies" were actually warning signs, I might have been able to make changes before it was too late.
- Make people aware that perfume, harsh cleaning chemicals and air fresheners can be toxic and shouldn't have a place in a public building like a church.
- Never ever dismiss any sick person's distress by saying "It's all in your head."
- Keep praying for a cure.