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by Denny Anker

In the early 1970's the hillside opposite my family's home in Christchurch, New Zealand, was sprayed with herbicide to remove unwanted gorse and broom which were deemed to be a fire hazard. Ironically, the plants were left standing dead and dry after spraying and created an equal, if not greater, fire hazard.

The sprayers showed no concern for the prevailing wind conditions which were blowing the spray across the valley to our house. I went the short distance to where they were working and pleaded with them to stop because I was concerned for the safety of my pre-school daughter. They ignored my requests. There is every likelihood that the garden from which my father so proudly kept his family provided with fresh vegetables also received windborne spray-drift.

Two years later I was diagnosed with - and treated for, to some degree - severe endometriosis, which I understand has now been linked with environmental poisoning. Our district was not highly built-on at that time and was subjected to a great deal of spraying. I later assisted with research into the high rate of chronic fatigue/ME being reported, and the area was later also associated epidemiologically with an increase in Parkinsons Disease. (My mother developed Parkinsons Disease in later life.)

During the mid-1980's my daughter's secondary schooling was interrupted with several years of chronic fatigue and associated symptoms. Her health has improved over time. During that time I have experienced many health problems and have never been able to have more than half-time employment. At the same time as my daughter was unwell I experienced CFS/ME symptoms, systemic candidiasis, hormonal problems and resultant hysterectomy. I have been left with respiratory problems - a constant and explosive, untreatable, cough which cracks ribs, tears back muscles and has caused a troublesome oesophageal hernia. I have sensory damage: hearing loss and visual problems - unduly bright and moving light both cause me distress. Also hypothyroidism, migraines, osteoporosis and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS), all of which affect my life hugely.

For example, the office in which I work experienced a flood in October last year. Because of the MCS I immediately had to move away from the contaminated carpet and work from home. This was neither easy nor convenient. In February the damaged carpet was replaced. Because of the chemicals coming off of the new carpet I was not able to return to the workplace until June, and I am still (August) working in a make-shift space where the old carpet was not affected or replaced. This causes considerable ongoing inconvenience and disruption for myself and my colleagues.

Home repairs and maintenance are a nightmare. Finding suitable, affordable, non-toxic materials, and understanding tradespeople, is difficult and often impossible. Fumes from carpet when I visited an open-sided warehouse to look at floorings, caused my eyes to close up and affected my breathing.

My ability to help myself through intensive internet searches for alternative techniques and products is very limited because additional use of computer screens outside my employed hours causes headaches and considerable strain on my eyesight.

My health condition may have been worsened by fifteen years' exposure to arsenic fumes in our house as a result of water leakage through copper-chromate-arsenic treated exterior timber. When we extended our house an external structure was incorporated into the living space (bedroom, bathroom and hall). It took many years for this problem to be rectified. Very little is known medically about the effects of inhaled arsenic.

I am seriously affected by perfumes, toiletries and many cleaning and household products, particularly air fresheners. Alternatives can be expensive and sometimes not as effective. Travel for my job can be very difficult - even daily commuting because of the amount of fragrance in vehicles, from residues of cleaning substances (unnecessarily perfumed) and air fresheners, and on fellow-travellers – especially in the mornings! Even a meeting or social function can be a huge ordeal, if not an outright danger to my health.

The daily discomfort is not visible - except when I become severely affected. It seems ridiculous to have to be thankful when my eyes swell and close, or my breathing becomes wheezy, so that people will believe my situation and take it seriously. Unlike many other disabilities, asking for my disability to be accommodated intrudes into people's personal lives - e.g. the use of toiletries and fragrances and household products.

I have spent many hundreds of hours and dollars on largely unsuccessful treatments. Only a few have given a small measure of relief to symptoms.