

**“I often wonder if I was genetically vulnerable to developing MCS especially since my youngest child is also afflicted.”**

# Member Spotlight:

## Wanda Finney

### How did you develop MCS?

This is a question that I believe will forever boggle my mind. I often wonder if I was genetically vulnerable to developing MCS especially since my youngest child is also afflicted. Or maybe my exposures before and during my pregnancy not only contributed to my ill health but to that also of my child. As I examine the health histories of the members of the paternal side of my family, I find many have fallen to cancer and other neurological diseases.

I grew up in the country and I was an outdoors kid. The barn was my home away from home. Gardening was a way of life. My favorite game to play with other children was Hide – N - Go seek in the corn fields and chasing the crop duster planes. Looking back I realize how dangerous this innocent game was. I remember my father warning me not to put my hands in my mouth as we planted the acres of seeds in the garden. They were coated with chemicals to protect the seeds from disease. As the plants grew we would spray them with all the great stuff that would yield a bigger & better harvest. There was

always a plentiful supply of veggies in our extended family.

As a very young child the doctors believed that I had food allergies. Not only was I very small, unable to sleep, but I had a terrible rash that was consistently treated with some type of mercury ointment. I was only allowed to eat white bread as a staple food while other foods were eliminated and re-added to my diet. The doctors could not find a difference in my health with the change in my diet. Obviously they forgot to consider wheat so I continued to be slathered with lots of mercury ointment as a treatment.

My father use to bring home huge empty barrels from the pharmaceutical company where he worked. I would clean out anything that was in them so that I could paint them and use them for barrel racing with my horses. Who knows what I was exposed to then!

I spent countless nights in stock car racing pits breathing exhaust fumes and smoke from burning rubber. As a firefighter and EMS person I know I had an unlimited amount of exposures then.

Throughout the many years of various employments, I accumulated many more toxic assaults. Pesticides, very strong cleaning chemicals, petroleum products esp. propane, ether, solvents, the list goes on and on. I had previously been diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, CFS, anemia, and allergies. After being prescribed many different types of drugs I became even worse off then before I tried them and experienced many side- effects at very low doses. I also lived for 2 1/2 years in a home that was found to have black mold throughout the walls from 2002 until the beginning of 2005.



**“MCS has changed everything in my life except for my love for my children and grandchildren.”**

It wasn't until 2004 that I began to relate my debilitating symptoms to the chemicals around me. I would “phase out” and almost faint while cooking or baking on my propane stove, mowing the lawn left me sitting in a lawn chair after only a couple of minutes, fragrances of all types had me either in a severe asthma episode or near syncope along with practically all household cleansers, the farms that I adored all my life became a No-Breathe zone, I became allergic and/ or sensitized to most foods, and to the many friends and animals that I treasured.

#### **How has MCS changed your life?**

Where do I begin? MCS has changed everything in my life except for my love for my children and grandchildren. From the moment I awake in the morning and even while I'm asleep at night- MCS affects my life. I have done well accomplishing the necessary life-style changes within my own home that one with MCS must do in order to survive, but I am limited in controlling what friends and neighbors- even outside family members- do that have a direct effect on my household. I am wise about what products I use and consume in my home. I am not able to visit friends or family because they prefer to use toxic chemicals in their homes. I can not go into public places such as banks, libraries, stores, churches, and schools without conse-

quences. There are no more concerts, movie theaters, horse shows, PTA meetings, family reunions, weddings, baby showers, Holiday gatherings, school band recitals, school sports events, gosh- I barely made it through my oldest daughter's graduation ceremony and that was held outdoors! Grocery shopping is like playing Russian Roulette and many times I have had to flee the facility. Once I even found myself literally sitting in one of the open cold case displays of Oscar Mayer products! Doctor visits are just as dreadful. My children can not have friends “pop-in” and hang out like other children get to do. I chat with my neighbors outdoors as long as none of them are doing laundry or yard work. Probably the hardest hit area that MCS has affected my life is financially. I have not been able to work since March 2004. This is a huge challenge as a single mom who is trying to raise her children as organically and as toxic free as possible.

#### **What words of wisdom would you give to someone new to MCS?**

You have begun what may seem the most challenging obstacle in your life. You will need to educate yourself by obtaining reading literature on MCS and by listening to others who have gained knowledge from first hand experience. If you are able to you should find a doctor who specializes in Environmental Illness. I, unfortunately, have not been able to get to one, but I have read several books that are authored by EI doctors. Do not doubt yourself- listen to your body. As a friend told me back when I first realized that I had this illness, “Run, don't walk” away from exposures as “it may save your life.” Many doctors may dismiss what you know are the causes of your symptoms, but I can only reiterate, do not doubt yourself! Eliminate the toxins that you are exposed to as best as you can. This will mean not only in the air that you breathe but in the foods that you eat and the products that you use on your body, including the materials used in your clothing. Find yourself a group of friends that are familiar with MCS. They will support you through all the frustration, tears, perplexities...and even contribute to the laughter and new found joy that becomes a part of your life.



**Wanda and her oldest daughter.**

**“If you truly care about the MCS person in your life then please learn all you can about MCS.”**

**What is the single greatest benefit to having MCS?**

Let's see...a benefit of having MCS...thankfully I am one who looks for the silver lining and I have lived by the old saying that "when a door closes- look for the open window." I would say that the greatest benefit of having MCS for me is the knowledge that I have gained concerning our environment and being able to share what I have learned with my children and others who are willing to listen.

**Do you miss anything about your life before MCS?**

I miss everything about my life before I became chemically sensitive. I miss my friends, family, social life, professional life, the way I use to dress, the way I use to look, the freedom I once had.

**What words of wisdom do you have for non-suffers who have friends or family with MCS?**

Let me say this as gently as possible. If you

truly care about the MCS person in your life then please learn all you can about MCS. Do not doubt that person when you are told that something you have on is triggering a reaction. Do not take it personally, but rather do take it seriously. Remember that the percentage is great- you may be the next person with MCS.

**What is your biggest goal for the future?**

My biggest goal for the future is to have MCS recognized by the medical professionals and this issue addressed by the CDC. This has begun with shorter term goals such as educating those around us and creating in awareness of MCS. This must be done to protect our future generations.

**Would you like to share anything else?**

Yes, I want to say "Thank You!" to everyone who has helped me get through the past few years. Also, a special thank you is sent to my youngest son. He has given me the chance to see MCS through the eyes of a child; a very humbling experience.

**Wanda with her two youngest children.**

