

Member Spotlight:

Jan Trease

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An interview of member, Jan Trease, by Lourdes Salvador.

How did you develop MCS and how has it changed your life?

The onset of my MCS was gradual. There were always logical reasons for the reactions to exposures. Exhaustion after shopping for carpet and vinyl flooring was caused by stress. Fatigue after swimming was due to the activity or the hot, humid Nebraska weather. A salesman’s cologne was so strong it would give anybody a headache! The musculoskeletal pain was ‘diagnosed’ as ankylosing spondylitis (chronic inflammation) and seronegative polyarthritis (joint inflammation).

Our lifestyle created the constant fatigue. We lived in the basement of our 100-year old two-story house while doing a complete renovation. We had a large garden.

Canning and freezing garden produce in a house without air conditioning exhausted me. I was actively involved as a volunteer parent at school. Our church needed an organist. My piano training was the basis for becoming a self-taught organist. My husband started a part-time machine shop in our garage. I learned to do the bookkeeping. My husband was a full time National Guard employee. He was gone at least one weekend a month and two weeks a year for training. He was active in church, community and union activities. Who wouldn’t be tired? I joked that I was born tired.

The symptoms not so easily explained were: ‘scrambled brain’ and ‘head-in-a-vice’ feeling, ear pressure, impaired cognitive function, and migraine headaches. I felt incredibly haunted by the symptoms.

My mother developed MCS after chlordane exposure in the 1980’s. Out of consideration for my mother, I immediately started using the same unscented products she used. I was on a mission to learn how to help her. Our symptoms were different. I was too close to my own situation to see what was happening to me. Eventually the pieces to the puzzle started to come together.

Five years ago I decided I had to do something. Weight loss seemed to be the place to start. Natural healing methods interested me the most. I lost forty pounds in six months. I felt much better in some ways, but I was still CUI (chemically under the influence) or (chemically) hung-over.



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The difficult-to-explain symptoms persisted. Our part-time business became full time. Two employees were using ‘in-your-face’ fabric softeners that caused predictable, consistent reactions. The floodgates of reality had opened. I was chemically sensitive!

My dabbling in health foods, nutrition and chemical avoidance has become part of my daily routine. I found an AAEM doctor 150 miles away. My doctor told me that the things I was doing might have kept my MCS from going full-blown.

My church and school activities put me in a leadership role, the go-to-get-things-done person. I’ve now gone from respected to ridiculed.

I have tried a number of approaches to the problem of exposure at church. Fragrance free just does not seem to be an option. I am disappointed, but not surprised. I have taken a leave of absence as

organist and am currently not attending services. Gone, but not forgotten. I will use any means possible to educate and inform. Perhaps this article will appear in the monthly newsletter.

What are your plans for the future?

My plans for the future include moving into a smaller, more manageable home. I will

enjoy playing the digital piano I purchased from a church in Michigan via EBay. I will subtly and not so subtly convince my kids that they should be choosing to go chemically free while that is still an option for them.

What is the funniest thing that has happened to you that would only happen to an MCSer?

My husband razed an abandoned house on property that we own. He burned the debris during sub-freezing weather. During the late evening hours, I heard a noise on the porch. I went to the sidelight to investigate. I could see him taking off his boots. I thought, “Great! He’s going to leave the smoky coat and boots outside.” Much to my surprise he walked into the house in his underwear!

What message would you like to send to those who do not have MCS?

Please be open-minded and accepting. Don’t take my word for it. Research it. Start asking people if they’ve ever heard of MCS. There are more of us afflicted than you realize. Please refrain from giving me ‘advice’. (i.e. It’s just Alzheimer’s or a junior moment. We could build a wall around you. Don’t you wish you could just pop a pill? You wouldn’t want to look like something from outer space by running around wearing a respirator.) It’s OK if you think I’m crazy. If I should start making sense and you can identify with what I’m saying, just give me a call. I’d be glad to share what I know.

Is there anything you’d like to add?

Thank you to all who make MCS-America work!

Interviewee - Jan Trease
Interviewer - Lourdes Salvador

